

Cabinet Response to the Air Quality Scrutiny Report

Introduction

At the Cabinet meeting on 9th January 2008 consideration was given to the report of the Air Quality Task Group. In introducing the item the Leader acknowledged the detailed work which it was clear had been undertaken by the Task Group together with the excellent quality of the final report. The Leader invited the Chairman of the Task Group, Councillor P. M. McDonald, to introduce the report. Councillor McDonald referred to the thorough exercise which had been undertaken and highlighted the consultation which had taken place with a variety of organisations as an important part of the scrutiny process. The Cabinet then considered each of the recommendations in detail.

Response to recommendations

Please find below responses to the recommendations contained within the scrutiny report:

Recommendation 1 - Low Emission Zones

This Council considers applying to Worcestershire County Council for certain roads to be made low emission zone roads therefore limiting access to certain types of vehicles which reduce air quality. Specifically, the Task Group believe the following roads/areas should be low emission due to high NO₂ levels:

- Approximately a 2 mile radius around Bromsgrove town centre
- A38 Bypass in Rubery
- All roads in Rubery with a weight restriction
- A456 in Hagley
- A491 in Hagley

The Cabinet resolved that this recommendation be deferred until further information is available regarding the results of the scheme which is shortly to be introduced in London. The Cabinet felt they did not have enough information regarding how such a scheme would operate in practice and how the results would be monitored. In addition it was felt that the impact on the surrounding road network as a result of motorists attempting to avoid the Low Emission Zones could make the situation worse.

Recommendation 2 – Bromsgrove Railway Station Improvements

The Council remain committed to improving Bromsgrove Railway Station including the Park and Ride facility as this will encourage the public to use public transport and therefore reduce the numbers of cars on the roads which are having a negative impact on air quality.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 3 – Public Transport – Buses Scrutiny Task Group

Support be given to any recommendations relating to the work of the Public Transport – Buses Scrutiny Task Group which relate to improving local bus services as this will (similar to improving Bromsgrove Railway Station) encourage the public to use public transport, therefore reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.

The Cabinet resolved that whilst they were minded to support the future recommendations of the Public Transport – Buses Scrutiny Task Group which relate to the improvement of local bus services, they would need to give full consideration to the recommendations when they were received and in particular would have to consider the recommendations in the light of any financial implications. The Cabinet felt they would need to be fully aware of the recommendations before giving a commitment to acceptance.

Recommendation 4 – Traffic Signals near the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)

- (a) Request that Worcestershire County Council's Highways alter the traffic signals on the A38 North into Bromsgrove so to reduce exit blocking and improve traffic flow near the AQMA; and
- (b) Request that both Worcestershire County Council's Highways and this Council's Environmental Health Team monitor the area before and after the alterations in order to obtain evidence to prove whether or not the alteration have been successful.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation subject to the request in (a) being considered by the appropriate authority as there was some doubt as to whether it would be the responsibility of the County Council or of the Highways Agency. The Cabinet also wished the appropriate authority to consider making the operation of the traffic signals part time as for example during the night, the traffic was much lighter and this would reduce the amount of stationary traffic and therefore improve air quality.

Recommendation 5 – Yellow Box Markings at Junction 1 M42

Request that Environmental Health monitor the AQMA before and after the Highways Agency have added and amended yellow box markings on the roundabout at M42 Junction 1 at gridlock (which is hoped will improve the flow of traffic) to investigate whether or not there has been a reduction in air pollution.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation and it was also resolved that the Police be requested to monitor the misuse of the yellow boxes as it was felt some motorists were not complying with the markings.

Recommendation 6 – M42 Westbound to M5 Scheme

Request that the Highways Agency monitor the area of the M42 Westbound to M5 to find out if this scheme has been successful in reducing the number of incidents (which has often led to traffic congestion and therefore impacted on the AQMA) and communicate their findings to the Environmental Health Team.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 7 – Town Centre Redevelopment

The Town Centre Redevelopment Steering Group (LSP Theme Group) be requested to consider air pollution caused by traffic congestion when looking at redeveloping the town. This would include the Group looking at the possibilities of having vehicle access to The Strand from Birmingham Road (by Davenal House) and investigate, in partnership with Worcestershire County Council Highway's, whether or not it might help decrease traffic congestion and therefore lower the air pollution at this location which has high NO2 levels.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 8 – High Street and The Strand

- (a) Request that Worcestershire County Council review the timing of the traffic signals located at the top end of the High Street by The Strand with a view to reducing the build up of standing traffic;
- (b) If (a) is agreed and County Council decide to amend the timing of the traffic signals, request that they monitor the traffic congestion before and after making the alteration to measure whether the action has had a positive impact; and
- (c) If (a) is agreed, request Environmental Health monitor air quality around Davenal House, Birmingham Road before and after the alteration to measure whether it has helped improve air quality (which is known to be poor at this location).

