

Report to	Sustainable development panel	Item
	4 November 2015	
Report of	Head of city development services	8
Subject	Air quality consultation - response to the government's air quality consultation	

Purpose

To consider the council's draft response to the Government's draft plans to improve air quality; which specifically tackle nitrogen dioxide

Recommendation

Members of the panel are asked to comment on the proposed response to the Government's air quality consultation.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority a safe clean and low carbon city.

Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Bremner – environment and sustainable development

Contact officers

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Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. The UK is compliant with EU legislation for nearly all air pollutants. However, there is a significant challenge meeting the NO₂ limit values in some areas; in particular larger urban centres. Road transport is the dominant source of pollution in areas where limit values are not met.
2. The EU Ambient Air Quality Directive (AQD) sets limits on key air pollutants and for NO₂, there are two limit values for the protection of human health:
 - a) annual mean concentration levels of NO₂ do not exceed 40µg/m³; and
 - b) hourly mean concentration levels of NO₂ do not exceed 200µg/m³ more than 18 times a calendar year.
3. Members will be aware that there are parts of Norwich within the city centre air quality management area that do not meet the annual mean concentration limit value and some evidence that the hourly mean concentration level is not met in some locations as well.
4. In 2013, 17 Member States (including the UK) reported exceedances of the annual mean limit value and four Member States (including the UK) reported exceedances of the hourly mean limit value. The European Commission has started formal infringement proceedings against six Member States (including the UK) for not achieving NO₂ limit values.

UK approach

5. The Government is fully committed to complying with EU air quality standards and has undertaken to provide revised plans to the Commission setting out how it proposes to bring the UK into compliance in the shortest possible time. The plans will be submitted to the Commission by 31 December 2015.
6. The Government believes that the action required to improve air quality needs to be taken at individual, local, national and international levels. Their plans are intended to take a comprehensive approach which identifies actions needed to bring zones into compliance in the shortest possible time.
7. The Government considers that local authorities have a central role in achieving improvements in air quality. Their local knowledge and interaction with the communities that they serve mean that they are better able to identify the issues on the ground in detail and the solutions that may be necessary or appropriate. Within the UK, there are over 400 local authorities, including 33 London Boroughs. As zones and agglomerations move closer towards and into compliance, the problem areas are likely to become more isolated and local action will be key to addressing them.

Consultation questions

8. The following sections set out the proposed council response to the Government's consultation:

Question 1: Do you consider that the proposed plan set out in the overview document strikes the right balance between national and local roles?

9. Poor air quality due to NO₂ is localised and the Government's plans rightly emphasize the need therefore take local action to address this. Working with Norfolk County Council, the council is very willing to play its part in talking the problems identified in Norwich as set out in the council's air quality management plan agreed by cabinet at their October meeting.
10. Government determines the financial and regulatory constraints local authorities may act within. The proposal to set out a framework for the implementation of new Clean Air Zones is very welcome in this regard as it will make it easier for businesses that operate across a number of cities to make straightforward, economic and operational decisions. In developing such guidance Government also needs to be mindful of the economic impact of such zones and the possibility that such measures reduce town centre vitality and viability to the benefit of less sustainable out of town centre locations. This could be overcome by businesses with high car modal shares having to pay increased business rates.
11. However the context provided by Government may also act as an obstacle to local innovative action and make it less easy for the UK to meet EU air quality standards. Such barriers and how they might be addressed are described in answer to question 5 below.

Question 2: Are you aware of any other action happening in your area which will improve air quality and should be included in the plan? If yes, please identify as far as you are able:

- a) What the additional actions are;
- b) The zone(s) in which they are being taken; and
- c) What the impact of those actions might be (quantified impacts would be particularly useful).

12. The city and county councils are taking a number of steps to improve air quality in the city as set out in the recently air quality management plan. This has recently been submitted to DEFRA.

Question 3: Within the zone plans there are a number of measures where we are unable to quantify the impact. They are included in the tables of measures. Do you have any evidence for the impact of these types of measures?

13. The council undertake extensive evaluation of the Castle Low Emission Zone as part of the EU co-funded CIVITAS SMILE project. Government's attention is drawn to this evaluation which assesses the likely impact of exhaust retro-fit, engine switch-off and eco-driving.

Question 5: What do you consider to be the barriers that need to be overcome for local authorities to take up the measures set out in section 4 of the UK overview document? How might these be overcome? Are there alternative measures which avoid these barriers?

14. The consultation document describes investment the Government has made in sustainable transport but it does not provide certainty of future funding. This is unhelpful as it makes it very difficult for local authorities to plan what they may feasibly undertake. With the spending review due to be published in advance of the Government's submission of their plans to the EU it would seem possible to provide a better indication of future funding in the finalised document.
15. The Government describes a number of initiatives to incentivise ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEV), which include electric vehicles, hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and plug-in hybrids (when driven in electric mode) which produce no pollution at point of use. The Government's focus on this – for all vehicles to be ULEV by 2050 – may be at the expense of other measures to reduce emissions. In the short/medium term there would seem to be value in continuing to support the use of gas as a road fuel through fiscal and other incentives. In particular use of bio-gas – as used in some of Anglian buses vehicles – has particular promise as it also provides significant carbon benefits as well.

Question 6: Are you aware of any additional action on non-transport sources to improve air quality that should be included in the plans?

16. No; in the case of Norwich the predominant reason for NO₂ exceedances is due to road transport emissions.