

Cabinet 26 October 2022	
Report of Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director, Place	Classification: Unrestricted
Air Quality Action Plan 2022-2027	

Lead Member	Councillor Cllr Kabir Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change
Originating Officer(s)	David Tolley, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	To be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards.
Forward Plan Notice Published	16 June 2022
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority 2- A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in/People live in a borough that is clean and green.

Executive Summary

Outdoor air pollution is the largest environmental risk to the public's health in the UK¹, accounting for up to an estimated 36,000 premature deaths each year. The Council has a statutory duty to comply with the London Local Air Quality Management (LLAQM) Regime under the Environment Act 1995.

The whole of Tower Hamlets was designated an air quality management area (AQMA) in December 2000 for two pollutants of concern, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀). Where an AQMA is declared, the local authority is required to prepare an air quality action plan (AQAP) setting out remedial measures to address poor air quality and achieve the air quality standards and objectives. The AQAP is a statutory document.

Tower Hamlets' current AQAP was approved by Cabinet in October 2017. This is a 5-year plan that runs up to an including October 2022. Statutory guidance issued by

¹ [Improving outdoor air quality and health: review of interventions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/reviews/improving-outdoor-air-quality-and-health)

the GLA (London Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (LLAQM TG, 19)² requires AQAP is updated every 5 years “to reflect current policy and to improve their effectiveness”.

This report introduces the Councils revised and updated AQAP for 2022-2027 (Appendix 1) following a statutory consultation undertaken between 1 December 2021- 30 June 2022 as per the requirement of Schedule 11 of the Environment Act 1995.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Air Quality Action Plan 2022-2027 for publication.
2. Note the Equalities Impact Assessment / specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to designate an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) where National Air Quality Objectives are exceeded. Where an AQMA is designated, an Air Quality Action Plan must be produced identifying how National Air Quality Objectives will be met.
- 1.2 As the Council’s current AQAP expires in October 2022, there is a requirement to update it. The revised AQAP sets out the actions the Council will take over the next 5 years (2022-2027) to deliver air quality improvement in the borough in compliance with our legal duty. The AQAP has been produced to comply with relevant statutory guidance issued by the Mayor of London and follows the format of the London Local Air Quality Management (LLAQM) Borough Air Quality Action Matrix 2019 produced by the GLA. The matrix has 25 actions that GLA expect boroughs to deliver locally to as part of their LLAQM action planning obligations.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Alternative option considered is to do nothing, however, as the air quality levels are failing to meet the national air quality objectives and the Council has declared an AQMA, there is duty to produce an AQAP and update it every 5 years. Otherwise, the borough would be in breach of its legal duty and at risk of receiving a direction from the Mayor of London.

² https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/llaqm_technical_guidance_2019.pdf

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

Research on impact of poor air quality

- 3.1 Poor air quality has significant adverse impact on the public's health. Both short and long-term exposure to air pollution can lead to a wide range of harmful effects including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases e.g., asthma, lung cancer, low birth weight and diabetes. Children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions are particularly vulnerable³. The international Agency for Research on Cancer (agency of WHO) has classified particulate outdoor air pollution as carcinogenic to humans. A review of nearly 70 studies by the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) concluded that it is likely air pollution can contribute to decline in mental ability and dementia in older people⁴.
- 3.2 Studies, including one carried out in Tower Hamlets, show that children's health is being negatively affected living in highly polluted areas. Children in Tower Hamlets have reduced lung function⁵, which they may never recover. The impacts of air pollution on health have been made even more apparent with the recent Coroner's inquiry into the causes of the death of Ella Kissi-Debrah, in Lewisham, which for the first time included exposure to excessive air pollution as a cause of death. The Covid-19 pandemic has also shown the effects of the virus was worsened for sufferers who were also exposed to poor air.
- 3.3 People on low incomes or from ethnic minorities are also more affected by poor air quality, partly because they often live in the more polluted areas of London. NO₂ in these areas likely to be 16-27% higher and PM_{2.5} likely to be 5-10% higher than those areas where white residents were more likely to live⁶.
- 3.4 A recent study by Imperial College found that over 4,000 Londoners died prematurely due to the impact of toxic air. This includes deaths from all causes including respiratory, lung cancer and cardiovascular diseases. In Tower Hamlets, it is estimated that between 88 and 97 deaths in 2019 were attributable to human made NO₂ and PM_{2.5} air pollution exposure⁷.
- 3.5 A report to the GLA found that Tower Hamlets is one of 5 London Boroughs with the highest numbers of people living in London's worst air quality areas and with the highest proportion of most deprived populations (top 30%) in London's areas of worst air quality⁸.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938623/Review_of_interventions_to_improve_air_quality_March-2019-2018572.pdf