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 9 – Property Development

- (a) The Head of Planning and Environmental Health Services be requested to consider the best ways to discourage development within an AQMA; and
- (b) An air quality guidance note for developers be drafted by the Planning and Environmental Health Officers to try and control and mitigate the impact property development has on air quality.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 10 – Communication with Local Residents

- (a) There is ongoing communication with local residents who own and/or reside in a property located in the AQMA to ensure they are fully aware of the situation. (The Task Group will be ensuring the households affected receive a copy of this report for their information.); and
- (b) A sign be erected (by the County Council) in the AQMA to inform the public that it is an AQMA and that the District Council is working with other agencies to reduce air pollution in the vicinity. The sign should also pose the question “Is your journey necessary?” to encourage the public to think about their travel habits and the impact it has on air pollution.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 11 – Web Site

Environmental Health be requested to update information on the Council's website as soon as possible and ensure it is regularly updated.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 12 – Health of Local Residents

- (a) The Environmental Health Team be requested to work in partnership with Worcestershire PCT (and local GP surgeries) and ensure they are kept up to date in regards to which areas are known poor air quality areas to help investigate further the correlations between poor air quality areas and respiratory illnesses such as asthma; and
- (b) Request that Worcestershire PCT work closely with GPs to ensure the criteria used for diagnosing and recording data relating to asthma is standardised wherever possible to enable the analysis of data to be more meaningful.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 13 – Bonfires

- (a) The Environmental Health Team be requested to actively discourage bonfires (with the exception of social events on and around 5th November) through promotion, similar to Birmingham City Council; and
- (b) Ensure that members of the public are aware how to report bonfires if they are a nuisance.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 14 – Street Scene and Waste Management Vehicles

The Head of Street Scene and Waste Management be requested to further investigate and assess options available (such as using bio fuel in refuse and recycling vehicles) which could assist the Council in contributing to improving air quality.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 15 – Staff Travel Plan

It is requested that the newly established Energy Efficiency Project Group progress the Council's Staff Travel Plan as a matter of urgency and work together with the LSP Better Environment Theme Group.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 16 – Training/Briefing

- (a) To help the Council lead by example to other agencies, training be offered to all Members and staff (including those based at the Depot) on air quality (and other green issues) to improve their awareness of the impact their behaviour at home and at work can have on air quality;
- (b) As part of that training, it is suggested that the film "An Inconvenient Truth" relating to the work of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore be shown at the Council House; and
- (c) The Head of Street Scene and Waste Management ensure specific training is provided to refuse and recycling crews relating to where refuse vehicles should be parked (to avoid causing traffic congestion) with engines turned off during breaks.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 17 – Taxi Drivers

The Licensing Section be requested to remind taxi drivers not to leave their engines running whilst waiting for the next fare at a taxi rank. As an incentive to

change their behaviour, it should be pointed out that (a) it will save fuel; and (b) it is an offence to leave a vehicle running when not in the vehicle and any person doing so is at risk of receiving a fixed penalty notice. This information could be included in a newsletter for example.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 18 – Car Sharing Scheme

- (a) To ensure car parking spaces are reserved for those who join the car sharing scheme (which could act as an incentive);
- (b) Through various forms of publicity, the Communication Team ensure that staff are frequently reminded and encouraged to join the Car Sharing Scheme and encouraged to use other alternatives to travel to work such as walking, cycling or public transport; and
- (c) The numbers of staff from Bromsgrove District Council joining the car sharing scheme be monitored.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 19 – Essential and Casual Car Users

Further investigations be carried out by the Human Resources Section into the possibility of having: (a) a pool of Council owned environmentally friendly cars for essential and casual car users; or (b) a loan/lease scheme to assist and encourage staff to convert their own car to alternative fuel.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Recommendation 20 – Car Allowance Pay Scales

The Council consider revising the current car allowance pay scales and not pay more to those who are potentially the worst polluters. Instead, base the car allowance pay scales on the Vehicle Exercise Duty (VED) Rates (attached as Appendix 5) to ensure payment is based on CO2 emissions. (Alternatively, the Council could as a minimum follow the example of other local authorities who have introduced a flat rate for all users (regardless of engine size) as this method would indirectly benefit those employees with smaller engine sized cars as these use less fuel per mile.)

The Cabinet resolved that investigations be undertaken into the revision of the current car allowance pay scales to include the possibility of paying a flat rate for all users regardless of engine size. It was felt that the payment of a flat rate may discourage the use of vehicles with larger engines.

Recommendation 21 – Home Working Policy

Support be given to a Home Working Policy as reducing the number of times staff need to travel to and from the office will help reduce the number of cars on the road and this will help towards improving air quality. Therefore, a report from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development should be submitted to the Corporate Management Team without delay.

The Cabinet approved this recommendation.

Following consideration of the Task Group report The Leader and Cabinet expressed their thanks to the Chairman and Members of the Task Group for the thorough scrutiny exercise which had been undertaken which had resulted in such a clear report.

Councillor Mrs. J. Dyer M. B. E.
Portfolio Holder for Planning