



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 11 NOVEMBER 2024**

**AIR QUALITY AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2024-28**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28, the draft of which is appended to this report.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The County Council's Strategic Plan includes strategic outcomes, namely 'Safe and Well' and 'Clean and Green' to which the Air Quality and Health Action Plan links. The Strategic Plan incorporates environmental commitments to ensure future growth is considered within a robust environmental framework, and under the 'Safe and Well' strategic outcome notes that health outcomes are influenced by a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors, with air pollution in particular being a significant health hazard
3. The work within the Action Plan also supports the vision of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Leicestershire (2022-32) which recognises that health inequalities are underpinned by social determinants of health and circumstances in which people are born, live, work and grow. It identifies success as an 'improvement in air quality and its impact on health and health inequalities across Leicestershire' and commits to implementing the Air Quality and Health Action Plan. The Action Plan also supports the Public Health Strategy (2022-27) which commits to protecting residents from harm by taking a multi-agency approach on issues such as air quality, through 'work with Environmental Health colleagues to explore ways of reducing harm from air pollution on the most vulnerable within the population and engage and communicate with residents around air quality and behaviour change'.
4. The Council's Environment Strategy 2018-2030 includes aims to reduce pollution and the environmental impacts of travel and transport and to protect people from harm caused by the deteriorating condition of the environment.
5. The Director of Public Health has a statutory duty under the Health and Social Care Act to ensure that plans are in place to protect the health of the local population.

6. The Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-24 was approved by the Cabinet in October 2020. The Health and Wellbeing Board receives updates on progress through Staying Healthy Partnership Board progress reports, the last update being in May 2024.
7. The Committee was last briefed in this area on 14 September 2023, receiving a report of the Director of Public Health on the progress made against actions within the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-24 and an initial proposal for an updated Plan for 2024-28. The report stated that a further update would be made to the Committee in 2024, prior to submission of the new Action Plan to the Cabinet for approval. A renewed Health Needs Assessment (HNA) was required to inform the new Action Plan and the creation processes for this follow a set structure and number of stages, including stakeholder contribution and consultation. The need to follow this process correctly has led to this report being brought to the Committee later than planned.

### **Background**

8. The Air Quality and Health Action Plan 2024-28 has been developed using recommendations from a Health Needs Assessment (HNA) conducted in 2024 and builds on the existing Action Plan. It aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Leicestershire by identifying actions that could reduce or mitigate the negative health impacts of air quality. The Action Plan also facilitates opportunities for partnership working and provides accountability in this area.

### **Local Context - Roles around Air Quality**

9. Within Leicestershire, lower tier local authorities (district councils) have the statutory responsibility to manage local air quality. This includes a requirement to regularly conduct air quality monitoring to ensure that it meets the required standards for certain pollutants.
10. Air quality is also a concern for Public Health due to the risk of harm to health and potential impact on health inequalities. The Chief Medical Officer's report (2022) states that mortality due to air pollution in England is estimated to stand at between 26,000 and 38,000 a year (from long term exposure), in addition to its contribution to ill health across the life course. Whilst there have been improvements in some pollutant levels in recent years, this is more of a mixed picture with particulate matter, where such improvements have stalled. It is recognised that there are no safe levels of particulate matter for health, and the 'fraction of mortality attributable to particulate matter' is included within the Public Health Outcomes Framework. Alongside monitoring this data, the role of local Public Health teams is seen as providing advice, guidance and influence to help shape appropriate action in this area as well as influencing local policy and raising awareness with colleagues and the public.

### **The Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership**

11. Following recommendations from a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) undertaken in 2019 covering air quality and health, a Partnership was formed of key organisations with the aim of working together to improve air quality in the County to contribute to a reduction in health inequalities. This 'Air Quality and Health Partnership' consists of officers from the County Council and all district councils as

they have a statutory duty to monitor air quality. The Integrated Care Board are also invited members.

12. The Partnership aims to contribute to a vision for air quality and health across Leicestershire: *“To improve air pollution in the county and reduce the impact of air pollution on the environment and human health, contributing to the reduction in health inequalities”*. Meetings are held on an eight-weekly basis, with discussion items and reports on progress against the action plan. The Partnership is now chaired jointly by officers from the Public Health and the Environment and Transport Departments.

