

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



SCRUTINY PANEL 4 – EMISSIONS STRATEGY

(ACTION PLAN)

CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Emissions Strategy (Action Plan): To provide Scrutiny input into the Action Plan for the Council's Emissions Strategy

Key lines of Inquiry:

To increase Councillor and public understanding of air quality issues in Northampton

To understand the causes and impact of air pollution

To understand the actions being taken to reduce air pollution in Northampton

To understand the actions being taken by partners to reduce air pollution in Northampton

To provide recommendations for the production of the Action Plan for the Council's Emissions Strategy, which will identify ways of improving air quality in Northampton

Examine all current air quality management areas to ensure they are performing. To see if they can be improved and consider all other factors and future factors in moving forward

The expected outcomes of this Scrutiny Review are:

- To make informed recommendations regarding the production of the Action Plan for the Council's Emissions Strategy

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

a. Please can you give your views and suggestions on how you think Councillor and public understanding of air quality issues in Northampton can be increased?

There is increasing knowledge about the health impacts of air pollution, i.e. that it doesn't just cause asthma but can lead to serious issues affecting mortality and morbidity. It is worth pointing out that PM2.5 is a Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator, therefore working with public health should be prioritised

There has been significant interest from the County Council's public health team and the link between air quality and health. There is experience within other partners that could be used to help promote messages, and also the consideration for combining messages regarding exercise and health, e.g. the benefit that switching to exercise may have on health and air quality. As a passive intervention, reducing vehicle emissions would have the greatest benefit on more deprived communities.

Referring to the outcome of the consultation on the LES responses suggests that understanding of air quality issues amongst the Northampton population appears to be good.

However, to further understanding of issues there are a range of suggestive (soft and hard) methods which could be incorporated to raise public awareness.

There is further work required to revise and refine the Council's webpages for air quality to promote the LES and inform the public as to how they can do their part to improve air quality.

This should include raising the awareness of the issues surrounding diesel car emissions and the mixed messages that the public receive from the Government who provide incentives through vehicle excise duty (VED) to many diesel car models. This leads to a perception that diesel cars are environmentally friendly and cheaper to run, however, their emissions of oxides of nitrogen (NOx) are comparable to heavy duty

vehicles and they are often more expensive to run and maintain based on the average mileage of most motorists.

There is substantial local employment in Northampton with a significant number of local and national employers. There is scope to engage with local business for promoting information regarding air quality and the benefits of using low and ultra-low emission vehicles through targeted travel plans. Incentives could be provided to employees to promote and reinforce uptake of cleaner technologies.

There could also be a drive around promotion of messages such as using public transport vehicles to display messages, e.g. buses, taxi's and e-hire bikes as mobile advertising to promote messages. Signage around the town used for traffic updates could also have a similar input.

The LES has articulated project ideas for implementation such as the prospect of 'try and buy'. The principle is to allow a free week's hire of an electric vehicle (EV) for residents of new development schemes to allow trial of the technology and helping to inform decisions when making a new vehicle purchase. This could be supported with information linked to air quality, e.g. the benefit of shifting away from petrol/diesel.

The Council is also in a position to incentivise low emission vehicles through its car parking. This could be the introduction of free or subsidised parking (advertised to raise awareness for others) for anyone with a low emission vehicle. Similar steps could be taking for a variable levy regarding parking permits issued on permit holder streets in the town.

Previously the town has had awareness days for projects, such as 'In town without my car'. A similar short-term project could be trialled under the umbrella of air quality to raise local awareness.

Harder measures which could be used to raise awareness and understanding of air quality could include the setting of emissions standards. This has already been pursued in respect of taxi emission standards, and is being pursued through discussion with local bus operators. Speaking with these stakeholders has raised the profile of air quality and prompted discussion at licensing committee meetings for the private hire trade already.

A more formal approach for setting of emissions standards would be the introduction of a clean air zone (CAZ) for the town. This would set a minimum emission standard for the town, and dependent upon feasibility could be introduced as a voluntary CAZ. A CAZ would be a very public

process, but in addition would require signage to inform people they are entering a CAZ to promote awareness.

Workplace parking levy (WPL) has been mooted as another approach for setting emission standards by charging employers for parking spaces. The revenue this generates can be paid back into highway projects, but this can only be implemented by a highway/transport authority. The Council would be excluded from pursuing a WPL and would not have control on how revenue generated could be spent.

So far only a single Council has pursued WPL (Nottingham) which introduced a WPL in 2013. However, a WPL could raise awareness of air quality issues where its purpose is to introduce charging against employers to offset the peaks at congestion times.

b. Are you aware of the causes and impact of air pollution? Please explain.

Yes. This is documented in the draft of the low emission strategy which has been project managed and developed in collaboration with Andrew Whittles of Low Emission Strategies Ltd.

The initial drive behind developing the LES is because of the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) across the town. These were declared due to emissions associated with road transport sources.

However, there is a growing body of evidence which identifies a number of health impacts associated with exposure to poor air quality, even where levels are below those mandated in national legislation. There are stronger associations for a detrimental impact upon health where housing and other types of sensitive receptors are situated close to significant transport sources, e.g. roads.

Contributors to air pollution are predominantly associated with combustion sources, such as industry, domestic and transport sources. Local pollution in Northampton will be a mix of local, regional, national and international sources. Locally vehicle emissions are the most significant source and growth in diesel car numbers has been a key contributor to locally produced sources of emissions.

In a very broad sense there will be a local background for pollutants comprised of emissions from regional, national and international sources. Locally generated pollution will add to this background, and

where there are locally generated pollution sources these can create hot-spots, e.g. near to busy roads.

- c. Are you aware of and do you understand the actions being taken to reduce air pollution in Northampton? Please provide suggestions of how these actions can be publicised wider.**

Yes. Please refer to answers provided for questions b & c.

- d. The themes of the draft Northampton Low Emissions Strategy are Evidence for Change, Creating a Low Emissions Future and Reducing Vehicle Emissions, please provide details of how the actions taken by your organisation contribute to these themes and would your organisation be prepared to fund / contribute to the funding of measures that benefit you / your organisation.**

In pursuing the themes of the NLES work has already developed to set emissions standards for private hire/hackney drivers. This work is in progress and going through a process of public consultation to agree the setting of a progressive emissions standard. This work has been instigated from the NLES and other local pressures, and is now being led by the licensing department.

We are also actively seeking to make applications for grant funding to support measures for low emission vehicles/infrastructure. It is also proposed to make capital bids for funding to support trial projects, such as the possibility of low emission taxi demonstrator trial to create confidence within the local private hire/hackney trade and support a shift towards cleaner vehicles.

We have also met with local bus operators to discuss the setting of emissions standards for buses that operate through Northampton. We will liaise with County to use Highways powers to aim to set emission standards for buses from 2018. We have also developed guidance with regard to public sector tendering and contract awards as part of Social Value procurement. This has included measures in the planning guidance for suggesting the setting of emissions standards on commercial development schemes.

We have consulted on proposed local guidance for planned new developments to encourage developers to incorporate low emission measures into their development. This is proposed to stand alone as an

action plan and has been developed to reflect national planning policy. There is also an aim that this builds on limited local policy, e.g. BN9, but also as local planning policy develops low emission measures become a standard requirement for new development, where feasible to do so.

The LES has been designed as a platform for inward investment, including securing funding from Government programmes e.g. OLEV, DfT, AQ Grant. Where the local authority has a published action plan (or equivalent) for air quality, it is placed in advantageous position to secure funding to support improvement projects.

e. Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to the Emissions Strategy?

None.