

Divisions Affected - All

Cabinet – 23 May 2023

Oxfordshire County Council Air Quality Strategy

**Report by Corporate Director for Environment and Place and
Director for Public Health**

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet are RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) **Approve the Oxfordshire County Council Air Quality Strategy and Route Map for launch on Clean Air Day (15th June 2023).**

Executive Summary

2. This report provides Cabinet with an overview of the Oxfordshire County Council Air Quality Strategy. It summarises the background to the strategy, development process and content of the strategy. It is recommended that the final strategy (annex 1) and route map (annex 2) are approved by cabinet.

Background

3. A person at rest takes about 16 breaths per minute, this means we breathe about 960 breaths an hour and over 8.4 million breaths a year. A person who lives to 80 will take about 672 million breaths in a lifetime. The quality of the air we breathe is therefore everyone's business, and it is a fundamental building block to good health.
4. Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. Long term exposure to air pollution in England is equivalent to between 26,000 and 38,000 deaths per year. The true public health burden is likely to be even higher. In Oxfordshire, it was estimated that air pollution's effect on mortality was equivalent to 320 early deaths at typical ages in 2021.
5. This strategy is a call to action for the Council to make improving air quality a key objective of our work; individually and collectively we can and must take steps so that our residents are able to breathe safely.
6. Air pollution is a mix of particles and gases of both natural and human origin. These air pollutants are emitted from a range of sources including agriculture,

transport, industry and domestic heating. Currently, there is no clear evidence of a safe level of exposure.

7. The Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2022 focuses on air pollution. The report highlights that we can and should go further to reduce air pollution – and it is technically possible to do so. The report includes a number of recommendations including the need for local action to improve air quality and highlights that local authorities are central in the response to air pollution.
8. In [June 2022](#) the county council demonstrated its commitment to addressing the air pollution crisis by signing a letter to the UK Environment Secretary George Eustice asking the government to bring forward the UK's PM_{2.5} target to 2030, in line with the World Health Organisation's interim guideline.
9. Locally, the air quality context is complex, with a range of partner organisations each responsible for different elements of air quality. In Oxfordshire, the district and city councils have a legal duty to monitor air quality, however many others including the county council now have a duty to contribute to an action plan to reduce those levels. Under the Environment Act 2021 the county council have new legal responsibilities to actively support district and city council air quality work.
10. The county council through its crosscutting work on climate action, transport, development, waste, public health and innovation has already implemented many actions that will help to tackle poor air quality, and more are due to be delivered in the coming years. However, air quality improvements are often a by-product of this work rather than being a priority or driver.
11. The strategy aims to demonstrate Oxfordshire County Council's commitment to addressing the air pollution crisis by seeking to meet the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on deadly air pollution by 2030. It is crucial that we do so as there is no safe limit of air pollution.
12. The strategy's vision is to **accelerate the improvement in Oxfordshire's air quality to reduce the health and environmental impacts of dirty air, so ensuring that all residents can breathe safely.**
13. The strategy objectives are to:
 - Work in partnership to support the work to improve air quality undertaken by the district and city councils.
 - Work with air quality partners to maintain a downward air pollution trajectory and develop population exposure targets.
 - Deliver the Oxfordshire County Council Air Quality Strategy Route Map.
14. The strategy outlines the approach that we will be taking to realise this vision and objectives. This is a high-level approach that will help to guide future work on air quality in the county and the actions we will be taking. The approach is grouped into three areas:
 - **Reduce** – Reduce emissions of air pollution
 - **Extend** – Extend distance from pollution sources

- **Protect** – Protect those most at risk
15. The strategy is supported by a route map that sets out what work we are already doing and the actions we will take in the short term. The actions are all related to functions directly within Oxfordshire County Council's control. This will help to better define the county council's role and support joint working with our partners. The route map is structured according to our strategic approach and identifies those actions that we will be taking to reduce, extend and protect against air pollution. Within this, we have grouped the actions into key areas that are either local drivers or enablers of air quality.
 16. We have grouped the actions in this way to reflect the diverse range of issues and work being conducted within the broader reduce, extend, protect framework. We have identified the work already underway and actions we will be taking in each section. We have included partnership working and monitoring as their own sections due to their cross cutting impacts on all work.
 17. We recognise that there are a number of actions in the strategy which are a mixture of existing work and new work. To help guide delivery, we have therefore identified 5 priority actions for the next year. The priority actions are all related to new work that we will seek to deliver in the next year. We have identified one priority action for each section and will review our priority actions annually. The priority actions identified are action numbers 1, 26, 33, 36 and 43.
 18. The strategy is viewed as a first step towards improving county council work on air quality and raising awareness of air quality. Moving forward a more comprehensive countywide strategy will be required with support from a range of stakeholders to provide a coordinated approach to improving air quality. It is hoped that the OCC Air Quality Strategy will serve as a starting point and platform for enabling a countywide strategy.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. The county council's strategic plan, 2022-25, sets out a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will help to deliver all aspects of this vision.
20. The OCC Air Quality Strategy builds on the 9 strategic priorities of the county council and will be key to delivering the following three:
 - Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire
 - Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
 - Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential
21. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will help to make Oxfordshire greener, fairer and healthier due the significant impacts air pollution has on the health of Oxfordshire residents and the natural environment.

22. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will help to tackle inequalities due to air quality's impact on older and younger people, pregnant women and those with existing health problems. These residents are particularly susceptible to the impacts of air pollution. There is also a complex association between air pollution exposure, area level deprivation and ethnicity. The actions proposed to tackle the sources of air pollution will therefore improve the health of these residents and create a more equal society.
23. Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will therefore be central to prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents.
24. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will also help to create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. Children and particularly susceptible to the health impacts of air pollution. Raising awareness of air pollution and taking steps to address the sources of air pollution will therefore help to improve air quality across the county and reduce health impacts on children.

Financial Implications

25. The OCC Air Quality Strategy has been produced by staff from the Public Health Environment and Place directorates, and hence covered by the staffing budget in these areas.
26. The route map identifies 45 actions related to county council work on air quality. These include work that is already underway to support air quality, existing work that can be expanded and new work.
27. Actions related to existing work will be delivered through business as usual work and existing funding. The majority of new work can be delivered with no additional funding as the actions are related to partnership work and engagement with air quality partners.
28. The actions matrix (annex 3) identifies that approximately £200,000 is required in total for the 5 new actions (tabled below), to deliver the full ambition of the strategy and a further £50,000 for additional officer resource (1 FTE for 1 year) to oversee and coordinate delivery of the strategy.
29. Officers are investigating potential external funding sources such as the Integrated Care Board and Defra grants that could support further work or securing additional officer resource. Modelling and evidence base development work (part of action 45) valued at £70,000 and funded through the Public Health reserve (£60,000) and the Local Transport Authority Capacity Grant (£10,000), will be conducted in 2023/24 and this will help to inform future bids.
30. It is proposed that any further funding to help realise the strategy ambition, accelerate delivery or secure additional officer resource, that cannot be externally funded and deemed a priority would be considered as part of a future budget strategy process.

Action	Cost	Explanation
28 - Work in partnership and use an intelligence led approach to enforcement in relation to improving air quality.	£5,000	Support trading standards staff time or a campaign regarding domestic wood burning.
33 - Develop and test the use of a local air quality impact assessment tool as part of health impact assessments.	£30,000	Develop local evidence based tool so that robust and practical air quality assessments can be made as part of Health Impact Assessments.
36 - Create an air quality communication plan, linking it with the work of the district and city councils and other air quality partners.	£5,000	Support communications campaign and associated materials.
41 - Secure funding to allow the continuation of existing air quality monitoring projects.	£60,000	Allow continuation of current project funded monitoring work conducted by the Innovation Hub to improve local understanding of air quality.
45 - Work with air quality partners to carry out population exposure modelling and develop local population exposure targets for PM2.5 and NOx.	£100,000	Modelling needed to improve understanding of air quality, inform development of local targets and the work required to reach target milestones.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner (Environment & Place),
rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Finance)

Legal Implications

31. The OCC Air Quality Strategy is not a statutory document and there are no legal requirements to produce or consult upon it. However, production of the strategy will help the county council to fulfil its legal responsibility to actively support district and city council air quality work, as required under the Environment Act 1995 and the Environment Act 2021.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment Team),
Jennifer.Crouch@Oxfordshire.gov.uk (Legal)

Staff Implications

32. Development of the OCC Air Quality Strategy has been undertaken by officer resource in the Infrastructure Strategy and Policy Team and the Healthy Place

Shaping team, with input from officers across the Environment and Place and Public Health directorates.

33. Once approved, delivery of the OCC Air Quality Strategy and action plan will be undertaken by officers from across the Environment and Place and Public Health directorates. Delivery of individual actions will primarily be covered by existing work or resources. However, as highlighted previously, additional officer resource (1 FTE for 1 year) will be required to deliver the strategy's full ambition and some actions will require further resource or reprioritisation of time.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

34. To ensure that we have assessed equalities implications in a fair and thorough manner an Equalities Impact Assessment was conducted (annex 4). This has ensured that any equality matters have been identified and acted upon during development of the OCC Air Quality Strategy.

Sustainability Implications

35. A Climate Impact Assessment has been undertaken (annex 5) to ensure that matters with climate implications are identified and where required acted upon during development of the OCC Air Quality Strategy.
36. The OCC Air Quality Strategy will help to build on and be supported by the county council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and Climate Action Framework. Air quality and climate action are closely linked due to the relationship between fossil fuels and air pollution. Similarly, transport is a key driver of air pollution and so delivery of the LTCP will be key to improving air quality.

Risk Management

37. A risk register has been kept during development of the OCC Air Quality Strategy. Key risks associated with the strategy moving forward have been summarised below.

38. *Risk:* The actions in the strategy are not implemented

Mitigation: The OCC Air Quality Strategy has been developed with input from a range of council teams, partners and external stakeholders. We will continue to work with these partners and stakeholders to ensure the strategy is implemented. Many of the actions are also related to ongoing council work and will be delivered through these existing programmes. Annual review by the Health Protection Forum will help to ensure the strategy is being implemented and identify areas where further work is required.

39. *Risk:* The strategy does not deliver its intended outcomes.

Annex 4: Equalities Impact Assessment
Annex 5: Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: John Disley, Head of Transport Policy, 07767 006742
Rosie Rowe, Head of Healthy Place Shaping, 01865
816413

May 2023