

Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny

Challenge Session

Examining the Council's Air Quality Commitments and impacts on residents' health outcomes

16/04/2021

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Chair's Foreword

Air quality is vital to the health of Tower Hamlets' residents and the communities. Air pollution has been linked to short term health effects such as exacerbation of asthma, cough, wheezing and shortness of breath, as well as long term health effects such as lung cancer, respiratory conditions, stroke, and cardiovascular diseases. Ultimately these lead to increased respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality, and reduced life expectancy of our residents.

The Coroner's ruling about pollution being a factor in the tragic death of young Ella Kissi-Debrah of Lewisham in December 2020 surely must not be forgotten.

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.

My role, as Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety, is to shine a light onto issues, query and examine, and make recommendations that will add value to the council's work. I am pleased to present this report that summarises the findings of the challenge session examining the council's air quality commitments and impacts on residents' health outcomes. The report makes several recommendations for the council to consider undertaking.

I'd like to thank following people who contributed to this challenge session:

- Councillor Asma Islam, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm, and team of council officers who provided an overview of the council's commitments and approach to air quality in the borough and responded to scrutiny questions
- Natalie Curd from Idling Action London who provided a regional perspective on the performance of the borough
- James Wheale from Sustrans Tower Hamlets who provided an account of the voluntary sector perspective, particularly on clean routes to schools, the need for more engagement with residents via the voluntary sector's networks, and the need for more behaviour change programmes to encourage substantial, long-term changes to our air quality
- My scrutiny colleagues who supported the discussion and helped to form some of the recommendations being put forward

Councillor Faroque Ahmed

Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety



Summary of Recommendations

Causes of air pollution and correlating health impacts

Recommendation 1	The council to set up more air quality monitoring stations in key areas including around construction sites, such as by prioritising funding of air quality monitoring in future capital programmes so that it is proactive in collecting long-term accurate live air quality data from all parts of the borough not just certain sites; and to make monitoring data more accessible so residents are better informed to make decisions and promote behavioural change.
Recommendation 2	The council to develop a partnership plan with TfL to take a more proactive approach to manage and reduce TfL traffic on the TfL roads in the borough, as these to have been identified to be high drivers of road-based pollution in Tower Hamlets.

Council's commitments to improving air quality and their effectiveness

Recommendation 3	The council to develop evaluation methods of the Air Quality Action Plan to ensure the initiative's goals and objectives are being achieved, as well as identify any components of the initiative that are not effective.
Recommendation 4	The council to include air quality priorities into the remit of the Climate Emergency Partnership Board to ensure that it is included as an important part of partnership discussion.
Recommendation 5	The council to identify existing air quality measures in the current capital programme and prioritise them for delivery, such as EV charging points.

Targeted responses: open spaces/green spaces

Recommendation 6	The council to develop plan to install green walls and green spaces in schools that currently have none, to purify the air our children breathe and protect them from the surrounding air pollution.
Recommendation 7	The council to develop plan to covert unused open spaces in the borough to green spaces to make these spaces greener and thus further reduce residents' exposure to air pollutants.

Targeted responses: road-based emissions

Recommendation 8	The council to promptly display anti-idling signs all over Tower Hamlets to discourage idling which will ultimately reduce emissions and also help drivers save fuel.
Recommendation 9	The council to investigate a new approach for stricter enforcement of anti-idling FPNs to better tackle idling and make this strategy more fit for purpose.

