

**Minutes of the Place Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 at 6.00 pm  
on Microsoft Teams**

**Present:**

Councillor M Rogers (Chair)

Councillors M Aston, I Bevan, B Challenor, T Crumpton, Z Islam, L Johnson, J Martin and P Sahota

**Officers:**

P Davies – Director of Housing and Community Services, G Dean - Acting Director of Public Realm, T Glews - Public Protection Manager (Directorate of Public Health and Wellbeing), K Griffiths and K Taylor – Democratic Services Officers (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

**Also in attendance:**

One member of the public

**11 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Finch and K Finch.

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**12 Appointment of Substitute Member**

Councillor T Crumpton had been appointed as a Substitute Member for Councillor A Finch for this meeting of the Committee.

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**13 Declarations of Interests**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

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14 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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15 **Air Quality Monitoring in Dudley Borough**

Members considered a report of the Director of Public Health and Wellbeing on the current position with respect to air quality monitoring within Dudley Borough and compliance with the National Objectives for Air Quality.

The Public Protection Manager gave an overview of the key information outlined in the report submitted to the meeting. A copy of the report was available to view on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS).

In 2007, the whole of Dudley Borough was declared as an Air Quality Management Area specifically due to a number of exceedances of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). It was confirmed that no other air pollutants had exceeded the national air quality objectives in the Dudley Borough.

Diffusion tubes to monitor nitrogen dioxide were currently used at 45 separate sites around the Borough where concerns had been identified relating to air quality. Three automatic monitoring stations were operated in St James' Road (Central Dudley), Colley Gate (Cradley) and High Street (Wordsley) which provided accurate readings of various pollutants. A graph providing various levels of NO<sub>2</sub> over a number of years had been included in the report, which had identified significant improvements in air quality year on year in all three areas.

Data collected over a 12 month period was required to analyse the figures to enable clear levels of pollutants from the diffusion tubes located around the Borough. In 2018 there had been nine areas located within the Borough which had exceeded the national objective, which had reduced to six areas by 2019, which were outlined in paragraph 7 of the report submitted. It was noted that the national objective level of NO<sub>2</sub> was 40 ug/m<sup>3</sup>, and it was expected that by the time the data was available to be analysed for the 2020 levels, the number of locations exceeding the national objective would reduce further. A lot of work had recently been undertaken in High Street, Wordsley with standing traffic being improved significantly and it was expected that by the end of 2020 the national objective level would be reached for that area. It was acknowledged that Halesowen Road, Netherton and High Street, Quarry Bank required more focus in 2021.

Although there had been an improvement in air quality over the years, there had been a number of rises in air quality emissions, however, these had mainly been due to road traffic pollutants and climate changes throughout the years. Areas would continue to be monitored to identify areas that required further improvements.

Collaborative work with Development Management and Highway Engineers was essential to ensure appropriate air quality conditions were included on any new planning applications for development. Guidance on air quality and regeneration had been published and adopted by all seven West Midlands Metropolitan Boroughs and an Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been adopted by the four Black Country Metropolitan Borough Councils, which Dudley had taken the lead on producing the document.

Environmental Health had been active and successful in applying for Government grants to fund air quality improvement projects, a list of projects that had been implemented had been included in the report submitted to the meeting.

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions, make comments and responses were provided where necessary, as follows:-

- Members acknowledged the progress made to increase air quality monitoring and improve the levels of NO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants in the Borough and queried how the figures compared with other Local Authorities. It was acknowledged that the four Black Country Local Authorities air quality levels were very similar, however, it was recognised that further improvements were essential to ensure that national objectives were met.
- Key factors when considering improvement schemes in the Borough were referred to and the health impact poor air quality had on residents living in areas identified with higher levels of NO<sub>2</sub> and other harmful pollutants. Traffic congestion was considered one of the main causes of high levels of NO<sub>2</sub> in the Borough and it was considered that projects to improve traffic flow and congestion would significantly improve the air quality. However, in order to achieve this, it was recognised that significant investment would need to be made to highway improvement projects. Environmental Health was consulted on any potential highway improvement projects to ascertain air quality levels in specific areas and air quality was one of the main factors that was considered when prioritising improvement schemes.

- Members queried the cause of poor air quality on Halesowen Road, Netherton and the plans to address the issue. Halesowen Road was considered a difficult area to monitor, which might be due to the location of where the diffusion tubes were situated. A report had been produced on air quality and other pollutants in the Halesowen Road area for Senior Management to consider and discuss the implications. The right locations on where to monitor the air quality was essential to enable more accurate data to be collected and compared. A number of highway schemes had been implemented on the Halesowen Road, however, further improvements were necessary to control the pollutants in that area. Collaborative working with Ward Councillors was essential to identify further improvement projects to help control traffic flow, congestion and air pollution, which included upgrading the bus fleet.

