

CABINET
10 SEPTEMBER 2024

AIR QUALITY STRATEGY 2024-2029

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval of the Air Quality Strategy 2024 -2029.

Summary

2. Due to changes in national policy the Council is now required to produce an Air Quality Strategy for the Borough.
3. Darlington Borough Council's Air Quality Strategy 2024 – 2029 (**Appendix 1**) aims to improve air quality, raise the profile and importance of air quality, provide information about local air quality and outline the vision, aims and key priorities going forward.
4. The Strategy includes the following six aims:
 - (a) Reduce emissions and protect public health
 - (b) Raise awareness and influence change
 - (c) Lead by example
 - (d) Decrease exposure to air pollutants
 - (e) Consider the impact of development on air quality
 - (f) Ensure compliance with legislation
5. The Strategy outlines work that has been done so far in relation to each aim and future actions going forward.
6. The Strategy was considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2024.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the adoption of the Air Quality Strategy 2024 - 2029.

Reasons

8. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) The Strategy demonstrates a commitment to improving air quality within the Borough.
 - (b) The Strategy includes objectives and actions aimed at reducing emissions which will have positive effects on public health.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

Darlington Borough Council 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR)

Carol Whelan : Extension 6437

Council Plan	<p>The Air Quality Strategy will contribute to improving air quality and to the aspirations of the Council Plan of Darlington being one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest – with a strong and sustainable economy; healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all. It links in particular with the following priority of the Council Plan:</p> <p>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough</p>
Addressing inequalities	<p>Air Quality affects everyone, health inequalities do exist in that some people are more affected, for example, because they live in a more polluted area, are exposed to higher levels of air pollution in their day-to-day lives or are more susceptible to health problems linked to air pollution such as children, the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. The Air Quality Strategy seeks to bring about improvements in air quality across the Borough as a whole.</p>
Tackling Climate Change	<p>The Air Quality Strategy contributes to our commitment to reducing Darlington Borough Council’s carbon emissions to net zero (carbon-neutral) by 2040. Actions within the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to reduce carbon emissions will see co-benefits such as cleaner air.</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	<p>The delivery of the strategy will be undertaken with existing staffing and financial resources, the extent of delivery of the educational and pro-active work by Environmental Health will be determined by staff resources and the demands of other statutory work.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>The Council has identified the health of the people of the Borough as a key priority. The Air Quality Strategy includes a section explaining both the short term and long terms health impacts of exposure to air pollution and the first aim of the Strategy is to reduce emissions and protect public health.</p>
S17 Crime and Disorder	<p>There is expected to be no impact on crime and disorder in Darlington.</p>
Wards Affected	<p>The Air Quality Strategy is applicable to all wards, but certain wards which have main arterial road networks will be greater impacted by road traffic emissions and currently only Darlington urban area is covered by smoke control areas and not the surrounding villages.</p>
Groups Affected	<p>The Air Quality Strategy is applicable to all groups.</p>
Budget and Policy Framework	<p>This report does not recommend a change to the Council’s budget or policy framework.</p>
Key Decision	<p>This is not a key decision.</p>
Urgent Decision	<p>This is not an urgent decision.</p>
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	<p>This report does not impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.</p>

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. The Local Air Quality Framework was established by Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 Local Air Quality Management (LAQM), and more recently amended by the Environment Act 2021 and includes the relevant Policy and Technical Guidance documents. The LAQM process places an obligation on all local authorities to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas, and to determine whether the air quality objectives are likely to be achieved.
10. Monitoring of air quality by the Council is carried out using diffusion tubes at several locations throughout the borough to measure levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). In Darlington air quality monitoring results has shown that air quality objectives are being achieved and there is no need to declare any air quality management areas. The Strategy acknowledges the Council cannot be complacent in this and need to ensure that as the borough continues to grow and develop, we maintain good air quality and strive to bring about further improvements.
11. The main pollutants of concern in Darlington are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) arising from road traffic emissions and PM_{2.5} associated with wood burners which have increased in popularity recently.
12. The Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance which was updated in August 2022 states that from 2023 in England where a local authority does not have an air quality management area declared which is the case for Darlington Borough Council, they are now required to create a local Air Quality Strategy.
13. The Air Quality Strategy is not a replacement for the Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) which is produced by the Council summarising air quality data, comparing data with air quality objectives, outlining steps taken to improve air quality and to report on significant new developments. The reports are submitted to Defra for approval on an annual basis. Defra have stated they will monitor whether Local Authorities have or are developing a local Air Quality Strategy through the ASR appraisal process.
14. There is no set format for local Air Quality Strategies, but the Government expectation is that all local authorities will take proactive measures to improve air quality regardless of whether they have air quality management areas and encourage the prevention and reduction of polluting activities.
15. Darlington Borough Council's Air Quality Strategy aims to improve air quality, raise the profile and importance of air quality, provide information about local air quality and outline the vision, aims and key priorities going forward.
16. The strategy provides a framework for work carried out by the Council going forward in relation to air pollution and improving air quality which builds on work that has already been undertaken by various section of the Council and complements objectives within existing Transport Plans, Climate Change Action Plan and the Local Plan.

