

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9 September 2020
(5:00 - 6:48 pm)

Present: Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Simon Perry, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson, Cllr Bill Turner and Cllr Phil Waker

Also Present: Cllr Andrew Achilleos and Cllr Margaret Mullane

Apologies: Cllr Donna Lumsden

11. Declaration of Members' Interests

12. Minutes - 1 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2020 were agreed.

13. Air Quality Action Plan

The Air Quality Officer (AQO) delivered a presentation on the position in Barking and Dagenham in relation to air quality and preparations for a public consultation on an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). The levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) (a pollutant principally arising from the combustion of fossil fuels), were noted to be above legal limits, requiring the Local Authority to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and to produce an AQAP under Part IV of the Environmental Protection Act. The AQAP currently being developed was for the period 2020-2025, and once approved by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Council would be required to report annually on the progression of its key objectives.

The AQO explained the current issues that the Borough faced, noting high concentrations of pollution on and near main road networks and high levels of emissions from road transport, construction and development and vehicle fleet composition. The need to increase current air quality monitoring in the Borough was also highlighted, along with key priorities for the AQAP 2020-2025. A timetable for the preparation of the AQAP was presented, including a consultation with key internal and external stakeholders, who played a major part in improving air quality in Barking and Dagenham, as well as an 8-week public consultation. A final draft AQAP 2020-2025 was intended to be put forward for Cabinet approval in December 2020.

Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions to the AQO, the responses to which are summarised below.

The AQO explained the difference between main monitoring 'stations' and smaller satellite air quality monitors and the reasons behind their geographical positioning within the Borough. The Environmental Health team was undertaking a review into the current air quality monitoring network, as this was not currently representative of air quality levels within Barking and Dagenham, overall. This was particularly

apparent through the monitoring station at Scrattons Farm, which was observed to not be receiving data from the A13 at all due to its 150-200m southern positioning from the main road, which had led to it being classified as a 'background' station. The Environmental Health team wished to relocate this station to a roadside position to obtain more representative data on current air pollution from main roads in the Borough; however, additional funding would need to be secured in order to achieve this. A number of factors needed to be taken into account when installing an air quality monitoring station, such as land ownership, access, maintenance, electricity connections and Wi-Fi connections.

Further discussions into the funding for future air quality monitoring stations took place, with Members noting that the Council's Environmental Health team were working with the Planning department to look into potential planning mechanisms that could be used to support future funding in this area. The Public Health team's continuing involvement in responding to challenges around air quality in the Borough had resulted in the further integration of the Public Health and Environmental Health departments' air quality work.

The Borough's pollution principally arose from roads, namely, vehicle exhaust, regenerated dust and emissions; main roads presented the biggest concern. Whilst the Council had a limited range of regulatory powers that it could implement on Transport for London (TfL) operated roads, the Council was the regulatory body for roads outside of TfL control. The Council needed to work to reduce emissions from the roads that fell under its remit. Council staff were working with TfL to implement the 'School Streets' programme, which looked into lowering air pollution in and around school areas. This programme was specifically targeting three schools around the A13 due to its high levels of air pollution.

There were a small number of Electric Vehicle street charging points in the Borough, but the Council would be looking into the best ways of deploying infrastructure to meet demand, given the projected growth of electric vehicles in London. It was also noted that with the reduced public transport uptake and the increase in private vehicle usage, as a result of the pandemic, the Council was considering ways to influence sustainable transport and incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles in the Borough through the implementation of travel plans within businesses and commercial entities, and new technology to reduce congestion and vehicle miles.

With regards to the extension of London's Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), there could be a 20% drop in NO₂ levels because similar reductions had been recorded when the GLA changed Central London's Congestion Charge zone into a Low Emission zone. Whilst the greatest benefits would be seen within the inner ULEZ zone (with Barking and Dagenham being an outlying borough on the edge of this area), there would be some positive benefits outside of the ULEZ too.

The AQO's team were working on a 'Ways of Working' staff travel programme in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in conjunction with the Council's Inclusive Growth department. This would aim to reflect the ways in which employees were now working, incentivise staff to reduce their car usage and use more sustainable and active travel routes. The Operational Director for Enforcement Services highlighted that there was a current drive to reduce the number of journeys that residents made, encouraging them to utilise more sustainable forms of transport.