⁴ [Air pollution: cognitive decline and dementia - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647422/Air_pollution_cognitive_decline_and_dementia_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)

⁵ <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-2667%2818%2930202-0>

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https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/air_pollution_and_inequalities_in_london_2019_update_0.pdf

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http://erg.ic.ac.uk/research/home/resources/ERG_ImperialCollegeLondon_HIA_AQ_LDN_11012021.pdf

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https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/aether_updated_london_air_pollution_exposure_final_20-2-17.pdf

Main sources of air Pollution

- 3.6 There are many sources of air pollution. In London, over 40% of NO₂ is from road transport (mainly exhaust emissions) and is also the main source of exposure at roadside. Vehicle emissions also accounts for a third of PM_{2.5} emissions. Around 40% of PM_{2.5} also comes from construction, wood burning and commercial cooking. Similarly, for PM₁₀, Road transport accounts for a quarter of emissions in London⁹.
- 3.7 In Tower Hamlets, from the most recent data available, the 2019 London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory, shows 37% of NO_x (oxides of nitrogen) is due to road transport and 30% from industrial/commercial heat/power, for PM₁₀ (35% from construction & 22% from road transport) and PM_{2.5} (26% road transport & 24% industrial processes such as roadstone plants, dry cleaners). Industrial processes are managed under a permitting system.

Legal duty to tackle poor air quality and to work with the Mayor of London

- 3.8 Section 82 of the Environment Act 1995 places a duty on all local authorities to review the quality of air in their areas, to assess whether the standards and objectives set out in Air Quality (England) Regulations 2000¹⁰ (as amended) are likely to be met.
- 3.9 Section 83 of the Act requires local authorities to designate an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) where Air Quality Objectives are being exceeded or are predicted to exceed. Where an AQMA is designated, an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) must be produced setting out the measures that will be delivered to work towards meeting the Air Quality Objectives.
- 3.10 The borough was declared an AQMA in December 2000 covering the whole of Tower Hamlets due to high concentration of NO₂ and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀). Although the Council is now meeting the UK legal limits for PM₁₀, there is however exceedance of the World Health Organisation (WHO) health-based air quality guideline limit for this pollutant. Also, for PM_{2.5} the legal objective is far higher than the WHO recommended guideline limit. In the London Environment Strategy, the Mayor of London has committed to meeting the WHO health-based guideline limits across London by 2030. Modelling carried out for the Council by air quality consultant, Ricardo, shows that most of the borough experience exceedance of the WHO 2005 limit (>10ug/m³), and so a key area of focus will be to help the Mayor of London meet this 2030 target.
- 3.11 Section 84 of the Act requires local authorities to produce an action plan detailing remedial measures to improve air quality and to address the issues within the AQMA. Local authorities in England are also required to have regards to the Secretary of States (SoS) guidance when discharging their functions under this Act. London boroughs are required to work with the Mayor of London to discharge the duties under the Act. Statutory guidance issued by the SoS states *“Supervision of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) system in Greater London has been devolved to the Mayor of London, to whom powers to intervene and direct boroughs have been given under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. The Secretary of State expects London boroughs to participate in the Mayor’s London LAQM framework and have regard to*

⁹<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-atmospheric-emissions-inventory--laei--2019>

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2000/928/contents/made>

any advice or guidance issued by the Mayor of London as to the performance of their functions under local air quality management”¹¹.

3.12 This includes following statutory guidance issued by the Mayor of London under London Local Air Quality Management framework (Policy and Technical guidance 2019) and on a yearly basis submitting an annual status report (ASR) on the progress of delivery of our air quality action plan and monitoring data.

3.13 As part of working with the Mayor of London to tackle air pollution, we have successfully delivered several air quality improvement projects jointly with other local authorities using funding from the Mayor of London’s (MoL) air quality fund. These include:

i) the **London anti idling project**- This project worked across 32 boroughs in London to raise awareness of idling issues. The project also delivered workshops and driver engagement at primary schools in the borough. The ‘Engines Off Every Stop’ public awareness campaign carried out as part of the project targeted idling vehicles as an easily preventable source of roadside pollution <https://idlingaction.london/> Training was provided to Tower Hamlets fleet managers on the importance of unnecessary idling. This project is now complete.

