

# **Taunton Deane Borough Council**

**Executive – 12 November 2008**

## **Air Quality Strategy**

### **Report of the Operations Manager (Environmental Health)**

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mel Mullins)

#### **1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive of the collaborative work carried out by the six Councils that form the administrative region of Somerset to produce the Somerset Air Quality Strategy, previously circulated.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Air pollution in the UK is estimated to reduce the life expectancy of every person by an average of 7-8 months with associated estimated health costs of up to £20 billion each year.
- 2.2 The Environment Act 1995 establishes a national framework for air quality management and places obligations on Local Authorities to undertake a review of the air quality in their area. Where air quality objectives are not met, Local Authorities are required to establish Air Quality Management Areas and implement Action Plans to improve air quality.
- 2.3 The Somerset Air Quality Strategy is a separate issue and is not concerned with these statutory duties.

However, the Government has recommended that all Local Authorities consider developing a Local Air Quality Strategy in addition to their statutory air quality work. The principal purpose of the Strategy is to maintain good air quality and where appropriate improve air quality locally.

This is fully in line with the findings of the Rogers Report, commissioned by the Government to examine enforcement priorities for local Authorities. The report, published in March 2007, is the first time that these priorities have been examined in terms of evidence of health risks.

It is a measure of the importance attached to air quality that it is one of only six priorities mentioned in the Report, which initially studied 60 policy areas.

- 2.4 Specific reasons that Air Quality was made a national priority in the Rogers Report include the statements that “Air pollution damages health, quality of life and shortens life expectancy.”

The Report continues “Air Quality is a high national political priority and actions taken to improve it will also contribute to tackling climate change. Local authorities have a vital role to play in delivering better outcomes.

Air quality is a national enforcement priority because it impacts on whole populations, particularly the elderly and those more susceptible to air pollution.

It is politically important to emphasise the role that local authorities can play in reducing its impacts, and its trans-boundary nature means that local action contributes to national outcomes.”

- 2.5 Somerset being largely a rural county, broadly speaking air quality across the County is good. The only pollutant to pose a problem in the area is nitrogen dioxide resulting from traffic pollution.

The focus of the review and assessment process is primarily concerned with areas where the local population is exposed to pollution above acceptable levels.

### **3. The Current Position**

- 3.1 Poor air quality resulting from traffic emissions is largely responsible for pollution hot spots across the UK and indeed Somerset. Somerset Local Authorities and in particular those that have declared Air Quality Management Areas are familiar with the importance of close communication and collaboration with various stakeholders, including transport and land-use planning authorities.

- 3.2 The aim of the County-Wide Air Quality Strategy is to complement the Local Air Quality Management process by working collectively and affording better use of resources and ensuring consistency.

Due to the cross-boundary nature of air quality studies, this approach is preferable to that of a single Authority producing a local Strategy.

- 3.3 The Strategy, in conjunction with partners and the community encourages a holistic approach to the problems of air quality and not merely target ‘hot-spots’.

- 3.4 The aim of the Strategy is not only to support the achievement of the air quality objectives but also to raise air quality as an issue for consideration within a wide range of local government and regional planning frameworks.

This will have the effect of reducing the risks of the most serious health effects relating to pollution.

- 3.5 The South West is the fastest growing region in the UK, which brings the need for further accommodation, transport networks, health, education and other services.

Of relevance to air quality is the need for more housing and the impacts on transport provision. The Strategy has recognised the constraints and opportunities, on improving air quality at local and regional level.

#### **4. Integrating Air Quality and Climate Change**

- 4.1 Mitigating and adapting to the effects of Climate Change, although led by Government requires the involvement of the public and private sector and also communities. The two matters cannot be considered in isolation and the Strategy recognises that air quality and climate change should be integrated into local authority policy and should meet the expectation placed by Government on dealing with these two considerable environmental issues.

#### **5. Provision of Information**

- 5.1 The Strategy sets out proposals for the provision of information to the public by a unified approach. This can help people to make informed choices about their lifestyles, particularly if they have health problems exacerbated by poor air quality. Such information may be provided from a central information hub, amongst other mechanisms for relaying information.

#### **6. Recommendations for Strategy Actions**

- 6.1 The Air Quality Strategy makes a number of recommendations for action by Local Authorities and the various stakeholders, both broader strategic and more specific. Some relate to work already underway across Somerset, mentioned because of their fundamental importance to maintaining or improving air quality.

#### **7. Evaluation, Implementation and Monitoring**

- 7.1 The effectiveness of the Strategy will be monitored to ensure that the aims and objectives are being met. This will involve a number of air quality targets and indicators and will require the input of a number of stakeholders. Air quality is also likely to benefit indirectly as a result of certain priorities featured in the Local Area Agreement process.

#### **8. Recommendation**

It is recommended that Taunton Deane Borough Council adopts the Somerset Air Quality Strategy.

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