#### Evidence for the Leicestershire Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28

13. As previously discussed with the Committee in September 2023, since the last JSNA was undertaken in 2019 there have been a number of changes that affect this area of work. Some relate to place and potential behaviour change (for example travel modes, distances and journey frequency post-pandemic) and strategically there have been publications of reports such as the Chief Medical Officer report (2022) focusing on air pollution, with key recommendations for action, including joint work on communicating monitored and forecasted pollution to population groups most vulnerable to harm, focus on densely populated areas, and work with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) on staff training and increased awareness around air quality. The Chief Medical Officer report also began to explore the growing evidence base around air pollution and increased dementia risk. Therefore, a renewed Health Needs Assessment (HNA) has been conducted in this area, with recommendations that have informed development of the Action Plan 2024-28.
14. There is also new local information available around populations most at risk from harms to health within the Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment chapter on Health Inequalities (2023). This can be added to the evidence around those populations that are known to be most at risk of harm from air quality nationally; children and young people, pregnant women, older people and those with existing long-term health conditions.

#### Summary of Health Needs Assessment Recommendations

15. The draft Action Plan is based around a number of recommendations from the HNA conducted in 2024, covering air quality and health.
16. The HNA reviewed key documents and their findings, including the Clean Air Strategy (2019), Air Quality Strategy (2023), Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) and the Chief Medical Officer Report (2022). Key pollutants and groups identified to be most at risk of health inequality due to air quality were also explored, alongside a summary of current work within this area from key stakeholders.

17. This cross-referencing process led to conclusions being made on gaps and unmet need, which led to the following recommendations being made within the HNA:

i. Leadership through the Air Quality and Health Partnership:

Strategic direction is required for reducing air pollution and its harmful effects on health. The Partnership could achieve this through informing on progress in this area to the Leicestershire Health and Wellbeing Board and also through work on the Action Plan; by leading, developing and delivering on actions that prioritise and respond to local need and the groups most vulnerable to the impact of poor air quality.

ii. Routinely influence urban design and planning across Leicestershire to improve air quality:

Consideration of air quality and health in strategic spatial planning documents (Local Plans), early strategic place and site design and infrastructure design is key.

iii. Align air quality and health work to climate change, net zero targets and biodiversity goals for the County:

Ensuring a strategic approach to identification of shared objectives and benefits that address various health and environmental aspects simultaneously.

iv. Increase active travel across the County:

Promoting active travel options, modal shift change and prioritisation of active travel within programmes of work, infrastructure development and planning whilst aiming to reduce health inequality through targeting interventions based on need.

v. Improve air pollution communications to the public and stakeholders:

Improving information to the public and key stakeholders on risk and personal impact on local air quality in a way that is meaningful, easily accessible and understandable, focusing on groups most likely to be impacted by air pollution.

vi. Target interventions in densely populated areas and vulnerable groups:

Using key demographic information from the Health Needs Assessment.

vii. Understand the impact of industry and agriculture on the air and potential action in these areas:

Through looking at key locations within the county, mapping to areas of pollution and populations most at risk.

## The Leicestershire Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28

18. The Air Quality and Health Action Plan aims to promote and facilitate joint working across organisational boundaries with key stakeholders to improve air quality in the county and reduce the impact of air pollution on human health and the environment. Like the previous Action Plan, this is informed by a HNA, and each recommendation from the 2024 HNA set out in paragraph 17 above, is included in the Plan and has a number of actions assigned to it.
19. Action on leadership (recommendation (i)) involves ensuring considerations around air quality impacts on health are routinely included within national and local consultation responses from Partnership members on proposed policy and programmes. This is supported by actions around embedding a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach throughout the County, using learning from the initial work in this area done by the County Council. This work has led to a commitment to conducting health impact assessment on key policies and programmes such as Local Transport Plan 4 and other transport-based work, which is captured within the draft Action Plan. HiAP roll out is already being piloted with local district Planning teams through Local Plan development work. Action to ensure air quality embedded in this ongoing work have been captured within the Plan under recommendation (ii), influencing urban design (set out in paragraph 17 above). Opportunities are also identified within the draft Action Plan for partnership members to provide leadership around focus on densely populated areas, using local knowledge. This contributes to action on recommendation (vi), building upon Public Health expertise on vulnerable populations.
20. Focus on increasing active travel (recommendation (iv)) and improving public communication in this area (recommendation (v)) have been carried over from the current Action Plan, but made more specific in terms of partners involved, areas and populations to prioritise and methods to achieve this. An example of this is joint work with NHS partners on communication with those most at risk of harm and looking at wider programmes with Active Together where air quality messages could be built into active travel work.
21. Some partnership work has already been undertaken on green and climate outcomes and health benefits but this has been formalised within the Action Plan, supported by the national recommendations identified within the HNA from national evidence and strategy, feeding into recommendation (iii). More ambitious action has been identified for recommendation (vi), working with industry and agriculture as key contributors, with a focus on mapping and engagement. This will allow partnership working and innovation to grow as this work develops.

