

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 December 2011

Subject: Air Quality Strategy for Wiltshire

Cabinet member: Councillor Keith Humphries - Public Health & Protection Services

Key decision: Yes

Executive Summary

Air quality in Wiltshire is predominantly very good with the majority of the residents of the County enjoying clean unpolluted air. There are however a small number of specific locations where the combination of traffic, road layout and geography has resulted in exceedences of the annual average for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulates (PM₁₀).

Local authorities have a duty to monitor air quality within their areas having regard to national air quality objectives and standards and report this information to Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) annually. There are seven pollutants which we are required to consider under European and UK law, including lead, benzene and sulphur dioxide. In Wiltshire we only have concerns with two of these pollutants.

The Air Quality Strategy is a high level guiding document to inform policy and direction across a range of council services with the aim of improving air quality.

The main aim of the strategy is that

'Wiltshire Council working collaboratively will seek to maintain the good air quality in the county and strive to deliver improvements in areas where air quality fails national objectives in order to protect public health and the environment'

The strategy has been subject to public consultation and individual reports on local air quality have been produced for Devizes and Marlborough Area Boards which requested this information. It has also been considered by the Environment Select Committee.

Proposal

It is recommended that the Cabinet approves the Air quality Strategy and recommends it to Council for adoption.

Reason for Proposal

The Environment Act Part IV places a duty on Wiltshire Council to monitor and achieve the Air Quality Objectives contained in the National Air Quality Strategy and regulations. The strategy contributes to discharging this duty and improving air quality in Wiltshire.

Name and Designation of appropriate Director:

Maggie Rae, Joint Director of Public Health and Public Protection

Wiltshire Council

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet of the Air Quality Strategy for Wiltshire, and for the Cabinet to approve it and recommends it to Council for adoption. The Air Quality Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the smogs of 1950's significant improvements in air pollution have been made. The issues for the 21st Century have moved on from coal burning to other pollutants, largely linked with transport. Today air pollution is not visible in the way it was in the 1950's however it still has the potential to have a significant impact on health. Councils have a duty to monitor air quality within their areas having regard to national air quality objectives and standards.
- 2.2 There are seven pollutants which Local Authorities are required to consider under European and national legislation. Air quality in Wiltshire meets all of these standards with the exception of the annual averages for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulates (PM₁₀) in a small number of localised areas.
- 2.3 **Monitoring air quality**
The national air quality objectives are health related and have been determined and set by the Government's 'Expert Panel on Air Quality' and are based on the epidemiological studies available on the toxicity and effect that each pollutant has on human health.
- 2.4 The Government's Environmental Audit Committee published a report in March of 2011 stating that poor air quality could reduce average life expectancy in the UK by an average of seven to eight months and it could lead to up to 50,000 premature deaths every year. They called for dramatic changes to be made to the UK's transport policy in order to improve the situation.

2.5 Health effects of air pollution

For someone who enjoys good health the levels of air pollution experienced in Wiltshire are unlikely to have any serious effects. However on the rare occasions when air pollution levels are high in some specific locations, some people (with existing health problems) may feel effects such as eye irritation and coughing.

2.6 The council's Environment Select Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2011 suggested the strategy included a risk register of other health risks to help put the effects of air pollution in to context. This piece of work will be addressed as part of the Joint Strategic Assessment process.

2.7 In Wiltshire road transport is the main source of nitrogen dioxide and fine particulates. Table 1 shows the source of pollution and the health effects from these two pollutants.

Table 1

Pollutant	Source of pollution	Health effects
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO ₂)	Nitric oxides derived predominantly from motor vehicles but also from other combustion and power generation processes.	This gas irritates the airways of the lungs, increasing the symptoms of those suffering from lung disease.
Particles (PM ₁₀)	Wide range of natural and manmade sources such as: road traffic, combustion, brakes and tyres. Agriculture and excavation.	Fine particles can be carried deep into the lungs where they can cause inflammation and worsening of heart and lung disease.

2.8 Exposure to air pollution

Air pollution levels vary from area to area and from day to day. Levels of pollution are influenced by a number of factors such as: topography, local pollution sources and weather conditions.

Examples include:

Higher pollution	Lower pollution
Towns in valleys	Towns on hills
In summer, during sunny, still weather and in the winter, cold, still foggy weather	Windy or wet weather at any time of year
Busy roads with heavy traffic next to high buildings.	Rural areas away from major roads and factories

2.9 Air quality in Wiltshire

Wiltshire enjoys very good air quality in the vast majority of its town and villages. This is perhaps unsurprising given the rural nature of much of county. The areas of concern are very localised and only involve a handful of streets.