17. The Strategy includes the following six aims:
 - (a) Reduce emissions and protect public health – Minimise emissions from road traffic and domestic burning.
 - (b) Raise awareness and influence change – Educational campaigns to encourage and enable behavioural changes on issues such as unnecessary idling of engines, wood burning.
 - (c) Lead by example – Ensure we lead the way as a Council for example with the use of electric vehicles. The Council has an electric fleet of vehicles currently consisting of 16 Building Services, three Highways, two Building Cleaning, two Street Scene, one Cemeteries, one Pest Control, one South Park Gardener, one Occupational Therapy, one Library Service.
 - (d) Decrease exposure to air pollutants – To increase awareness of the effects of poor air quality and how to minimise exposure.
 - (e) Consider the impact of development on air quality – Ensure the air quality impact of development is assessed and wherever possible, secure improvements to mitigate impacts on air quality via the planning process.
 - (f) Ensure compliance with legislation – Fulfil our statutory obligations to report on air quality within the Borough, enforce smoke control legislation, regulate Part B activities under the environmental permitting regulations.
18. The Strategy outlines work that has been done so far in relation to each aim and future actions going forward. Some of this work is linked to existing priorities such as providing sustainable transport and the good work already undertaken by the Council to promote cleaner vehicles in the Taxi Licensing Policy.
19. The future actions are summarised within the Strategy and include the following:
 - (a) Work to continue to expand the active travel network and encourage shift to more sustainable transport modes as well as improving awareness of traffic free walking/cycling routes.
 - (b) Provision of information and education campaigns to educate and raise awareness of the public, businesses etc. on how to reduce emissions. Work will continue with regard to the education interventions in relation to idling and wood burning and to raise awareness on how to improve indoor air quality.
 - (c) Promote and encourage the uptake of cleaner energy.
 - (d) Expansion of electric vehicle infrastructure and continue to reduce emissions from the Council fleet and buildings.
 - (e) To review and consider expanding the extent of the Smoke Control Areas in Darlington.

20. It is proposed that the strategy will be reviewed every five years and progress will be reported in the Annual Status Report submitted to Defra and published on the Council's website.

Financial Implications

21. The delivery of the priorities and future actions contained within the Air Quality Strategy will be delivered by the Environmental Health team working collaboratively with other sections of the Council such as Transport, Climate Change, Development Management and in terms of campaign work the Council's Communication and Marketing teams.
22. There are no plans for any additional staff resources and funding will be provided from existing Environmental Health Budget and government funding as and when available.

Legal Implications

23. Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 Local Air Quality Management, as amended by the Environment Act 2021, and the relevant Policy and Technical Guidance documents. The LAQM process places an obligation on all local authorities to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas, and to determine whether or not the air quality objectives are likely to be achieved.
24. The Council submits an Annual Status Report to Defra on an annual basis detailing the actions taken to improve air quality, air quality monitoring data and comparison with air quality objectives.
25. There is no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to produce an Air Quality Strategy, but the requirement is included in Government Policy.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

26. The Air Quality Strategy contributes to our commitment to reducing Darlington Borough Council's carbon emissions to net zero (carbon-neutral) by 2040. Actions within the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to reduce carbon emissions will see co-benefits such as cleaner air.

Consultation

27. Consultation has taken place with other Sections of the Council. There is no requirement to consult, and no public consultation has been carried out.
28. The draft Air Quality Strategy was considered by the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on the 19 June 2024. The Strategy was well received by members of the committee and feedback was received on focusing further work on wood burning stoves including health impacts and emissions from idling school buses.