ii) **Non Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM)**-LB Merton carry out monitoring and compliance checks on non-road mobile machineries (contributor to PM_{2.5}) to ensure that only approved and lower-pollution machinery are used to support the Mayor’s Non-Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM) Low Emission Zone

iii) **Zero emissions network (ZEN)**- A joint project with LB Hackney and Islington to encourage local businesses to switch to sustainable mode of transport for delivery by giving a small workplace grant from the MoL air quality fund. This project is now complete

3.14 Tower Hamlets’ current AQAP was approved by Cabinet in October 2017 and runs for 5 years until October 2022. The Environment Act 1995 requires that action plan be periodically reviewed. Statutory guidance issued by the Mayor of London (London Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (LLAQM TG, 19)¹² requires AQAP is updated every 5 years as a minimum “to reflect current policy and to improve their effectiveness”.

Statutory/Public Consultation

3.15 As the Mayor of London is the statutory consultee on new and revised AQAP and as required by guidance issued by the Mayor, the draft AQAP was sent to the GLA for review and approval before commencing public consultation. Approval was given on 15 November 2021, a statutory consultation was carried out to gather feedback/comments on the draft AQAP.

3.16 The draft AQAP went to public consultation initially between 1 December 2021 and 28 February 2022. However, a re-consultation was undertaken between 10 May and 30 June 2022 specifically targeted at BAME and other minority groups as the response from these groups were low during the first run of the consultation.

¹¹ <https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/documents/LAQM-PG16-April-16-v1.pdf>

¹² https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/llaqm_technical_guidance_2019.pdf

3.17 Officers from Environmental Health & Trading Standards Service also provided briefing at management team meetings for each relevant council service area on the draft action plan consultation and to bring to attention the specific action/s relevant to their service. Each service area was invited to make comments on the action/s, whether the service agrees with the action, is the timescale achievable, and alternative action/s they would like to suggest. Post consultation meetings were also held with the relevant services to discuss the consultation feedback and to finalise the actions and targets relevant to their service areas.

3.18 An analysis on the outcome of the consultation is provided in Appendix 2. However, summary headlines from the public consultation are shown below:

- 159 responses were received. 95 per cent of respondents said they were residents of the borough, 39.3% live in Bow East, Bow West, and Weavers wards. Most respondents were aged between 25-44 years old. And just over half defined themselves as white British / Irish.
- 85 % of survey respondents perceived air pollution to be an important topic for us to tackle. 82.4 % of respondents agree we should work towards the more stringent limit of PM2.5 concentrations to match the World Health Organisation updated limit. Fewer than half of the participants (44 %) strongly agreed or agreed that the draft AQAP identified the areas of work needed to improve air quality in the borough.
- Awareness of air pollution sources and the potential for individuals to improve air quality varied by subject. A high proportion of respondents were aware that air pollution can be reduced by swapping car travel to walking, cycling or public transport (95 %) and by switching off vehicle engines whilst parked (97%). However only 55% of the survey respondents were aware that pollution levels can be higher in a car than outside. Further communication about the actions individuals can take to reduce air quality could improve the public awareness and help drive changes in behaviour.
- When asked about priorities for the AQAP, survey respondents highlighted improving walking and cycling infrastructure as the top priority (76.7%), followed by promoting regular car free days / temporary road closures in high footfall areas (46.5%), reducing pollution in and around schools (almost 45%), and reducing emissions from buildings and developments (almost 41%).
- Most of the survey respondents are in favour (strongly agree or agree, 76.1 %) of the proposal to install publicly accessible Electric Vehicle charging points across the borough. This could help drive a switch from fossil fuel to electric vehicles which in turn will reduce air pollution.
- Just 38% of respondents knew that they could sign up to receive alerts when pollution levels are high. The participants highlight the 2022-27 Air Quality plan should implement campaigns to raise air quality awareness. When asked how good the communication by the council on air pollution around the borough was, almost 77% of survey respondents responded negatively (“not very well” or “not well at all”).
- The results from the consultation show the survey participants are generally aware of air quality issues and would like more action to be taken limiting the emission of pollutants.

Respondents' top priorities for the AQAP are:

- Improving walking and cycling infrastructure
- Promoting regular car free days / temporary road closures in high footfall areas
- Reducing pollution in and around schools

3.19 Following the consultation, the draft AQAP action matrix has been amended to take account of comments and feedback received. This includes the addition of new actions and identified in the 'Further information' section of the action matrix. In total 30 actions are proposed to be delivered over the next 5 years across the council services to improve air quality and to comply with our legal requirements.

