

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 November 2021
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Liz Wade, 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 05 October 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report based on the Council's Annual Air Quality Status Report for 2020.
2. The Committee would like to thank Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer, for authoring and presenting the report, particularly in light of Councillor Hayes' inability to attend the meeting owing to illness.

Summary and recommendation

3. Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer, introduced the annual report, which fulfilled a statutory duty and provided an overview of all monitoring data for the year and an update in relation to the air quality actions set out in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2025.
4. The previous year had been atypical given the consequences of Covid and significantly reduced traffic volumes. As a result of this, for the first time since air quality monitoring started in Oxford, there were significant reductions in air pollution levels and the city had been compliant with all short and long term UK air quality objectives. The highest annual mean however continued to be in St Clements.
5. The Committee devoted significant discussion to i) understanding air quality impacts arising from Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes (LTNs) ii) ways to work with other stakeholders to improve air quality, and iii) suggested functionality for the upcoming air quality website. On these issues it makes a total of five recommendations. Further, the Committee discussed its concern over the use of wood burning stoves. Members were assured that this would be addressed by information programmes to draw attention to the impact of their use and advice about best practice in relation to their use.

Air Quality and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

6. An issue of particular interest for the Committee is that of LTNs, and specifically whether traffic (and therefore vehicle emissions) which can no longer travel through the LTNs is being funnelled to nearby streets instead, a displacement effect. Committee members highlighted particular concern for Hollow Way as potentially experiencing this effect.
7. The Committee recognises that the current LTN in Headington is a trial. It notes that projected falls in car journeys may not happen immediately, meaning it is important that the effects are given time to show. Equally, however, it is also important that LTNs do not merely shift the negative externalities of traffic, such as poorer air quality, from one area to another. Indeed, it is quite possible that a partial reduction in traffic and a partial displacement effect could co-exist, and not inconceivable that the negatives of displacement could outweigh the benefits of a reduction in overall traffic. This situation would concentrate the burdens some households more heavily than others, oftentimes on the less well off, leading to their being asked to bear unacceptable proportions of the burdens arising from LTNs. The Committee considers this an important consideration within the overall conversation about the future of LTNs, and requests that the Council review the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to enable monitoring of areas where there is the potential of a displacement effect from LTNs. Given the public interest in this issue, the Committee suggests that all information be made publicly available to inform the discourse on the issue.

Recommendation 1: That the Council reviews the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to support the monitoring of roads where there is the possibility of displacement traffic generated by LTNs,

particularly around Hollow Way and the junction with Crescent Road, that the Council makes publicly available the findings as soon as possible if and when the Cowley, Headington and East Oxford LTNs are concluded, and that the information is also passed on to County Council colleagues.

8. Getting air quality data for streets around LTNs is necessary in identifying whether a displacement effect is occurring, but it is not sufficient. Without other sources of data it is not possible to tell whether a deterioration in air quality in streets in the vicinity of an LTN can be attributed to displacement traffic from the LTN, or from an overall growth in traffic. Members of the Committee were unsure as to whether traffic monitoring of this sort was being undertaken by the County Council in its role as the Highways authority. Given how polarising a topic LTNs are proving to be, it is the Committee's view that it is imperative that decisions made around their continuation should be evidence-led. Air quality impacts for nearby streets are an important issue within that wider conversation and the Committee seeks that the Council works with colleagues at the County Council to ensure that decisions made around it are informed by data.

Recommendation 2: That the Council seeks to work with the County Council to ensure that sufficient concurrent data is collected and shared to enable contextualised analysis of the impacts of LTNs, with particular regard to identifying whether a displacement effect is evident.

Working with Other Stakeholders

9. The Committee recognises that whilst it has a goal and a plan to reduce air pollution to below government limits, the overwhelming majority of emissions are produced outside the direct influence of the Council. As such, partnership working with other local stakeholders is vital. There are a number of institutions based locally providing a high number of jobs, and therefore a commensurate contribution to commuter travel – the universities, the hospitals, the County Council, Unipart and the Mini factory, for example. Working to ensure that such key institutions are working in tandem with the Council's own targets and plans over air quality would provide an outsized impact. The Committee suggests the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership as the easiest means to engage such institutions, but its primary concern is that the Council is proactive in engaging and working with partners in the most effective way to ensure their strategic plans are in line with the Council's own air quality targets and aspirations.

Recommendation 3: That the Council works with the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership to engage major local stakeholders, including the universities, in conversations with the Council about how they can incorporate air-quality positive measures into their strategic plans.

10. Whilst strategic plans and high-level activity to curb air pollution are undoubtedly important, so too is behavioural change at a local community and individual level. The Committee wishes the Council's efforts to promote this to be as effective as possible, with members keen to be able to share the educational material

produced by the Air Quality team throughout their own community networks. It is requested, therefore, that these graphics are made available to all councillors as they are produced with the encouragement that they be shared further.

Recommendation 4: That the Council makes available to all councillors all educational graphics developed by the Air Quality team for further sharing with community organisations.

Website Functionality

11. The Committee approves of proposals to launch a new community air quality website to provide greater transparency over air quality throughout the city. One function felt to be of particular benefit is to allow members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts. Given that traffic volume is not the sole determinant of air pollution on a given day, it is not necessarily easy to tell when it has reached a level where behaviour may need to be adjusted for health reasons. This is particularly important for those with particular vulnerability to air pollution, such as those with breathing problems, the elderly and the young. Real time alerts would provide objective data to enable such people to make choices beneficial to their health. Discussions at the meeting indicated that there were not technical barriers to adding this function to the website, in which case the Committee recommends that it is.

Recommendation 5: That the Council builds a function into the new community Air Quality website to enable members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts

Further Consideration

12. The Committee does not anticipate revisiting this topic in the current civic year.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 05/10/2021 concerning the Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)

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

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<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council reviews the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to support the monitoring of roads where there is the possibility of displacement traffic generated by LTNs, particularly around Hollow Way and the junction with Crescent Road, that the Council makes publicly available the findings as soon as possible if and when the Cowley, Headington and East Oxford LTNs are concluded, and that the information is also passed on to County Council colleagues.		
2) That the Council seeks to work with the County Council to ensure that sufficient concurrent data is collected and shared to enable contextualised analysis of the impacts of LTNs, with particular regard to identifying whether a displacement effect is evident.		
3) That the Council works with the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership to engage major local stakeholders, including the universities, in conversations with the Council about how they can incorporate air-quality positive measures into their strategic plans.		

4) That the Council makes available to all councillors all educational graphics developed by the Air Quality team for further sharing with community organisations.		
5) That the Council builds a function into the new community Air Quality website to enable members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts		