



CABINET - 17 DECEMBER 2024

AIR QUALITY AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2024-2028

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to inform the Cabinet of the Council's ongoing work with partners to improve health inequality linked to air quality across the County and seek approval for the Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan for 2024-28. The draft Action Plan is attached as Appendix A to this report.
2. The Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan is overseen by the Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership. The Action Plan provides a summary of joint, evidence-based work opportunities, identified action leads and an opportunity to monitor progress against these actions.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
 - a) Notes the Council's continued work with partners to improve health inequality linked to air quality across the County;
 - b) Approves the Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Action Plan 2024-2028.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. Air pollution has a significant impact on public health and wellbeing and poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. 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.
5. 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. The new Action Plan will enable, facilitate and

monitor collective action in the area of air quality and health, across the County Council, district councils and NHS partners.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. The Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on 11 November 2024 and its comments are set out from paragraph 33 below.
7. Subject to approval by the Cabinet and any other partner bodies as necessary the Action Plan will be adopted by the Partnership.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

8. The County Council's Strategic Plan strategic outcomes, namely 'Safe and Well' and 'Clean and Green', link to the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan. The Strategic Plan incorporates environmental commitments to ensure future growth is considered within a robust environmental framework. Under the 'Safe and Well' strategic outcome, health outcomes are noted as being influenced by a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors, with air pollution in particular a significant health hazard.
9. The delivery of the Action Plan will also support 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. The Strategy 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.
10. The Public Health Strategy (2022-27) also 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'.
11. 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.
12. In October 2020 the Cabinet approved the first Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-2024.

Resource Implications

13. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Partners are asked to support the delivery of the Action Plan using existing resources.

14. The Director of Law and Governance and Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

15. The report will be circulated to all members.

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PART B

Background

16. Air pollution is a complex mix of particles and gases. Particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) are major contributors to urban air pollution. Other pollutants include sulphur dioxide, ammonia, ozone and non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs).
17. Health effects from air pollution occur throughout the life course, from conception to older age. 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 a lifetime. Ill health may mean people are less able to work and need more medical and social care support, resulting in higher social costs and greater burden on the Health and Care System, and increased health inequality.
18. Whilst there have been national improvements in some pollutant levels over recent years, this is a mixed picture with PM, where improvements have stalled somewhat. It is also recognised that there are no safe levels of particulate matter for health. The 'fraction of mortality attributable to particulate matter' is included as an indicator 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

19. The Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Partnership was formed in 2020, delivering against the previous Action Plan for the period 2020-24. This action plan was created following recommendations from a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) undertaken in 2019 on air quality and health.
20. The Partnership consists of officers from the County Council and all district councils (which have a statutory duty to monitor air quality) and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) has been invited to send a representative. Representatives from the University of Leicester attend on a quarterly basis to present on their air quality related work.
21. 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 County Council's Public Health and the Environment and Transport Departments.

Leicestershire Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28

22. 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. This report included 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 ICBs on staff training and increased awareness around air quality. It 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.
23. There is also new local information available around populations most at risk from harms to health from the Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment chapter on Health Inequalities (2023). This can now build upon existing 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 (2024) Recommendations

24. The draft Action Plan is based around a number of recommendations from the HNA conducted in 2024, covering air quality and health.
25. 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.
26. 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 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

- 27. 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 26 above, is included in the Plan and has a number of actions assigned to it.
- 28. 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 a 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. The HiAP approach is already being piloted with district councils through Local Plan development work. Actions to ensure air quality are embedded in this ongoing work have been captured within the Action Plan under recommendation (ii), influencing urban design (set out in paragraph 26 above).

29. 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.
30. 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.
31. Some partnership work has already been undertaken on green and climate outcomes and health benefits. 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 (vii), 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

32. 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 then on the draft Action Plan, between July and September 2024. This was achieved through the use of 2024 Partnership meetings as a HNA stakeholder group, which gave the partners an opportunity to contribute their thoughts, data, content and priorities to the needs assessment at every stage and then to discuss, review and agree the draft Action Plan. Their contribution was pivotal and stakeholders have been assigned actions on the Action Plan that they agreed to lead. Live documents were shared on the Partnership Sharepoint website to add to, review and amend and a number of task and finish meetings were held with smaller officer groups to look at areas such as data collaboration across organisations.

Comments of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee

33. The Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee considered a report at its meeting on 11 November 2024 and agreed that the vision, aims and priorities set out in the draft Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28 be supported.
34. Members welcomed the potential roll-out the targeted school work in South Wigston across the County, post-evaluation. Concerns were raised around the impact on air quality in this area due to congestion linked to buses and closure of a nearby bridge. The Director of Environment and Transport was able to reassure Members on these issues, particularly around work with Network Rail to minimise impact.
35. The Director explained that that delivery of the actions within the Action Plan increasingly relied on partnership working and the contribution of many partners within the Air Quality and Health Partnership, which was much stronger than in previous years. Progress made by the district councils on addressing air quality was regularly monitored through the Partnership and informed action. All district councils attend the meetings and Annual Status Reports for each district area were now routinely signed off by the Director of Public Health, after reviewing health links within these.
36. Public Health officer work with districts' Local Plan development was welcomed, including work on the inclusion and content development of key health policies, including air quality. Concerns were raised around this being able to be delivered, but officers are involved with all six Local Plans currently in development to embed health impact assessment requirements, including air quality considerations.
37. A question was raised about monitoring the impact of the potential cumulative effect on air quality of smaller local developments. Members were advised that a mapping process was planned to be undertaken to address this through the (officer) Strategic Planning Group, with health issues and development data overlaid, to identify areas of risk of harm to health, potential mitigation and a focus for Partnership activity. This has been added into the Action Plan for partnership commitment (in action 2.2f).
38. Availability of live data was also raised as a concern by the Chairman. The Director emphasised that the available data from monitoring and measuring air quality was used to inform current action. He acknowledged that more Zephyrs (air quality monitors) were needed for more thorough measuring but costs were prohibitive.

Equality Implications

39. There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The Action Plan 2024-28 updates the previous Action Plan, for which the screening assessment concluded that a full impact assessment was not required.

Human Rights Implications

40. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Health Implications

41. 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. 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. Some groups within the population are disproportionately at risk from poor air quality due to determinants such as age, socioeconomic gradient, health conditions 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. 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. 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. 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.

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/documents/s178459/Air%20Quality%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

Report to the Environment and Climate Change Overview Scrutiny Committee- 11 November 2024 and minutes of that meeting.

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Mid=7646>

Appendix

Draft Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28