Introduction

- 1.1 Air quality is an important public health issue – in London, 9,400 premature deaths are attributed to poor air quality and a cost of between £1.4 and £3.7 billion a year to the health service¹.
- 1.2 Air pollution contributes to shortening the life expectancy of Tower Hamlets residents, disproportionately impacting on the most vulnerable in our society, such as the poor, the old, the very young, and those with respiratory illnesses. Exposure to air pollution has also been linked to lung cancer, asthma, other respiratory conditions, Alzheimer's, stroke, cardiovascular diseases, and a number of other illnesses. Unsurprisingly, air pollution ranks as one of the top personal concerns of residents in the council's Annual Residents Survey².
- 1.3 Seventy-seven per cent of Tower Hamlets residents live in areas that breach EU and Government air pollution guidance³, as a result, the lung development of children in Tower Hamlets is affected, causing them to have up to five per cent less lung capacity than the national average⁴. This capacity never grows back once it is lost.
- 1.4 The Environment Act 1995 required a national air quality strategy to be produced, and set national air quality standards and objectives for the first time. It also placed a statutory duty on local authorities to carry out a review and assessment of current levels of local air pollution, and to predict whether the national objectives would be met. Where non-compliance is likely, the local authority must declare an Air Quality Management Area, and produce an Action Plan detailing how it proposes to work towards meeting the objectives.
- 1.5 Tower Hamlets council completed its first review and assessment in January 2000 and determined that national air quality objectives would not be met. As a result, the entire borough was declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2003, and the council was under statutory obligation to produce an Air Quality Action Plan. This is still the case today, with the last Air Quality Action Plan prepared in 2017⁵.
- 1.6 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 Policy, Transport Strategy, Liveable Streets Programme, Open Space Strategy, Parking Policy, and Net Zero Carbon Plan.

¹<https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/33224#:~:text=In%20London%20alone%2C%20air%20pollution,of%20pollutants%20into%20acid%20rain.>

² https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/2019_ARS_Briefing_Paper.pdf

³ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-atmospheric-emissions-inventory--laei--2016>

⁴ Research conducted through a major study (the EXHALE - Exploration of Health and Lungs in the Environment - project by King's College London) found that the lung capacity of 8 and 9-year-old children in Tower Hamlets is 5% lower than the national average

⁵ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Planning-and-building-control/Strategic-Planning/Local-Plan/Submission_2018/Air_Quality_Action_Plan_2017.pdf

Methodology

- 2.1 The reasons for the scrutiny challenge session included:
- 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
- 2.2 A more detailed scope for the challenge session can be found at Appendix 1.
- 2.3 In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the challenge session was held virtually via Microsoft Teams in order to comply with the government's requirements for social distancing.
- 2.4 The session, chaired by Councillor Faroque Ahmed, Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety, took place on Tuesday 30 March 2021 from 6pm to 8pm. The session followed a structure that included:
- Chair's overview, including focus of the session and intended outcome
 - Presentation from the service led by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm, and supported by the Divisional Director of Public Realm
 - Presentation from Public Health led by the Associate Director of Public Health
 - Committee discussion and lines of enquiry
 - Voluntary Sector user feedback, and input from Idling Action London Campaign
 - Scrutiny Committee discussion and recommendations
 - Chair's closing comments and next steps
- 2.5 Members in attendance:
- Councillor Faroque Ahmed - Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety (Session Chair)
 - Councillor James King - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair
 - Councillor Bex White - Scrutiny Lead and Chair for Children and Education Sub-Committee
 - Councillor Gabriela Salva-Macallan - Scrutiny Lead and Chair for Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee
 - Councillor Leema Qureshi - Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources
 - Councillor Ehtasham Haque - Scrutiny Lead and Chair for Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee
 - Councillor Andrew Wood - OSC Member
 - Councillor Denise Jones - OSC Member
 - Halima Islam - OSC Member (co-optee)
 - James Wilson - OSC Member (co-optee)
 - Councillor Shad Chowdhury - non-executive councillor
 - Councillor Victoria Obaze - non-executive councillor
 - Councillor Val Whitehead - non-executive councillor

Evidence received from officers, experts, and users:

- Councillor Asma Islam - Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm
- Dan Jones - Divisional Director Public Realm, LBTH
- Katy Scammell - Associate Director Public Health, LBTH
- Natalie Curd - Idling Action London Project Lead
- James Wheale - Sustrans Tower Hamlets Project Officer (Voluntary Sector)
- David Tolley - Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards, LBTH
- Muhammad Islam - Pollution Team Leader, LBTH
- Jack Ettinger - Strategic Transport Team, LBTH

The challenge session was supported by LBTH officers:

- Onyekachi Ajisafe - Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate
- Adam Boey - Senior Strategy and Policy Manager, Corporate

