

Report to:

**TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer:

John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

Date of Meeting:

8 February 2022

AIR QUALITY STRATEGY SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To inform the Committee of the work undertaken by the Air Quality Strategy Scrutiny Review Panel.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 That the Scrutiny Committee note the recommendations of the Panel and amend its workplan as appropriate:

- That the need for a review of air quality monitoring sites be endorsed.
- That any future new policies in relation to the regulation of domestic burning and heating be brought to TEC to allow ongoing scrutiny of air quality work.
- That the Air Quality Action Plan be amended so that in respect of Public Engagement and Communication, that each message has a dedicated “owner” to provide clarity on who should be providing what information.
- That a draft of the Air Quality Strategy be provided to the TEC Scrutiny Committee following the completion of the consultation exercise.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure the Committee has an overview of ongoing work to develop the Air Quality Strategy.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- “The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool”
- “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”

6.0 Background information

6.1 On the 14 December 2022 Members of the Tourism, Economy and Communities (TEC) Scrutiny Committee held a Review Panel meeting, via MS Teams, to consider the work being undertaken to develop an Air Quality Strategy

6.2 Councillor Gerard Walsh chaired the meeting with the following members in attendance:

6.3 Councillor Paul Galley

Councillor Martin Mitchell

Councillor Paul Wilshaw

6.4 Mr Scott Butterfield, Strategy and Climate Lead, Ms Nicky Todd, Senior Environmental Protection Officer and Ms Grace Naylor, Graduate Strategy Officer, were also in attendance.

6.5 The review panel was informed that the Council was developing an Air Quality Strategy as part of its work in response to its declaration of a Climate Emergency and the supporting objective of achieving zero net carbon by 2030. The development of the strategy had been undertaken by officers with support from the consultancy firm Ricardo.

6.6 Consultation on the strategy had been undertaken with Officers and a public consultation was planned for 2023. The meeting sought input from scrutiny members into the development of the strategy, the priorities identified and the work planned and being undertaken.

6.7 The strategy would look not just at the Council but at the impact of air quality on the wider community and cover areas such as health, transport, planning and climate change.

6.8 The air quality in Blackpool had been demonstrated to be generally good. In 2005 Blackpool had been subject to an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) due to NO₂ levels being above the national average. However by 2019 Blackpool was compliant with levels across all the monitoring sites within the town. If this situation continues then the AQMA will be withdrawn. Significant air pollutants were still however generated in Blackpool primarily from road transport, commercial and domestic combustion and production processes such as construction.

6.9 The locations of the monitoring points for air quality were discussed, with the panel being

informed that their location was guided by the Department for the Environment, Fisheries and Rural Areas' (DEFRA) requirements that they be in areas with high vehicle and pedestrian traffic. However it had been recognised that there had been significant changes on the layout of Blackpool since 2005, significantly in the central area, and therefore officers were considering a review, with support from Ricardo, of locations used to allow the most accurate monitoring of air quality.

- 6.10 Members of the review panel welcomed the need for a review of air quality monitoring sites and endorsed the proposal to undertake one.
- 6.11 The review panel was informed that to support the strategy an Air Quality Action Plan would be developed. This would allow compliance with the strategy's objectives to be monitored. The actions within the plan fell under the following themes:
- Reducing Emissions from Vehicles
 - Encouraging Active Travel
 - Domestic Heating and Burning
 - Green Infrastructure
 - Reducing the Impact of New Developments
 - Public Engagement and Communication
- 6.12 Reducing Emissions from Vehicles
- 6.13 The review panel expressed the view that the aim of increasing the use of public transport would be in part achieved by showing its convenience for members of the public. This would require consideration of how the infrastructure of Blackpool was used and how underused facilities such as the car parks adjacent to the South Shore Train Station could be used more. Officers highlighted that this information could be fed into the review of the car parking policy being undertaken by the Council.
- 6.14 Taxis that had been licensed outside of Blackpool were raised as an issue as the Council had no control over the type of vehicles that they used. Although the Council could not force taxi operators to have Blackpool licences they could ensure that the terms and conditions offered within the town were more attractive to those offered elsewhere. This would assist by increasing the number operating with a Blackpool licence and therefore the control exercised by the Council as licensing authority.
- 6.15 However with respect of Blackpool licensed vehicles it was reported that although a discount for electric vehicles was considered when the taxi licensing policy was last reviewed, it was considered unsuitable due to a lack of supporting infrastructure within Blackpool. It was noted however that as the town centre continued to develop and climate emergency work progressed that the use of electric vehicles would increase and the Council's position on their use by taxi companies.

