

To: Cabinet
Date: 09 September 2020
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Air Quality Action Plan

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Air Quality Action Plan report
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Joe McManners, vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Tom Hayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 01 September 2020, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Air Quality Action Plan.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Tom Hayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, for presenting the report and answering questions. The Committee would also like to thank Mai Jarvis, Environmental Quality Team Manager for compiling the report and supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. Tom Hayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford, introduced the report. The Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) fulfilled a statutory duty. It also provided the Council with an opportunity to demonstrate its desire for a more challenging approach to the importance of clean air than was expected by the Government. The need for a robust approach to air pollution was a matter of social justice given the profound impact of poor air quality on everyone and, in particular, on some members of the community. The Council already had a good track record of measures to tackle air pollution, working in close partnership with the County Council where necessary and was well placed to address the target for the reduction of air pollution set out in the report. The introduction of a Zero Emission Zone, and “Connecting Oxford” for example, would be critical factors in the achievement of the target.
4. Overall, the Committee expressed strong support for the draft AQAP and praise for those involved in its development.
5. The Committee’s discussion and questioning in response to the report were wide-ranging and thorough, considering the equalities aspect of air quality, textual clarifications and amendments, emitters outside the scope of the Clean Air Act (such as canal boats), the financial implications of the AQAP, issues on consultation and engagement, and suggestions on practical steps for the Plan on transport issues.
6. The Scrutiny Committee makes ten recommendations relating to
 - Textual amendments to the AQAP
 - Communication and engagement in consultation and around air-quality generally
 - Transport suggestions

Textual Amendments

7. In its scrutiny of the AQAP the Committee raised a number of areas within the plan itself where additional clarification would be of benefit.
8. Although the Cabinet report alongside the draft AQAP does specify (s. 38) that ‘Poor air quality affects people in different groups differently. Minority groups and low income households might be disproportionately impacted by poor air quality’ it is the suggestion of the Committee that the use of the term ‘minority groups’ obscures the particular experience black and other people of colour, whose specific concentration of negative outcomes is sufficiently severe to warrant its own reference. Further, the fact that those individuals who intersect multiple risk groupings, disabled black people, for example should also be recognised.

Recommendation 1: That the Council amends its action plan to make specific reference to the particular negative impacts experienced by BAME community members as well as other risk factors such as disability and low incomes, as well as the particular negative outcomes experienced by those intersecting multiple risk factors.

9. It is evident that in setting a target more ambitious than the legal target of 40 µg/m³ of NO₂, meeting that legal target is a milestone on the way to achieving the Council's own target of 30 µg/m³ of NO₂. However, as Oxford's NO₂ levels are currently above the legal target, reaching the level of legal compliance is in itself an important and symbolic milestone. The Committee encourages more clarity and attention to be given to achieving this on the way to the Council's more ambitious goals.

Recommendation 2: That the Council makes the achievement of the legal 40 µg/m³ of NO₂ as a milestone in its plan clearer.

10. The Committee understands that references to the measures of air pollution, particularly around NO and NO₂, are complex and that there is a not necessarily complete agreement on their usage. Within the AQAP there are references to both but without explanation as to how they are employed and the rationale behind their usage. The Committee considers that Oxford, as a trailblazer amongst local authorities in implementing its own air quality target, is liable to be looked to by authorities who wish to follow its example. That would bring with it closer external engagement and scrutiny, and therefore additional precision is deemed to be of benefit.

Recommendation 3: That the Council provides an explanatory note or glossary reference to explain the technical meanings within the Action Plan of references to NO and NO₂.

11. In a similar vein to the recommendation above, the Committee considers that Oxford's position as a trailblazer also means that a definition of its central KPI, the 'local annual mean' is also provided.

Recommendation 4: That the Council provides within its plan a definition of the term 'local annual mean'.

Communication and Engagement

12. With air quality being such an important issue, and the changes required to deliver the Council's targets requiring significant behavioural change and modal shift, the Committee were keen that consultation on the draft strategy should go beyond standard levels of engagement. It was recognised by the Committee that the Council has had particular success in engaging with young people on the topic, winning Initiative of the Year in the 2018 National Air Quality Awards. The Committee seeks that efforts to extend that track record of successful engagement is continued, both in relation to the draft AQAP and the issue of air quality in general.

Recommendation 5: That the Council will continue to think of new and imaginative ways of increasing engagement with the issue of air pollution, especially amongst children and young people, and to increase participation in the Council's consultation on the Air Quality Action Plan.

13. One issue around the Council's communication and engagement which drew comment was the perception that in its framing and portrayal of air pollution, the Council may provide an imbalanced picture, which is skewed towards the City Centre. The Committee recognises that the preponderance of emissions hotspots are indeed within the City Centre. However, a greater number residents - from all over the City – face lesser (though still elevated) levels of air pollution. The Committee is keen to underline that air quality is an issue which faces the whole city, and requires engagement from everybody. To quell the possibility of giving the misleading impression that the Council considers air quality to be primarily a City Centre issue, the Committee encourages the Council to be mindful of the benefits of a more diverse presentation in its communications on the subject, involving a wider variety of communities and geographical locations where possible.