Findings and Recommendations

Causes of air pollution and correlating health impacts

- 3.1. The primary pollutants of concern for Tower Hamlets are particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Scrutiny members in the challenge session heard that Tower Hamlets continues to show high levels of NO₂ (Blackwell exceeded National Air Quality Objective standards and WHO guideline values) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} exceeded WHO guideline values at all sites).
- 3.2. Pollution mapping across the borough showed consistently high levels of these pollutants along arterial roads (A11, A12, A13, and the Highway and Cambridge Heath Road/Mare Street)
- 3.3. Scrutiny members heard that the main causes of elevated air pollution is road transport.
- 3.4. However, our detailed information on pollution levels across the borough is limited and patchy. Upon reviewing the air monitoring stations set up in the borough, Members raised queries as to the insufficient amount of air monitoring stations in the borough - there is a big gap in the west of the borough where we seem to have the worst air quality, yet there are no live monitoring stations set up there.
- 3.5. The service confirmed that there were only a few monitoring stations in the borough and they have plans to only set up one more next year on the Highway. Council officers agreed that more monitoring stations are needed to get a more accurate picture of air pollution levels in the borough.
- 3.6. Scrutiny members were told that air pollution has been on a downward trend with the exception of PM_{2.5}. However, Scrutiny members raised issues with the air quality data presented by the council being outdated. Without accurate up-to date data, we cannot understand the full picture – where there are impacts, and their severity. This limits our informed and targeted response, with decisions not made on full information.
- 3.7. Having looked at the website and downloaded the air quality data, Scrutiny members highlighted that the council needs to share data collected from its air quality monitoring stations in even more accessible ways than that on its website, so there is more clarity as to what the latest information means to the public, and increase awareness and understanding about the situation in Tower Hamlets. Council officers conceded that other information could be used besides the GLA data that are updated every five years, and further thought needs to be put into how they are sharing and presenting the data, which they plan to look into.

Recommendation 1

The council to set up more air quality monitoring stations in key areas including around construction sites, such as by prioritising funding of air quality monitoring in future capital programmes so that it is proactive in collecting long-term accurate live air quality data from all parts of the borough not just certain sites; and to make monitoring data more accessible so residents are better informed to make decisions and promote behavioural change.

- 3.8. Council officers highlighted that that the poor air quality from NO₂ results from road traffic and roads over which the Council has no direct control. Lobbying with TfL continues - to work with

them to switch people away from driving and onto other transport methods such as train, walking and cycling. The Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) expanding to Tower Hamlets on 31 October 2021 is forecast to help reduce this.

- 3.9. Scrutiny members enquired as to what standing communications the council has with TfL to engage with them on mitigating/monitoring the road-based pollution, as TfL roads such as for example the A13 seem to be main drivers of road-based pollution. Council officers commented that further information on this will be followed up on after the meeting.
- 3.10. Scrutiny members raised questions regarding what to expect as a result of the ULEZ extending to Tower Hamlets, as well as what would happen to residents with old cars not compliant with ULEZ. Council officers commented that there is a forecast reduction of a third of pollution based on TfL's modelling of the impact of ULEZ, they further added that if residents with vehicles that don't meet ULEZ requirements drive into the ULEZ zones they will have to pay a daily charge as is presently the case with the Central London ULEZ.

Recommendation 2

The council to develop a partnership plan with TfL to take a more proactive approach to manage and reduce TfL traffic on the TfL roads in the borough, as these to have been identified to be high drivers of road-based pollution in Tower Hamlets.

- 3.11. Scrutiny members heard from Public health about health implications of air pollution:
- short-term effects – exacerbation of asthma, coughing, wheezing and breathing difficulties; and
 - long-term effects – stroke; lung cancer; respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease.
- 3.12. Members were also told that no-one is safe but there are certain groups more at risk such as pregnant women (and their unborn children), children, adults with existing conditions, the elderly.
- 3.13. Public Health also revealed that health outcomes haven't changed (improved or declined) over the last five years, but such results are difficult to interpret regarding effectiveness of improvement efforts. We do not have enough detailed data to understand the complications. However, the Air Quality Action Plan needs to continue and we need to be ambitious about our efforts in order to improve. There are gaps: we should use community champions to enhance community mobilisation on air quality issues; we need to encourage and promote behaviour change.

Council's commitments to improving air quality and their effectiveness

- 3.14. Scrutiny members heard that the council has its Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) that it has to produce as a statutory requirement, it's a five-year plan which they report progress on an annual basis to the GLA. The council is due to review the AQAP in 2022, so work is currently underway to assess how successful it's been with actions and determine what actions may need to be included in the next iteration of the AQAP. There is a working group set up within the council that comprises of officers across the council's services including Public Health, to meet the actions of the AQAP.
- 3.15. Scrutiny members felt that in terms of monitoring the AQAP projects, evaluation methods need to be put in place to ensure the objectives of the Plan are being successfully achieved.
- 3.16. Members also raised that the Council is in the final year of its current AQAP, and of the 76 actions within the Plan, there are 22 without updates. And of the actions in the Plan that do have updates there are some with concerning issues regarding progress on the actions.

Recommendation 3

The council to develop evaluation methods of the Air Quality Action Plan to ensure the initiative's goals and objectives are being achieved, as well as identify any components of the initiative that are not effective.

- 3.17. The Scrutiny Members were concerned that the Air Quality Board was subsumed into the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB). When Members queried the Public Health Team (who sit on the HWB) as to how often Air Quality is brought up in the HWB's agenda, it was identified that in the two years the Associate Director of Public Health had been in the council air quality had not yet been discussed in the HWB. In the first year, it hadn't been put on the agenda as the board has a massive agenda and only meets quarterly, and in the second year the focus had been on COVID-19.
- 3.18. Scrutiny members followed up with enquiring if there were any future plans to provide a separate partnership board where people will practice strategies to improve air quality, and they can come together with the council. Scrutiny members understands that officers within the council meet on air quality, which is good, but the intention is about extending that partnership opportunity. Council officers commented that they are looking into setting up a Climate Emergency Partnership Board and it may be that air quality can be discussed as a section of this Board, which is something they are willing to look into seeing as CO₂ emissions which is within the climate emergency remit, does have an impact on air quality as well.
- 3.19. Members queried that air quality certainly needs a board that it can be brought to for partnership work. Scrutiny members were of the opinion that it was a mistake for the Air Quality Board to have been subsumed into the HWB, especially as evidence heard in the meeting indicates that a lot of the air quality actions live within the Place Directorate.
- 3.20. Scrutiny members heard from the Idling Action London Campaign that one of the things that most councils will have to reflect on is the case of the Ella Kissi-Debrah inquest, and the findings that are coming out of that. One of these findings is on local authorities' partnership working together with other local authorities, the polluters, and other organisations. So, the Idling Action Project really encourages that partnership working.

- 3.21. Scrutiny members also heard from Sustrans that the council further working with voluntary organisations like themselves would be encouraged, especially in relation to behaviour change. Since they have a local understanding of the different cultural and social values, and therefore the barriers to change. Partnership working with organisations such as themselves during the design and engagement stages of air quality programmes, such as for example the Liveable Streets Programme would utilise their expertise and networks with schools and communities and would ensure that councils provide meaningful engagement in the planning and consultation stages of such big developments. As this is really when behaviour change programmes start to work, when collaborative design helps the planning, as well as the implementation and accessibility of the infrastructure to ensure we achieve the changes we need to make.

Recommendation 4

The council to include air quality priorities into the remit of the Climate Emergency Partnership Board to ensure that it is included as an important part of partnership discussion.

- 3.22. Scrutiny members heard that as part of the council's ambition to move towards the World Health Organisation recommended level for PM_{2.5}, which is 10 micrograms particles per cubic metre by 2030, more work needs to be done to reduce the amount of pollution that's caused from road traffic. The borough's current PM_{2.5} level is currently higher than the UK average, so they hope to move people away from the usage of cars with combustion engines towards electronic vehicles (EV) as it would be interesting to monitor the effect that will have on the borough's PM levels.
- 3.23. Scrutiny members were concerned that funding has been available for electronic vehicle (EV) charging points, but there has still been a lag in delivery which is difficult to explain to residents. The Cabinet Member commented that the Council plans to install 300 EV charging points by 2022, however, of this target, they currently have installed about 159 EV charging points.

Recommendation 5

The council to identify existing air quality measures in the current capital programme and prioritise them for delivery, such as EV charging points.

- 3.24. Scrutiny members questioned what the Mayor of London's £200,000 Air Quality Fund had been spent on. Committee Members were also concerned about long-term data measuring of air quality, especially around schools. They highlighted that £5 million funding has been announced to local authorities to deliver projects to improve air quality and queried if this funding can be used to update and increase the capturing of this air quality long-term data.
- 3.25. The council officers commentated that in terms of monitoring of the Liveable Streets Programme and other similar schemes, the council are doing traffic counts that will help indicate whether traffic has moved. However, council officers conceded that the council needs to do more monitoring of air quality, they plan to put install one more monitoring station, as they are quite costly. The cost is approximately £50,000 per monitoring station, so funding permitted they are currently only committing to putting up just one monitoring station, with the hopes to put up more in the future.

Targeted responses: open spaces/green spaces

- 3.26. The Cabinet member acknowledged that parks, open spaces and trees help address the air pollution issues in the borough. Council officers added that the council monitors and reviews the loss and gain of open space areas annually which is published in the Local Plan's annual monitoring report. However, Scrutiny members were concerned that there were schools in the borough that had no open spaces within their premises at all.
- 3.27. Scrutiny members noted that green screens are in essence living screens which when installed in schools puts a barrier between the pollution and the school, as the leaves capture the pollutants. Scrutiny members enquired as to what efforts the Council has made to increase the number of green walls installed in schools to further protect children from the surrounding air pollution, and purify the air they breathe in. Council officers commented that there are green screens installed in 4 primary schools in Tower Hamlets.
- 3.28. Scrutiny members queried that there were a lot of schools along the TfL roads with high pollution, and enquired as to the location of the 4 primary schools where these green screens have been installed, how effective they are, and if there are plans to roll these out further if they are effective. Council officers commented that research undergone by King's College on a school in Enfield found that from the roadside to the school playground, there was approximately 18 micrograms reduction in NO₂, which is a significant reduction, so the green screens can be quite effective when used correctly.
- 3.29. Members further queried why more green screens had not been installed around more schools in the borough, especially those with no playgrounds.
- 3.30. Scrutiny members were also concerned about the increased use of wood burners in private homes and canal boats which create air quality issues, and highlighted that the council has no policy yet on this emerging issue. Council officers commented that residents should not be using unauthorised fuels and burners based on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) legislation, and these are banned in the mock control zones. They added that the council doesn't get many complaints from residents regarding domestic wood burners. However, the Council does get more complaints about canal boats, and are trying to engage with boat owners via an awareness raising campaign which started in February, to educate boat owners on what they should be doing to reduce the burning. The Cabinet Member added that this has been raised to the Mayor's attention as well , and a meeting has been scheduled with Canal and River Trust to promote partnership working with them, with the aim to adjust their terms and conditions to ensure change, and discuss how the council can support those using wood burners to make that switch

Recommendation 6

The council to develop plan to install green walls and green spaces in schools that currently have none, to purify the air our children breathe and protect them from the surrounding air pollution. [NB. Action 54 in AQAP 2017]

- 3.31. The Chair commented that there are also a number of unused open spaces in the borough, which should be dealt with and made better use of by converting them into green spaces as soon as possible, as these will further help reduce residents health impacts from air pollution.

- 3.32. Scrutiny members also raised that there is an ongoing erosion of open spaces, and it is unclear what provision is being made regarding this, and whether as part of the Open Space Strategy there will be some form of re-provision of these in some of the ongoing construction in the borough, and how this is being monitored. Scrutiny members believe that replacements of these eroding open spaces need to be delivered, and they need to meet the kind of biodiversity level that's needed as a replacement.

Recommendation 7

The council to develop plan to convert unused open spaces in the borough to green spaces to make these spaces greener and thus further reduce residents' exposure to air pollutants.