- 2.10 Monitoring of air pollution in Wiltshire has been ongoing for over ten years. The majority of monitoring sites meet the air quality standards and therefore can be considered to pose no risk to health.
- 2.11 A small number of specific locations have been identified where air quality falls below the required standards and further investigation or remediation is needed.
- 2.12 Site specific action plans have been produced for these locations. These will be consolidated and updated to produce a single new Wiltshire wide Air Quality Action Plan in the early part of 2012.

3. Main Considerations for the Council

- 3.1 The Air Quality Strategy provides high level guidance to inform policy and direction across a range of council services with the aim of improving air quality. Improvements in air quality are generally difficult to achieve as they rely on individuals, businesses and communities changing their travel behaviour. Given this, the strategy recognises that improving areas of poor air quality can only be achieved by working collaboratively across departments and with local communities and other relevant organisations.
- 3.2 The strategy also includes a 17 point action plan which identifies improvements to collaborative working, information sharing and communication on air quality issues.
- 3.3 The adoption of this strategy is a key step in the development of a consolidated Air Quality Action Plan for Wiltshire. This action plan will set out the specific measures that Wiltshire Council intends to introduce in pursuit of the air quality objectives. The plan will be developed with local member and community involvement, and contain timescales to indicate when the measures will be implemented. It will contain town or area specific measures, and also more strategic measures which will be implemented Wiltshire wide. Progress on the action plan then needs or has to be reported to Defra on an annual basis.
- 3.4 The strategy therefore seeks to secure better health outcomes for individuals and communities in Wiltshire. It identifies 10 strategic objectives as shown in table 2:

Table 2

Reference	Strategic Objective
SO1	Secure improvements to existing Air Quality Management Areas

SO2	Implement a prioritisation system to manage and schedule proposed improvements to existing air quality management areas
SO3	Implement a prioritisation system to manage the investigation of new sites
SO4	Maintain or improve air quality in areas currently meeting the statutory standard.
SO5	Improve interdepartmental working on common strategic objectives with an outcome focused approach.
SO6	More efficient use of equipment and resources.
SO7	Community and Area Board involvement in the air quality management process
SO8	Provide high quality information and guidance on air quality. This will be made available to the council, the public and developers.
SO9	Provide improved mapping layers and data via the corporate graphical information system (GIS) to identify current and potential Air Quality Management Areas.
SO10	Support planned economic growth, sustainable transport alternatives and reductions in climate change emissions

3.5 Progress will be monitored against the strategic action plan. Public Protection Services will also:

- report air quality monitoring data collected from the council's network of diffusion tubes and real time monitors.
- review the strategy within 5 years

4. Environmental and climate change impact of the proposal

4.1 The air quality strategy is a significant piece of work which will help protect the local environment in Wiltshire and have positive impacts environmentally and on climate change. The strategy impacts on a number of issues shared with the Energy, Change and Opportunity (ECO) team such as reducing transport related emissions and links to spatial planning.

4.2 Although CO₂ is not highlighted as one of the pollutants managed by the Air Quality Strategy, work to reduce CO₂ by reducing energy consumption will ultimately contribute towards improving air quality. The ECO Team are working with the community to reduce the county's carbon footprint. Identifying and developing linkages between the work of the Public Protection, Sustainable Transport and Spatial Planning Teams would help to progress projects that can satisfy a number of different environmental objectives.

5. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

5.1 Regard has been had to Wiltshire Council's policies on diversity and

equality. The strategy is classed as being “low relevance” within the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment Framework. However the strategy will be applied having regard to legislative duties, council policy and other relevant officer Codes of Conduct.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 If the strategy is not approved then the council could be criticised for not producing a consolidated council-wide document and this carries associated reputational risks. This also applies to failing to improve collaborative and community working which are included in the strategy. Failure to deliver specific improvements to air quality in local Air Quality Management Areas may also result in these risks with the added potential of being targeted by Defra. There is also currently some discussion on the potential impact of the localism agenda on the European Union’s ability to impose fines on national governments for ongoing breaches of air quality standards.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct additional budget requirements associated with the adoption of the strategy. Whilst some improvements to traffic related air quality can be delivered at little cost other infrastructure schemes may require significant capital investment. Funding and the delivery mechanism will be part of the Local Transport Plan and will also include the Highways Agency and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan associated with the Wiltshire Local Plan.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 Adoption of the strategy will contribute to council achieving compliance with its duties under the Environment Act 1995 Part IV. There is a risk of legal challenge if the strategy is not adopted.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Wiltshire enjoys good air quality in most of its area. The few areas of poor air quality are all traffic related and it is recognised that tackling these areas is neither easy nor simple. It is only by working collaboratively and with local communities can progress be made.
- 9.2 The strategy identifies thematic links within the council, suggests improvements in the way air quality is addressed and includes a high level action plan to deliver these improvements.

Name and title of Director

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Background Papers

No additional unpublished paper used.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Air Quality Strategy for Wiltshire.