Recommendation 6: That in its communications plan the Council broadens the story it tells about the impact of air pollution away from the City Centre, including people and locations from across Oxford.

Transport Suggestions

14. Throughout its discussion of the AQAP there was strong agreement by the Committee with the underpinning contention that 'air pollution is, at its heart, a social justice issue'. This view was explicitly manifested in points made in relation to the establishment of electric vehicle charging infrastructure around the City. The Committee recognises that whilst the cost of electric vehicles is reducing, their uptake still tends to be clustered in more affluent areas. It is the Committee's suggestion that the Council must be willing not to follow demand in its decisions of where to situate electric vehicle infrastructure, but to enable it. If it is passive and simply follows demand, it is likely that instead of confronting the inequalities of air pollution, they could be embedded. It is important, therefore, that the Council does not overlook the less affluent areas of the City in its decisions of where to situate charging infrastructure, even if the immediate business case for doing so is less compelling.

Recommendation 7: That the Council, in its efforts to increase the number of electric vehicle charging points around the city, does not overlook provision for lower-income areas of the City.

15. The Committee discussed with approval plans around the electrification of the bus fleet and explored a number of issues around this, including the policy towards tourist coaches in the City Centre. Amidst the approval, however, was a degree of disappointment that the Pick Me Up bus service had not proven viable. The Committee considers the flexibility of the Pick Me Up service to have been of great benefit to users, and seeks that the Council considers alternative means of providing a service with similar benefits. Its own suggestion is for electric taxis to be used instead of the Pick Me Up bus.

Recommendation 8: That the Council considers the feasibility of implementing an electric taxi service to replace the Pick Me Up service.

16. Through discussion the Committee were informed of the Council's intention as shareholder in Oxford Direct Services (ODS) for 25% of its fleet to be electrified by 2023. The Committee welcomed the extension of the Council's ambitions into its commercial activity, but questioned whether this target may be insufficiently stretching. The Committee does not suggest an alternative figure, but asks the Council to consider whether the electrification process could be expedited.

Recommendation 9: That the Council will work with ODS to bring forward the plans for the electrification of the ODS fleet.

17. Whilst the Committee recognises the Council's commitment to implementing the Zero Emissions Zone and Connecting Oxford, it notes the central importance of delivering these programmes to the overall success of achieving its ambitious emissions targets. Consequently, the Committee wishes to underline its support for them, and express its encouragement to the Council to continue ensuring they progress.

Recommendation 10: That the Council continues to employ its best endeavours in working with its partners to realise the plans for the Zero Emissions Zone and Connecting Oxford.

Further Consideration

18. Scrutiny is scheduled to consider an update report on the Annual Air Quality Status Report at its October meeting, a topic related to this item. It is not anticipated that Scrutiny will seek to consider this topic further in the current civic year.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 01/09/2020 concerning the Air Quality Action Plan report

Response provided by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, Tom Hayes

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council amends its action plan to make specific reference to the particular negative impacts experienced by BAME community members as well as other risk factors such as disability and low incomes, as well as the particular negative outcomes experienced by those intersecting multiple risk factors.	Yes	To be incorporated in AQAP prior to public consultation
2) That the Council makes the achievement of the legal 40 µg/m³ of NO₂ as a milestone in its plan clearer.	Yes	To be incorporated in AQAP prior to public consultation
3) That the Council provides an explanatory note or glossary reference to explain the technical meanings within the Action Plan of references to NO and NO₂.	Yes	To be incorporated in AQAP prior to public consultation
4) That the Council provides within its plan a definition of the term 'local annual mean'.	Yes	To be incorporated in AQAP prior to public consultation
5) That the Council will continue to think of new and imaginative ways of increasing engagement with the issue of air pollution, especially amongst children and young people, and to increase participation in the Council's consultation on the	Yes	The Council will continue to work with schools and community groups to reach as wide an audience as possible for the public consultation

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Air Quality Action Plan.		
6) That in its communications plan the Council broadens the story it tells about the impact of air pollution away from the City Centre, including people and locations from across Oxford.	Yes	The Council will continue to ensure stories from across the city is hold in relation to air pollution to ensure it is clear this is a city wide issue.
7) That the Council, in its efforts to increase the number of electric vehicle charging points around the city, does not overlook provision for lower-income areas of the City.	Yes	The Council will continue its work as part of Go Ultra Low Oxford to engage across the city.
8) That the Council considers the feasibility of implementing an electric taxi service to replace the Pick Me Up service.	Yes	The Council regularly meet with the taxi trade and will seek their views. We have strong ambitions to help electrify the fleet so recognise one ambition of the recommendation is to clean up our demand responsiveness in the city
9) That the Council will work with ODS to bring forward the plans for the electrification of the ODS fleet.	Yes	The Council will continue to work with ODS on their plans for electrification of their fleet.
10) That the Council continues to employ its best endeavours in working with its partners to realise the plans for the Zero Emissions Zone and Connecting Oxford.	Yes	The Council will continue to progress plans for the introduction of the Zero Emission Zone and Connecting Oxford.

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