Targeted responses: road-based emissions

- 3.33. Scrutiny Members raised the issue that more behavioural change work also needs to be done to change residents' mindsets and behaviours towards using vehicles and idling. The Cabinet Member conceded that there has been a lot of requests from residents regarding further action against idling, and for example in the Whitechapel area they have put up anti-idling signs around the East London Mosque and around 2 schools. She acknowledged that more signs need to be put up in idling spots around the borough and they are taking it seriously and working towards it as part of behaviour change.
- 3.34. Further in relation to idling, a co-optee member enquired if the work the council is doing is being fed through to companies like Uber, because in residential areas such as hers, Uber drivers consistently park outside residents' properties, while keeping their engines running, and many residents are placed in an uncomfortable position and mostly don't have the confidence to step out of their houses to tell the Uber drivers to switch off their engines, and this is happening quite a lot in certain areas of the borough. Council officers commented that they have approached corporate organisations to take control over what their drivers are doing.
- 3.35. Scrutiny members heard that anti-idling signs had been erected in some hotspots such as primary schools, however, the council is continuously trying to identify more hotspots, as they are aware that can further help reduce idling in the borough.
- 3.36. Scrutiny members felt that the increasing size of vehicles in the borough and their accompanying larger engines is demoralising in the fight against air pollution. Scrutiny Members believe that ideas on tackling this need to be considered by the council. Council officers commented that they have recognised the increase in size of vehicles and their pollution in terms of the changes they have made in their pricing charging in the Parking Policy. So that it levies a higher charge on those higher polluting vehicles and larger vehicles. They added that the council will continue to monitor whether this strategy has an impact or not on the size of vehicles we have in the borough, as it has done with some of the permits in the borough.
- 3.37. Scrutiny members were concerned about last mile deliveries and the recent increased use of delivery services and takeaway, they highlighted that this trend is likely to continue post-COVID-19. The Members questioned as to what plans the council have for last mile deliveries to de-incentivise the use of motor vehicles for these deliveries where it's not necessary. Council officers stated that there seems to be a certain amount of change that's happening

organically, there are more bicycle delivery companies operating in London, and it is anticipated that this will continue to grow based on what the council is doing. The council has a project called Blend Business Low Emission Network, which is part funded by the GLA. And as part of that programme, the council is looking to set up an e-cargo bike delivery service from crisp street market, which involves residents purchasing goods from crisp street market and then leaving their items with this delivery service for delivery to their homes. The Cabinet Lead also added that based on learning from the Climate Emergency partnership workshop on 17 March 2021, the council wants to look into encouraging resident behaviour change post-COVID-19 to educate residents in the same household to jointly purchase items together rather than separately, as this is more eco-friendly, and to also support businesses to deliver these goods to residents in an electric vehicle or any other means that is more environmentally friendly.

- 3.38. Scrutiny members had issues with the council's previous car scrappage schemes, as it only offers scrappage of old cars in exchange for new cars which will still cause pollution. The Scrutiny Members felt that a new innovative scheme similar to the new Coventry Council Scheme where residents are given mobility credits for scrapping their cars, needs to be developed by the council. As this scheme offers scrappage in exchange for money towards public transport, hire bikes, and similar less-polluting options.

Recommendation 8

The council to promptly display anti-idling signs all over Tower Hamlets to discourage idling which will ultimately reduce emissions and also help drivers save fuel.

- 3.39. Scrutiny members noted that the council had claimed powers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for idling. However, when Scrutiny members raised questions over the future plans of the anti-idling programme, how effective this current system of enforcement has been on vehicle idling, and how many FPNs had been issued so far, council officers identified that no FPNs had been issued because the process involves enforcement officers in the first instance issuing a warning to drivers to turn the vehicle off when caught idling. Officers added that the council's focus is on educating drivers on the negative impact of idling and there is still a need for strong education to achieve behaviour change. The Cabinet Member also commented that the issue of continuous vehicle idling has also been brought to her attention by a number of residents and councillors, and that the team has put forward some ideas to further tackle idling and are more than happy to take some more ideas on board.
- 3.40. Scrutiny members acknowledged that during lockdown the anti-idling efforts had to be put on hold because of difficulties we all had to face. However, when things go back to normal there needs to be a more effective plan in place, because it is a serious issue in the borough, drivers are grossly idling every day. Scrutiny members felt that special measure needs to be taken to tackle this issue that isn't reducing, they reiterated that changes to the penalty system needs to be considered to make efforts more effective.
- 3.41. The Idling Action London project lead agreed that the current system of enforcement is a very ineffective tool, as it is very hard to enforce effectively because the legislation around enforcement is quite unworkable. The legislation is very old and vague, which means there is no clear guidelines for local authorities to follow. In terms of the possibility of enforcement fines being revised or improved, the City of London Corporation have submitted a bill to the House of Lords, which is due for its second reading, and as part of that bill increasing the fine for

fixed penalty notices, up to 80 pounds is included. So, if that bill goes through, it means that local authorities will then have that at their disposal.

