

# 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:

### **Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Public Health team responses to**

**Core Questions:** Stephen Marks, NCC Public Health, 02 February 2017

- 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?*

#### *Training / awareness raising:*

Training / awareness raising for Councillors could be undertaken by inviting relevant experts to present to Councillors. For example an East Midlands Air Quality Network has been established to share information and good practice across the region, led by Public Health England. Public Health England representatives could be invited to speak to Councillors to help increase their understanding if required / appropriate. Councillors / officers from other local authorities who have been addressing air quality issues could be invited to speak of their own experiences and challenges in doing so.

Relevant local medical practitioners could be invited to speak about certain medical conditions and how they are affected / exacerbated by exposure to air pollution.

#### *Assessing impacts of relevant decisions on air quality:*

Air quality will indirectly be affected by a whole range of policies and decisions, particularly those that influence road transport levels and patterns. Decisions that are made on other topics, such as town centre management, parking management, planning decisions etc. could clearly identify their likely impacts in relation to air quality, thus raising awareness amongst all those involved in those decisions of how other decisions could have air quality implications.

#### *Public understanding*

It is important that the public are made aware of air quality issues, in order that they can understand any risks and respond to them appropriately. Indeed, in many cases the public expect to be made aware of such risks. Awareness / understanding amongst the public could also be very important in gaining support for local initiatives to address air quality issues.

However such communications must be handled sensitively as research<sup>1</sup> shows that raising awareness of certain health risks can be particularly alarming to the public, especially if they don't feel that they have much control over those risks.

For example, while people may feel that they have control over the amount of physical activity they undertake, the amount of alcohol they consume or whether they smoke or not, they may feel that they have little control over their exposure (or that of their family) to air pollution. (This is sometimes referred to as a 'fright factor'.) As such raising awareness of the risks of air pollution without identifying any specific ways in which individuals can reduce that risk could be alarming and potentially counter productive.

Specific guidance about communicating with the public about air pollution has been produced and should be considered. This includes 6 key principles:

- A. Use information about what particulate matter is made of and where it goes to get the broader topic of air pollution onto the agenda – not statistics about health consequences.*
- B. Don't raise public concern about air pollution unless you can at the same time satisfy people's desire to do something to reduce their exposure.*
- C. Focus on what is known for certain about the health consequences of air pollution.*
- D. Talk about air pollution as a problem linked to specific places – and not as a general problem of the atmosphere.*
- E. Keep the focus of communications on practical improvements – not long-term solutions.*
- F. Demonstrate leadership and empower communities, instead of just expecting individuals to change their behaviour.*

These issues should be considered when communicating about air quality issues either through your own communications or via local press / media.

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

**Causes of air pollution:**

NCC's Public Health team is aware that the causes of air pollution can be wide ranging, such as industrial sources, combustion from heating etc. However in general air pollution from road transport is often the most relevant air quality concern as it is often co-located with exposed pedestrians, homes, schools, shops etc. The Public Health team understands from the information provided / published by NBC that the primary sources of concern in relation to air quality in Northampton are indeed those from vehicle emissions.

NCC's Public Health team is also aware that trying to achieve improvements in air quality can be challenging, especially when other policy objectives (such as encouraging people to travel into town centres to support the local economy) can potentially contribute to negative air quality impacts.

**Impacts of air pollution:**

NCC's public health team is aware of the impacts of air pollution on health and wellbeing.

Individuals - The specific impact of air pollution on any one individual will always be complicated and will depend on a range of factors relating to that individual's existing health and also the nature and extent of their exposure to pollutants.

However there is increasing evidence that air pollution is a serious public health issue which can and does have significant health and wellbeing impacts. There is now evidence that long-term exposure to everyday air pollutants over months to years contributes to the development of cardiovascular disease (conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels), lung cancer, and respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma), as well as exacerbating them in people who already have those conditions.

In particular, the more vulnerable members of our communities are likely to be those affected the most, such as the young, the old and those with existing medical conditions.

It is also acknowledged that<sup>2</sup>, while EU and UK air pollution limit values are in place to protect human health, there are no absolutely safe levels of particulate matter (PM) and evidence suggests that health effects can still occur well below these limits.

