

Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
8 September 2021	
Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director of Place	Classification: Unrestricted
Service Action Plan: Improving Air Quality in Tower Hamlets	

Lead Member	Cllr Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment
Originating Officer(s)	Dan Jones, Divisional Director of Public Realm David Tolley, Head of EHTS
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Significant impact on wards
Forward Plan Notice Published	14 July 2021
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in

Executive Summary

This report submits the Service Action Plan response to the Environment scrutiny challenge session report and recommendations on “examining the Council’s Air Quality Commitments and impacts on residents’ health outcomes”.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Consider the report of the Environment scrutiny challenge on “examining the Council’s Air Quality Commitments and impacts on residents’ health outcomes” and agree the service action plan in response to the report recommendations.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council’s constitution requires the Executive to respond to the recommendations from the OSC.
- 1.2 The attached report is the Executive’s response to the scrutiny recommendations arising from the Environment scrutiny challenge session’s “examination the Council’s Air Quality Commitments and impacts on

residents' health outcomes".

- 1.3 Improving air quality within the Borough remains one of the key priorities for the council.
- 1.4 As part of the 2020/21 Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC) work programme, the committee held an Environment Scrutiny Challenge Session on 30 March 2021, focussing on: "examining the Council's Air Quality Commitments and impacts on residents' health outcomes".
- 1.5 The committee noted that air pollution is one of the top concerns raised by residents in the Annual Residents Survey.
- 1.6 40 per cent of residents in Tower Hamlets live in areas that breach EU and government air pollution guidance.¹
- 1.7 Tower Hamlets children living in some of our most polluted areas may have 5 to 10 per cent less lung capacity they may never get that back due to being exposed to high levels of air pollution.²
- 1.8 Tower Hamlets is London's third highest emitter of CO₂.³
- 1.9 77 per cent of our residents are exposed to unsafe pollution levels; and long term exposure to air pollution reduces life expectancy mainly due to cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses; with studies also suggesting links with dementia, low birth weight and diabetes. Short-term exposure can also cause a range of effects including exacerbation of asthma, effects on lung function, and increases in respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions.⁴
- 1.10 The implementation of the service action plan will look to target and address the issues identified in the scrutiny challenge session.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To take no action. This is not recommended as the Environment scrutiny challenge session provides an evidence base to demonstrate that the council has drawn on and has applied best practice to the activities that have been undertaken to improve air quality in the Borough.

¹ London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory 2013 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-atmospheric-emissions-inventory-2013>

² Research by Kings College London University investigated the link between traffic derived air pollutants and lung function in 8–9 year old children living in London's Low Emission Zone in east London.

³ [Climate Emergency Declaration: Tower Hamlets Net Zero Carbon Plan](#)

⁴ [Tower Hamlets Transport Strategy](#)

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Air pollution has long been an issue for the borough with poor air quality formally recognised in Tower Hamlets in 2003, when the whole borough was declared an Air Quality Management Area due to not meeting national objectives. The 2017 Air Quality Action Plan demonstrates the borough still has poor air quality. It is one of the top concerns raised by residents in the Annual Residents Survey.
- 3.2 The scope of the scrutiny challenge session was:
- To examine air pollution issues in the borough, and the Council's progress towards its air quality commitments including the Anti-idling Policy, Open Space Strategy, Air Quality Action Plan, Net Zero Carbon Plan (commitments relating to air quality), Transport Strategy, Parking Policy, and the Liveable Streets Programme).
 - To assess if there are any outstanding issues that haven't been addressed.
 - To assess the impact on health implications for residents such as asthma and other health conditions linked to air pollution.
 - To assess the Council's long-term plans for air quality improvement, including funding/budget proposals.
- 3.3 Desired outcome for the challenge session was to establish the extent to which the Council has been effective in meeting its plans to improve air quality and corresponding health outcomes of residents in the borough.
- 3.4 Following the challenge session on 30 March 2021, the service has developed action plan based on the recommendation which came out of the session.
- 3.5 The committee heard evidence from external experts and officers from within Public Realm, Corporate Communications and Strategy and the Performance Team.
- 3.6 The challenge session report outlines out scope and methodology used for the session. The report also presents key findings from the evidence gathered from the challenge session.
- 3.7 The report acknowledged that along with preparing the Air Quality Action Plan, the council has developed policies and strategies aimed at improving air quality in the borough - these include the Anti-idling , Transport Strategy, Liveable Streets Programme, Open Space Strategy, Parking Policy, and Net Zero Carbon Plan.
- 3.8 The report makes a number of recommendations for the council and its partners to consider and put into action to improve the air quality in the Borough.

- 3.9 The recommendations are grouped under four key themes which can found in the full challenge session report attached at Appendix 2.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The recommendations within the report and proposals in the service action plan will make positive impact on the environment of the Borough, which will be beneficial for all regardless of their background.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Tower Hamlets Air Quality Action Plan (2017-2022) sets out actions the council is taking to improve air quality in the borough. This is a statutory document, which is required to be reviewed and updated every 5 years. The action plan is published as part of our duty to London Local Air Quality Management. Delivery of the actions are monitored by the Air Quality and Net Zero Strategic officer group.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report has sought the cabinet to consider the report of the Environment scrutiny challenge on “examining the Council’s Air Quality Commitments and impacts on residents’ health outcomes” and agree the service action plan in response to the report recommendations.
- 6.2 Improving air quality within the Borough remains one of the key priorities for the council and action plan is needed considering the fact that Tower Hamlets is London’s third highest emitter of CO2.
- 6.3 Any financial implications arising from the implementation of any actions from the Action Plan will need to be contained within approved budgets..

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Part B, Section 19 of the Council’s Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants. This includes making recommendations to the authority or executive following from scrutiny challenge sessions.
- 7.2 Section 82 of the Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review air quality in their area and assess whether air quality standards specified in the National Air Quality Standards are being achieved. As Tower Hamlets has been designated an air quality management area , Section 84 of the Act imposes a duty to develop an Action Plan seeking to achieve the relevant air quality standards in the air quality management area. The recommendations in the report sets out how the service action plan will address the issues identified in the scrutiny challenge session.

7.3 When considering its approach to improving air quality, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. A proportionate level of equality analysis is required to discharge the duty and information relevant to this is contained in the One Tower Hamlets section of the report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Service Action Plan: Improving Air Quality in Tower Hamlets
- Appendix 2: Air Quality Challenge Session Report

Officer contact details for documents:

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