Air Quality Action Plan 2022-2027

3.20 This AQAP replaces the previous action plan and outlines the proposed actions we intend to undertake to improve air quality in Tower Hamlets between 2022 and 2027 using levers that are under our control. It directly links to the Mayor's manifesto pledge to ***work with the Mayor of London to tackle pollution in Tower Hamlets and research the causes of poor local air quality***. The AQAP has developed 30 actions to tackle the sources of air pollution. The Plan also highlights the successes that Tower Hamlets has had in tackling air pollution in recent years and includes notable achievements since the publication of our last Action Plan. Highlights of some of the successful projects delivered through the past action plan include:

- Achieved targets for sustainable travel through the Staff Travel Plan and School Travel Plans.
- Maintained the council's Ambient Air Quality Monitoring stations and added two new PM2.5 monitors to the network
- Delivery of low emission neighbourhoods and School Streets programme
- Funded 21 local community air quality projects from the Tower Hamlets Mayor's Air Quality Fund.
- Supported the GLA to undertake air quality audits at 4 schools (2 primary and 2 nursery)
- Adopted anti-idling powers to issue fixed penalty notices to idling drivers and deployed idling signs to schools and hotspot locations
- All Council fleets are now Euro 6 or better
- Successfully delivered a DEFRA funded air quality project jointly with Poplar HARCA
- Delivery of the Zero Emissions Network (ZEN) with Islington and Hackney councils. ZEN offers sustainable transport initiatives to businesses and residents including cargo bike trials, bike maintenance workshops and scooter switches. The ZEN project has been hailed as a good practice by DEFRA
- Using LIF funding provided living green infrastructure at 3 primary schools exposed to high pollution levels
- Funded delivery of 24 'pollution solution' workshops at 16 primary schools

3.21 We have seen a significant improvement in air quality in the borough over the last 5 years but more needs to be done as there is no safe levels for air pollution, which is why the WHO have recently revised their health-based guideline levels for NO₂, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} to 10 µg/m³, 15 µg/m³ and 5 µg/m³ (annual mean) respectively.

- 3.22 The national lockdown has shown that with a reduction in the source of air pollution, such as reduced number of cars on the road and fewer emissions from construction activities, there was a significant drop in air pollution nationally and in the borough. Along with the numerous fundamental health benefits of less exposure to air pollution for the most vulnerable, there are also wider benefits for society such as safer, cleaner streets, an increase in community interaction and greater equality.
- 3.23 It is important therefore to take a comprehensive approach to tackling air quality and the associated issues to achieve the many societal benefits a reduction in air pollution brings.
- 3.24 The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is determined to tackle poor air quality in the borough. Raising awareness and providing education about the causes and impacts of poor air quality are crucial to achieving this. We want to support residents to make a difference to the air quality that is affecting all of us.
- 3.25 Due to Tower Hamlet's strategic location in London, most pollution in our jurisdiction is from traffic travelling through the borough. Therefore, a key part of this action plan will aim to work in partnership with the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, as well as lobby other regional and national authorities to improve air quality in Tower Hamlets.
- 3.26 Tower Hamlets is experiencing unprecedented development and population increase. According to the Greater London Authority's Population Projections (GLA, 2018) for the Borough, the population growth will be about 25% by 2031. Therefore, a key priority is ensuring new development does not hinder our progress on improving air quality. However, Tower Hamlets is striving to go beyond compliance with our commitment and responsibility to reduce emissions from our own operations and jurisdiction. We are, therefore, committing to a range of projects and localised measures to improve air quality and work towards reducing exposure to air pollution.
- 3.27 The AQAP follows the GLA requirements and is divided into seven broad themes that will help to improve air quality in Tower Hamlets:
- Monitoring and other core statutory duties
 - Emissions from developments and buildings
 - Public health and awareness raising
 - Delivery servicing and freight
 - Borough fleet actions
 - Localised solutions
 - Cleaner transport
- 3.28 The AQAP is striving to go beyond compliance with the Council's commitment and responsibility to reduce emissions from our own operations and jurisdiction. The action plan looks at committing to a range of projects and localised measures to improve air quality and work towards reducing exposure to air pollution. The AQAP sets out how we plan to effectively deliver against the above broad themes, improving air quality issues within our control and leading by example to reduce concentrations of pollution, and exposure to pollution; thereby positively impacting on the health and quality of life of residents and visitors to the borough. It also outlines how we plan to effectively use local levers to tackle air quality issues within our control. However, it is important to

recognise that air pollution by its very nature is transboundary and certain matters are outside of our control such as PM_{2.5}, which requires national and international effort.