Recommendation 9

The council to investigate a new approach for stricter enforcement of anti-idling FPNs to better tackle idling and make this strategy more fit for purpose.

Appendix 1. Challenge Session Scope

Environment Scrutiny Challenge Session Scope:

Examining the Council’s Air Quality commitments and impact on residents’ health outcomes

Title	Examining the Council’s Air Quality commitments and impact on residents’ health outcomes
Reason for enquiry	<p>Air Pollution is one of the top concerns raised by residents in the Annual Residents Survey. Some key facts about air pollution highlighted by the council state:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 77 per cent of residents in Tower Hamlets live in areas that breach EU and government air pollution guidance. • Our children’s lungs are up to 5 per cent smaller because of air pollution. • We are London’s third highest emitter of CO2. • 77 per cent of our residents are exposed to unsafe pollution levels. • Air pollution is linked to asthma, heart disease, dementia, lung cancer and low birth weight. <p>The reasons for this scrutiny challenge session are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine air pollution issues in the borough, and the Council’s progress towards it’s 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.
Core Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main causes of air pollution in the borough, and what are the correlating health implications for residents? 2. Are there any specific resident groups that are especially impacted by air pollution in the borough? 3. What commitments have the Council made towards improving air quality in the borough (such as in relation to 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)? And what progress has been made towards these? 4. To what extent do these air quality plans and commitments address the air quality issues in the borough? 5. Are there any issues/ gaps that haven’t fully been addressed? 6. What efforts/plans has the Council made towards increasing the number of Green Walls and Roofs in the borough, especially in schools?

	<p>7. How effective has the Council's air quality plans been on improving health outcomes of residents, especially children and young people?</p> <p>8. What are the Council's air quality plans for the future and what are the funding/budget implications for this?</p>
Proposed completion date	30th March 2021 from 6pm-8pm
Desired outcome	Establish the extent to which air quality issues have been addressed by the Council, and identify any issues/gaps not fully met.
What will not be included	There will be no focus on other areas relating to climate change besides air quality, specific to Tower Hamlets.
Risks (mitigation)	The session is dominated by untested opinions. It needs to be informed by robust evidence
Equality & Diversity considerations	Specific to demographics of Tower Hamlets. Air quality plans need to take into consideration the impacts on the different protected characteristics.
Key stakeholders/ consultees	Cllr Faroque Ahmed (Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety), Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members, Ward Councillors.
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Asma Islam (Cabinet Lead for Environment and Public Realm)
Potential witnesses	Dan Jones (DD for Public Realm), Keiko Okawa, Katy Scammell (Public Health Consultant), Natalie Curd (Idling Action London), Tower Hamlets Project Officer (Sustrans)
Research/Evidence required	Desktop research, Internal (Council), and Annual Residents Survey
Timescales	<p>Agree Scope pre-meeting & planning session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 1: Scoping meeting with Scrutiny Lead for Environment 26 February 2021 • Session 2: Scoping meeting with Council officer 4 March 2021 • Session 3: Scoping meeting with Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Council officers 8 March 2021 • Session 4: Challenge Session (virtual) 30 March 2021 6pm-8pm • Report first draft – April 2021 (scrutiny lead and officers for comments) • Scrutiny report for OSC sign off 26 April 2021 • Council response (action plan) for scrutiny recommendations June 2020 / July 2021 • Council response (action plan report) for CLT, MAB and Cabinet August 2021.
Publicity	Council Channels and email to members, once report has been completed and signed off by OSC, methods to publicise will be explored.
Links to Strategic/ Mayoral Priorities	<p>Priority 2: A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in</p> <p>Outcome 1: People live in a borough that is clean and green.</p>

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