The GLA had contracted an external agency to investigate the potential health repercussions of cycling on A-Roads, such as the A13, concluding that the overall psychological and physical benefits from cycling outweighed the negative impact of air pollution on health. However, to mitigate the effects of air pollution, it was important to inform residents about alternative cycling routes that would expose them to less air pollution. The AQAP would also include an action to undertake more strategic planting of trees near major roads around the Borough to reduce pollution.

The Council's Planning department had responsibility for implementing and delivering policies to regulate air quality emissions from buildings and developments. The Council had greater regulatory control in reducing emissions from newer buildings, as developers would be subject to any new planning policies to minimise the impact of pollution. In respect to the Council's existing building stock, a refit and renew programme was in place. There would be a specific measure in the AQAP to demonstrate that all major developments would need to abide by GLA requirements relating to dust mitigation in relation to construction and demolition. All construction companies also needed to abide by a code of construction practice in relation to on-site operational work.

The Council's goal that 25% of its fleet should be electrified by 2025 was a target the its Inclusive Growth department had already agreed to work towards, but further work was necessary to establish whether this target would meet the Council's goal of being carbon neutral by 2030, and meeting the national 2050 carbon neutral goal. Members also discussed the possibility of campaigning for an electrified TfL fleet across the Borough, with the AQO noting his own specific responsibility to report on and encourage wider air quality lobbying for collective resident gains.

Members noted that steering group meetings would be held on a quarterly basis after the adoption of the AQAP, during which each internal Council department would provide an update as to their designated actions. It was suggested that briefings from these meetings could be arranged and shared with the Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Member Champion for Climate Change acknowledged the timeliness of the forthcoming AQAP, considering the current challenges around respiratory health and welcomed the commitment to the 'School Streets' initiative. He emphasised the importance of a meaningful implementation of the AQAP, the importance of regular monitoring by the Council's scrutiny Committees, once ratified.

The Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety congratulated the AQO for his work and the central role he played in moving this agenda forward. She commented that there was a lack of representation of schools in the Dagenham and Marks Gate areas (the latter being close to the A12 road), in the 'School Streets' programme and had raised this as an ongoing issue in a recent portfolio meeting. She assured the Committee that air quality would be a quarterly feature at her portfolio meetings, as it was a priority for her as a Cabinet Member.

The Chair suggested that a progress report into the implementation of the AQAP be scheduled into the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 9 June

2021. She highlighted the importance of helping schools to implement air quality monitoring programmes, as well as using the Council's Communications team to disseminate information about sustainable transport. The need for additional funding to better monitor pollution levels was also discussed, to support the Council's case when lobbying TfL and the Government to help the Borough reduce pollution levels and its impact. The Chair suggested that the use of the River Thames for the transportation of more goods be looked into, as well as the further lobbying of TfL to encourage them to use more sustainable public transport methods.

In response to comments, the AQO stated that whilst the Borough had a Carbon Offsetting Fund, there was currently no mechanism for ensuring developers made a contribution to offset any local air pollution emissions that they did not meet, unlike several other boroughs in London which have put this mechanism in place through the planning process.

The Committee **resolved** to recommend that as part of the AQAP, developers be required to make a contribution towards offsetting the impact of new developments on local air pollution.

The Chair asked that the relevant officers be requested to respond to this recommendation and report back to this Committee.

14. Update on the Scrutiny Review on Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact

The Chair stated that this report merely confirmed that the previously agreed recommendations stemming from the scrutiny review into 'Ambition 2020 and its Early Impact' had been accepted by officers. She added that the Committee was due to receive an update at this meeting outlining how the recommendations would be implemented, in the form of an action plan. However, due to officers wanting to check the action plan against the Council's recently amended Corporate Plan, the Chair had agreed that the action plan instead be presented to the Committee's meeting on 7 October 2020, which was noted.

15. Work Programme

Further to the suggestion made by the Chair in minute 13, Members agreed that the Work Programme include an update on the Council's Air Quality Action Plan in relation to the meeting scheduled for 9 June 2021.

In response to a comment, the Committee agreed that a short update on Anti-Social Behaviour be provided as part of the second response to Covid-19 update item scheduled for the 4 November 2020 meeting and asked the Governance Officer to note this.

The changes to the Work Programme were **agreed**.

Members passed their thanks to the Council's Finance Director for sending an analysis of the expenditure relating to the Housing Revenue Account classed as 'supervision and management', and the overspend in repairs and maintenance to the Committee, following a request for this information at the previous meeting. The Chair asked that any further questions Members had on the information

provided be forwarded to herself and the Governance Officer by a deadline she would confirm outside of this meeting.