## **Consultation**

22. All members of the Air Quality and Health Partnership were consulted throughout the process of the development of the HNA between January and June 2024 and Action Plan between July and September 2024. This was achieved through the use of 2024 Partnership meetings as a Health Needs Assessment stakeholder group, which gave the partners opportunity to contribute their thoughts, data, content and priorities to

the needs assessment at every stage and then to discuss, review and agree the Action Plan. Their contribution was pivotal and stakeholders were assigned actions on the Action Plan that they agreed to lead. Live documents were shared on the Partnership Sharepoint site to add to, review and amend and a number of small task and finish meetings were held with smaller groups to look at areas such as data collaboration across organisations.

### **Resource Implications**

23. There are no additional resource implications for the Council arising from the updated Action Plan. The HNA recommendation (iii) to align air quality and health work to climate change, net zero targets and biodiversity goals for the County will lead to actions around this to achieve co-benefits through partnership work.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

24. Following consideration by the Committee, the draft Action Plan will be presented to the Cabinet for approval at its meeting on 17 December. The comments of the Committee will reported to the Cabinet at that meeting. The final Action Plan will then be presented to the Air Quality and Health Partnership for approval and if required, to take through their respective governance processes.
25. As identified within actions against recommendation (i) of the HNA, there will be a bi-yearly report to the Staying Healthy Partnership (as per the governance arrangements identified within the Partnership Terms of Reference), to maintain accountability and progress reporting.

### **Conclusions**

26. The Air Quality and Health Partnership is well attended by key stakeholders working within the area of air quality and health, who engage well within and between meetings. The Action Plan gives an opportunity for evidence-based action, structure, reporting and accountability in this work area for the period of 2024-28. A focus on the benefits of the Partnership and cross organisational work to address air quality and health can be demonstrated by the adoption of the Plan.
27. The Committee is asked to comment on the vision, aims and priorities set out in the draft Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28, appended to this report.

### **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet- October 2020 – Air Quality and Health Joint Action Plan 2020-2024 <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s157168/Air%20Quality%20and%20Health%20Joint%20Action%20Plan%202020-2024.pdf>

Report to the Environment and Climate Change Overview Scrutiny Committee- 14 September 2023 – Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan. <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1292&MID=7150#A175935>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

28. A copy of the report will be circulated to all members.

### **Equality Implications**

29. There are no equality implications arising from this report. The Action Plan 2024-28 is an update to a previous Action Plan, for which the screening assessment concluded that a full impact assessment was not required.

### **Human Rights Implications**

30. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

### **Other Relevant Impact Assessments**

#### **Health Impact Assessment**

31. The Air Quality and Health Partnership and associated Action Plan give a unique opportunity for Partnership members to come together to consider air quality within the context of potential health impacts and health inequality rather than just monitoring and reporting on pollutant levels and exceedances.
32. The new Action Plan will allow for partnership work and dialogue to continue in an evidence-based way, with local considerations of health need impacting and steering action.
33. Some groups within the population are disproportionately at risk from poor air quality due to determinants such as age, socioeconomic gradient and ethnicity. These inequalities exist due to different levels of exposure (i.e. living in a more deprived area is linked to increased exposure) and by vulnerability (due to existing health conditions). The Action Plan steers work to address these inequalities.
34. Through work with Authorities that monitor the local air quality, joint work can be explored to communicate risk to these populations affected, linking with local NHS partners to improve the pathway between monitoring and communications with the public.
35. Action on improving air quality such as encouraging active travel can also have wider health impacts on physical and mental health. Evidence shows that a healthier population is also more productive, contributing to economic prosperity within the county. Improved active and sustainable travel within the county may also allow for improved access to local services and employment opportunities.
36. There are a number of key co-benefits between health and climate/green/net zero work that are identified within the Health Needs Assessment, and the plan contains actions to explore and capitalise upon these locally.

### **Appendix**

Draft Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28.

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