6.16 Encouraging Active Travel

6.17 Methods to encourage cycling and other forms of active travel were discussed. The need to ensure that appropriate infrastructure was in place and safety features, such as road marking and barriers was recognised. Consideration also needed to be given to what routes were made available with it being noted that this should not be restricted by the existing road network. Members highlighted that there needed to be a change in culture in respect of active travel, with it being reported that the Council's Active Cycling Team had been utilised to engage with communities to show them the benefits of cycling and seek local ideas on how to encourage cycling ore widely.

6.18 The possibility of implementing an electric scooter scheme, as available in some other towns, was raised. It was reported that the Council had considered a scheme involving electric bikes, however more work was need to ensure that any such scheme was properly integrated into Blackpool's infrastructure safely.

6.19 Domestic Heating and Burning

6.20 The review panel was advised that domestic heating and burning could be controlled through powers granted by the Environment Act 2019. It was reported that in order to greater understand what the Council could introduce in relation these powers officers would be attending a meeting on 15 December 2022 to discuss the issue with other local authorities. It was hoped that once clarity had been gained on the use of powers that the Council would seek to develop bonfire and solid fuels' policies to regulate how burning took place and what fuels could be used.

6.21 It was proposed that under a new bonfire policy, such fires would be banned, while under a solid fuels policy the Council could require domestic heating to use smokeless fuels. Although the management of these issues was welcome it was noted that there was a potential issue with enforcement the implementation these policies. In relation to domestic burning, the Council had no powers to actively monitor what fuels residents used within their own homes or that domestic stoves were serviced appropriately, unless a complaint was made. However the Council could control how new stoves were installed and ensure that fumes were released in the cleanest way possible.

6.22 Members welcomed the proposed new policies and asked that once drafted that the TEC Scrutiny Committee receive these for consideration and input. Communication of changes was also highlighted as important so that the community was aware of the quality of fuel that should be used and the important of servicing domestic appliances. In this respect Ricardo had recommended changes to the information available on the Council's website and two apprentice posts had been appointed to whose responsibilities would include updating information online.

6.23 Green Infrastructure

6.24 The review panel was informed that a number of new policies had been implemented in respect of this theme, such as the Tree Strategy and Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. Green Infrastructure was also being incorporated into the updated Town Centre Strategy to ensure it was considered in future development plans. Other work had included a school tree planting scheme, which had encouraged the planting of trees near to and around schools in Blackpool.

6.25 Reducing the Impact of New Developments

6.26 It was reported at the meeting that a number of air quality controls had been introduced such as the introduction of supplementary planning documents on the control of dust and emissions for new developments.

6.27 The review panel welcomed the work that had been undertaken so far and emphasised the need to ensure that these changes would provide long term benefits to residents be properly communicated and so positively influence public perception of new developments. In order to ensure that this was done, officers reported that discussions in this regard would be undertaken with the communications team and the Head of Planning Policy.

6.28 The installation of solar panelling on Blackpool Coastal Housing and Blackpool Housing Company Ltd properties was discussed, with officers reporting that a financial model had been developed exploring how the scheme could be funded. If successful, this could generate further electricity to supplement that needed for the running of air source heat source pump-based heating systems, further improving the environmental efficiency of the buildings.

6.29 Public Engagement and Communication

6.30 The review panel discussed the work to develop an Air Quality Communications Plan and the other engagement work with Blackpool's residents and partners. This would be supported by a new Climate Engagement Officer post that would be recruited to in 2023.

6.31 Members welcomed the reported work but highlighted that the action plan needed to ensure that specific messages had specific "owners" to ensure that responsibility for messaging was clear. It was therefore recommended that the action be amended to include this.

6.32 Next Steps

6.33 Consultation on the draft Air Quality Strategy would be ongoing, with a further consultation meeting with officers and partners on 21 December 2022 and a public consultation in 2023.

6.34 Once this had been completed it was confirmed that the draft strategy would be developed to reflect the outcome of the consultations that had taken place. The strategy would then be

shared with members of the TEC Scrutiny Committee.

- 6.35 The review panel asked that the following recommendations be noted by the TEC Scrutiny Committee:
- That the need for a review of air quality monitoring sites be endorsed.
 - That any future new policies in relation to the regulation of domestic burning and heating be brought to TEC to allow ongoing scrutiny of air quality work.
 - That the Air Quality Action Plan be amended so that in respect of Public Engagement and Communication, that each message has a dedicated “owner” to provide clarity on who should be providing what information.
 - That a draft of the Air Quality Strategy be provided to the TEC Scrutiny Committee following the completion of the consultation exercise.

6.36 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 None.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 None.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 The review panel was held as part of the TEC Scrutiny Committee’s work to scrutinise the Council’s implementation of the Climate Emergency Declaration adopted being undertaken.

12.2 The Committee regularly receives updates on Climate Emergency work at its meetings and has agreed to hold in-depth reviews of specific policies related to the work being undertaken

going forward.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.