- 3.29 We also recognise that there are many air quality policy areas that are outside of our influence (such as Euro standards, national vehicle taxation policy, taxis, and buses), and so we will continue to work with and lobby regional and central government on policies and issues beyond the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' influence.
- 3.30 The AQAP also sets out our key priority work areas for the next 5 years, these are outlined below:
- Continue monitoring air pollutants and carrying out other core statutory duties to improve air quality within the borough
 - Reducing emissions from developments and buildings
 - Increasing public health and awareness raising to reduce exposure to air pollution
 - Working with businesses in delivery servicing and freight to decrease air emissions
 - Reducing emission from Council fleet
 - Localised solutions such as expanding and improving green infrastructure, Low Emission Neighbourhoods (LENS),
 - Improving cleaner transport within the Borough through transport and air quality policies, idling enforcement, car free days, pedestrianisation schemes projects, installation of electric vehicle charging points, and supporting walking and cycling.
- 3.31 For each of the 7 themes, the AQAP actions matrix sets out our proposed actions, the responsible departments who will deliver this action, estimated cost to the Council, expected benefit in terms of emissions and concentration reduction, the timescale for implementation, the outputs, targets and KPIs and how progress will be monitored.
- 3.32 The AQAP action matrix includes a column which sets out the anticipated cost range for each measure. As action to improve air quality cuts across several different services, the costs will be met through different service budgets. For many of the actions, the costs are already being met through their existing budgets. Cost will also be spread over the term of the action plan.
- 3.33 It is also a requirement that the final version of AQAPs must be approved by the GLA before they are ratified at Cabinet and published. The final version of the AQAP will be submitted to the GLA for approval

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is often a strong correlation with equalities issues, as areas with poor air quality are also often the less affluent areas. Air pollution disproportionately affects the vulnerable in society including children, elderly, and those with pre-existing illness. Air pollution also exacerbates wider health inequalities because levels of pollution are higher on the busiest roads which are used more by disadvantaged people as places to live, work and shop.

- 4.2 It is expected that certain groups with certain protected characteristics (the young and the old, people with disabilities, and pregnant women) will benefit more from a reduction in air pollution, as air pollution has a disproportionate impact on them owing to biological or medical factors.
- 4.3 Research by Imperial College for the GLA also shows that those exposed to the worst air pollution are more likely to be deprived Londoners and from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities. There is also emerging evidence linking air pollution with an increased vulnerability to the most severe impacts of COVID-19¹³.
- 4.4 Delivery of the AQAP will have a positive beneficial effect on all groups within the borough as the outcome will be to improve air quality for all in the borough but particularly the most vulnerable groups. An equalities impact assessment checklist has been carried out at Appendix 3.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- **Best Value Implications-** Delivery of the AQAP will help the Council in achieving the air quality objectives and demonstrate to external regulators that the Council is committed to improving air quality within its area. Improvements in air quality will benefit everyone in the borough.
 - **Consultations-** A full statutory consultation with key stakeholders (internal and external) was undertaken. A report on the analysis of the outcome of the consultation can be found in Appendix 2.
 - **Environmental (including air quality) –** The AQAP has synergy with the Council's other corporate strategies, including Climate Change and Transport Strategy as some of the actions in the draft AQAP are relevant to tackling not only air pollution but also climate change and encouraging modal shift/active travel and will deliver co-benefits.
 - **Risk Management-**

Delivery of the AQAP will be overseen by the Air Quality and Carbon Neutral Strategic Working Group to check on progress of action plan delivery. The group will meet on a quarterly basis. Progress each year will also be reported in the Annual Status Reports produced by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, as part of our statutory London Local Air Quality Management duties.
 - **Crime Reduction-** There are no crime reduction implications
 - **Safeguarding-** There are no safeguarding implications

- **Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment-** There are no safeguarding implications

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications emanating from this report which seeks approval of the Council Air Quality Action Plan 2022-27. Any costs associated with developing the action plan have been absorbed within existing budget provision.
- 6.2 However, implementing the actions contained within the action plan may require additional funding and will be subject of separate reports. These may require growth where they cannot be contained within existing budgets or receive external funding.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council is legally required to have an action plan to tackle air quality issues in the current circumstances and to keep the plan updated. The recommendations demonstrate compliance with this legal duty.
- 7.2 The Council has the legal power to undertake the activities highlighted in the Action Plan

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1- Air Quality Action Plan 2022-2027
- Appendix 2- Consultation feedback report
- Appendix 3- Equalities Impact Assessment Checklist

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

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