It was acknowledged that the influences that made the air quality poor in Netherton and Quarry Bank High Streets were very similar, the hill gradients, high volume of traffic, stop and start traffic, pedestrian crossings, parking issues and the volume of heavy goods vehicles. Various schemes were being considered to alleviate traffic congestion to support improved air quality.

- Reference was made to the historic air quality issues and potential causes in the Cradley area, which had been improved following the opening of the by-pass. Members considered that focus should be addressing bottlenecking rather than improving public transport and granting significant investments to priority highway projects, similar to the improvement schemes carried out in Brierley Hill and Lye High Streets, which had resulted in significant improvements to the air quality in those areas.
- In referring to residential areas and new housing developments in the Borough where high levels of NO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants had been identified and the serious health implications associated with poor air quality, it was recognised that projects needed to be specific to reduce traffic from residential areas, resolve bottlenecking and try to encourage people to use alternative modes of transport where possible and to make safe provisions for walking and cycling. Electric vehicles were becoming more popular which would support improved air quality.
- Historic issues in relation to Brierley Hill Five Ways was referred to and although the highway improvement scheme had alleviated traffic congestion by building Venue Way By-Pass, traffic build up had moved to surrounding areas. It was essential that monitoring continued to be carried out in areas that had developed alleviation schemes to identify any early signs of increasing NO<sub>2</sub> and pollutant levels.

- In referring to the use of grant aid for Air Quality Improvements, in particular, the UK Government's Clean Vehicle Technology Fund, Members queried the process involved in selecting Prospect Coaches to be awarded the grant. It was noted that the grant had been received from Central Government to enable modifications to be made to coaches to reduce emissions and improve the way coaches were operated. A number of companies had been approached, however, Prospect Coaches had agreed to match funding the project. Prospect Coaches were used to transport children and students around the Borough and it was considered important that the grant aid was granted to a company that frequently used the Borough and had an impact on the NO<sub>2</sub> and pollutant levels. Members were advised that as a result of the improvements made, the majority of coaches were still in operation.
- It was recognised that the number of taxis drivers, not only in the Borough, but the whole Country was increasing and Members queried whether any research had been undertaken to monitor NO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants from taxis. Collaborative work with Dudley's Licensing Department was carried out to ensure that conditions were imposed on Taxi licences for MOTs and emission checks to be carried out by the Local Authority to enable appropriate monitoring of the emission levels, age of vehicle, mileage and maintenance/condition of taxi vehicles. Councillors and Members of the public were encouraged to contact the Licensing Office to report any taxi vehicle they felt was not operating effectively in order for officers to request appropriate checks to be undertaken to ensure the vehicle was running efficiently. Any vehicle failing any test provided by the Local Authority would be taken off the road until necessary work has been completed and Local Authority tests had been passed. Data collected was not specific to areas affected by taxi pollutants, however, Public Health frequently reported statistics in relation to the health of Dudley residents, which had contributed to improvement work, particularly in Netherton to identify the health implications associated with poor air quality.

It was queried whether there was potential to work with Central Government to improve the standard of taxis and as a result of the Covid-19 situation and economic difficulties associated with the pandemic, Members queried whether any financial support was offered to support self-employed taxi operators. The Environmental Health Manager undertook to make enquiries to identify what assistance was provided to self-employed taxi drivers/operators and undertook to circulate information to Members of the Committee.

- In relation to Brierley Hill and other improvement areas in the Borough, Members requested data that had been collected identifying air quality trends in the Borough. Members referred to the potential for Public Health to work with Central Government to identify public health measures and health awareness activities to prevent chronic health conditions developing or deteriorating for citizens in those problem areas. Members were advised that a new Director of Public Health and Wellbeing had been appointed and the matter would be raised once she had started her new role. Significant data on health that related to air pollution within the Borough had been collected and the Environmental Health Manager undertook to discuss the matter further with Public Health colleagues to identify further schemes, focusing on areas that had poor air quality.

## Resolved

- (1) That the current position with respect to air quality and air quality monitoring within Dudley Metropolitan Borough, be noted.
- (2) That the continuation of air quality monitoring to show the general improvement in air quality across the Dudley Borough, be supported.
- (3) That the enhanced air quality monitoring at locations where poor air quality was suspected and to demonstrate that measures to improve air quality had been successful, be supported.
- (4) That the measures being undertaken to improve air quality as detailed in the report submitted, be supported.
- (5) That the Environmental Health Manager be requested to circulate data identifying air quality trends in Brierley Hill and other areas of improvement to Members of the Committee.
- (6) That the Environmental Health Manager be requested to make enquiries to identify what assistance was provided to self-employed taxi drivers/operators and circulate information to Members of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 6.56pm

CHAIR