



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum

Scrutiny Project Group report on Air Quality

Date agreed by O&PSF:

Table of Contents

Section 1 - Introduction and reasons for the review	Page 3
Section 2 - Link to priorities and review aims	Pages 3
Section 3 - Review approach and findings	Pages 4-6
Section 4 - Recommendations	Page 6
Section 5 - Review conclusions	Pages 6

Project group members:

Councillors:	
Lead	Lisa Collins
Group Members	Stuart Brittain Barry Dyke Jenny Flood Ed Fordham
Project group officer support was provided by Amanda Clayton	

1.0 Introduction and reasons for the review

- 1.1 In July 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency with the purpose of enabling Chesterfield to become a low carbon, resilient and sustainable borough.
- 1.2 In February 2020 the council adopted a formal climate change action plan.
- 1.3 This topic was selected following the scrutiny work programming sessions to look at the perceived problem of air quality within the Borough, particularly in relation to traffic hotspots on key routes, congestion around schools and increasing numbers of asthma/chronic breathing conditions.

2.0 Link to priorities and review aims

- 2.1 Chesterfield Borough Council has a role to play in regulating emissions to air from a range of pollution sources, enforcing the Clean Air Acts, influencing land use planning and supporting Derbyshire County Council in developing the Local Transport Plan. Chesterfield Borough Council also has a key role in implementing Local Air Quality Management.
- 2.2 The aims of the review were:
- 2.3 To identify existing plans and strategies in respect of air quality within the Borough.
- 2.4 To identify areas of concern within the Borough and the management plans in place.
- 2.5 To examine air quality around schools within the Borough and if any issues are identified to suggest ways in which the schools can impact/mitigate against them.
- 2.6 To identify any opportunities to improve the air quality in the Borough thus contributing to the Council's vision of a clean, green and attractive Borough, where our open spaces and built heritage are valued.

3.0 **Review approach and findings**

- 3.1 The project started with a guidance meeting between the Democratic and Scrutiny Officer and Lead Member on 12 August 2019. An overview session with the Senior Environmental Health Officer and an Environmental Health Officer highlighted the following points;
- Air quality is monitored in the Borough by two static monitoring stations and 40 nitrogen dioxide tubes in various locations
 - An annual report is submitted to DEFRA on air quality and this was available on the council's website along with CBC's clean air strategy.
 - As Chesterfield no longer has heavy industry, the key factors of air pollution were traffic and wood burning stoves that emit fine particulates into the atmosphere.
 - One air quality management area was declared in 2015 in Chesterfield, in Brimington, caused by high volumes of standing traffic on the one-way system and the proximity of the houses to the road. The AQMA was declared following three consecutive years of readings above the acceptable level.
- 3.2 The Democratic and Scrutiny Officer attended an Air Quality Stakeholders meeting with Environmental Health Officers from both Chesterfield Borough Council and Derbyshire County Council (DCC) on 20 September, 2019. The DCC Traffic Strategy Officer explained that traffic flow had improved in Brimington and as vehicles became more efficient and replace older cars this situation would continue to improve. It was noted that DCC had more aspirational targets regarding air quality from traffic than the targets set by central government.
- 3.3 A further guidance meeting between the Democratic and Scrutiny Officer and Lead Member took place on 22 October 2019. The Democratic and Scrutiny Officer spoke with the Derbyshire Sustainable Travel Department that has a role in offering advice and guidance to schools to form their travel plans.
- 3.4 The Derbyshire Sustainable Travel Department confirmed that all schools in Derbyshire had membership of the Modal Shift Star scheme, paid for by the government. The scheme was a resource where schools could find pointers on how to encourage active travel and sustainable travel. Subsequently a list of schools in the borough who received accreditation was provided to the group; there were eight in total and none of these had renewed their membership beyond the first year.

- 3.5 The first meeting of the members of the Scrutiny Project Group (SPG) took place on 31 October, 2019. Members discussed key areas of focus for the review including;
- The perceived problem of air quality versus the actual statistical evidence
 - How to engage with schools
 - Expert witnesses that could provide further evidence on the impact of air quality
 - Three focus areas; schools, large scale employers and CBC as an exemplar
- 3.6 A further meeting took place with the Environmental Health Officer and the group members on 28 January, 2020. Information was provided on the 2008 EU Air Quality Directive that sets legally binding limits for concentrations in outdoor air of major air pollutants that impact public health such as particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/uk-eu-limits> . The overall trend in air quality standards showed an improving situation over the last five years in Chesterfield.
- 3.7 It was agreed that a member of the Public Health Team from Derbyshire County Council would be invited to the next meeting to talk about the medical effects of air pollutants. A discussion also took place around domestic wood burners, the growth in their popularity due to the perception that they are more sustainable and their effect on air quality.
- 3.8 The planned meeting with Public Health officers on 17 February, 2020 was cancelled due to pressures of the emerging Coronavirus.
- 3.9 A meeting with the Development Management and Conservation Manager and representatives of local Cycling groups 6 April, 2021 was cancelled due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- 3.10 The project was put on hold from April 2020 to December 2021 due to pressures on all involved parties caused by the impact of COVID-19. The key stakeholders that the group was keen to engage with included schools, Public Health officials, Environmental Health Officers and Highways Officers, all of whom were still dealing with changed circumstances and increased workload due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.
- 3.11 The group met again on 16 December, 2021 and received an update from an Environmental Health Officer who provided data gathered over the last 2 years and gave a comprehensive update on the situation. The key points of discussion included;

- The impact of national lockdowns on air quality where improvements were seen due to the reduced number of vehicles on the roads
- The effects of trans-boundary pollution from Europe
- The long-term trend of a gradual reduction in pollution in Chesterfield
- An expected return to pre-pandemic levels of nitrogen dioxide and fine particulates
- There had been no breaches of air quality objectives within the Borough over the last four years

4 **Review conclusions**

4.1 The aims of the scrutiny review were to;

- Identify existing plans and strategies in respect of air quality
- Identify areas of concern within the Borough
- Examine air quality around schools
- Identify any opportunities to improve air quality

4.2 The SPG extend their thanks to the officers from the Environmental Team for attending meetings and providing information. The review has benefited from cooperation from all those involved and an appreciation of the difficult circumstances under which this review was undertaken.

4.3 The SPG identified and reviewed the different strategies in place for monitoring and reporting air quality in the borough which included static monitoring stations, providing an annual report to DEFRA and the ability to use air quality management zones to target areas of concern within the borough where air quality objectives were not met. The project also highlighted the benefit of working together on a coordinated approach with Derbyshire County Council who have statutory responsibilities with regard to schools and highways

4.4 Following on from this review, the SPG have determined that their aims have been achieved as far as practicable during these exceptional circumstances. It acknowledges the limitations of its work caused by the global pandemic but is confident that at this time there are no immediate concerns regarding air quality in the Borough.

5.0 **Recommendations**

5.1 That the Scrutiny Project Group conclude its work in this area.

5.2 That the subject of air quality remains a key element of the Council's Climate Change work to ensure continued improvement for the benefit of all residents of the Borough.

5.3 That the report be considered by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and that a response be reported back to the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Slides presented to the Air Quality Scrutiny Project Group 16th December, 2021