Due to the nature of the effects of air pollution, it is difficult in individual cases to identify the exact nature and extent of the role of air pollution in death or illness. Air pollution will rarely be the sole cause of illness / death and would not be recorded as such on a death certificate for example. It is more likely that exposure to air pollution will exacerbate an existing condition or contribute to an illness / death along with other factors. It will always therefore be impossible to state the exact level of deaths or illness that are caused by air pollution in an area.

However modelling has been undertaken that gives an overview of the likely contribution of some air pollutants to death rates.

It has been estimated that there are 44,750 – 52,500 annual equivalent attributable deaths in the UK due to the impact of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter PM. This has an annual social cost of £25.3bn - £29.7bn<sup>3</sup>.

Public Health England<sup>4</sup> use PM<sub>2.5</sub> as an indicator for mortality attributable to particulate air pollution. It was estimated that as at 2010, across Northampton, 6.1% of people aged over 25 would die prematurely each year because of particulate air pollution: equivalent to 102 deaths per year or 1168 associated life years lost.

Further work is being undertaken nationally to better understand the impact of Nitrogen Dioxide on Health and Wellbeing.

In addition to the health and wellbeing impacts of air pollution, the illness it causes will have significant financial / economic costs in terms of healthcare costs and lost productivity.

- 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.*

We are aware of the actions that have been proposed in the draft Low Emissions Strategy, which NBC consulted on in late 2016. The Public Health team's views on those actions were identified in the formal response to the consultation. In summary the Public Health team felt that the measures identified in the draft Low Emissions Strategy were unlikely to achieve the desired improvements in air quality and therefore meet the air quality standards identified in current legislation.

With regards to how actions to reduce air pollution could be publicised more widely, the following could be considered:

Relevant actions could be published more prominently on NBC's website, rather than within substantial strategy documents.

NBC could use its social media channels to raise awareness.

Messages about air pollution could be combined with other relevant public health messages – e.g. active travel such as walking / cycling can contribute to the individual's wellbeing as well as reducing contributions to air pollution.

NBC could report its strategy and associated actions formally to other relevant organisations and networks, such as the Northamptonshire Health & Wellbeing Board, health organisations, economic development partnerships, voluntary sector etc.

- 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.*

NCC's Public Health team has worked with NBC to inform the development of the draft Low Emissions Strategy and is happy to continue to do so. This is primarily through identifying the health and wellbeing implications of air pollution and contributing to efforts to address them.

The Public Health team is also working with NBC and other Northamptonshire Districts through the East Midlands Air Quality Network to try to learn from other areas with regards to addressing air quality.

The Public Health team also promotes physical activity through its direct activities and through its commissioned health and wellbeing services. Encouraging physical activity through active travel in Northampton could contribute to the Northampton Low Emissions Strategy by encouraging people to walk / cycle for personal wellbeing benefits, as well as wider air pollution benefits. While the funding environment remains extremely challenging for the Public Health service, as for other public sector

organisations, the Public Health team will seek to contribute to air quality related initiatives as best as it can.

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

The Public Health team can access wide ranging information about the health and wellbeing impacts of air quality as well as related guidance and information on ways to address it.

The Public Health team can also contribute to any activities intended to raise awareness of air quality issues amongst the public, including identifying guidance that identifies effective ways of doing so.

1. Bennett, P. (1997), Communicating about risks to public health: pointers to good practice, Department of Health <http://www.bvsde.ops-oms.org/tutorial6/fulltext/pointers.pdf>

2. *Review of evidence on Health Aspects of Air Pollution – REVIHAAP: final Technical Report*, World Health Organization Office for Europe, 2013 <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/publications/2013/review-of-evidence-on-health-aspects-of-air-pollution-revihaap-project-final-technical-report>

3. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/460401/air-quality-econanalysis-nitrogen-interim-guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460401/air-quality-econanalysis-nitrogen-interim-guidance.pdf)

4. Estimating Local Mortality Burdens Associated with Particulate Air Pollution, Public Health England, 2014