
Air Quality Status Reports 2024

Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	16 December 2024
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Iskandar Jefferies
Date JMB agreed report:	2 December 2024
Report Author:	Suzanne McLaughlin
Forward Plan Ref:	JPPC

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) of the submission and results of the annual air quality reports for Bracknell Forest (BFC) and West Berkshire Councils (WBC). These reports are for the monitoring data and action planning update for the calendar year 2023.
- 1.2 To inform the JPPC that the annual air quality report for Wokingham Borough Council has also been submitted and the results received and passed on to Wokingham Borough Council in accordance with the shared service arrangements effective from the 1st April 2022.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Is informed about the contents of the two Air Quality Annual Status Reports as set out in [Appendix A for Bracknell Forest Council](#) and [Appendix C for West Berkshire Council](#).
- 2.2 Is informed about the feedback from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the reports as set out in Appendix B for Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) and Appendix D West Berkshire Council (WBC).
- 2.3 Is informed about the progress on the measures to improve air quality set out in each report.
- 2.4 Approves the ongoing and planned future measures to improve air quality set in each report.
- 2.5 Is informed that the Air Quality Status Report produced by the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council has been submitted to DEFRA, the feedback received, and both have been passed on to the authority for processing under their governance arrangements.

3. Implications and Impact Assessment:

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	Work relating to Air Quality monitoring and reporting is funded from the general revenue budget allocated to the Public

	<p>Protection Service. Several proposals in the action plans continue to require additional funding to implement whilst others are relatively low cost and are covered from the PPP revenue budget.</p> <p>Grant funding from DEFRA has been available and PPP have applied annually. In addition, West Berkshire Council (on behalf of the Partnership) was awarded £259,406 in March 2021 by DEFRA to fund a project focused on behavioural change for the residents who drive in the three boroughs by launching an anti-idling campaign as well as PM_{2.5} monitoring in / near the Air Quality Management Areas. This funding has now come to an end.</p>
Human Resource:	<p>Staff who undertake this work are a shared resource with Wokingham BC under the new IAA with Wokingham.</p> <p>One benefit of the shared service is the ability to have staff that specialise in areas such as this and the service is fortunate to have several officers with significant expertise on environmental matters generally and air quality specifically.</p> <p>The 2021/22 Grant from DEFRA has meant that the authority was able to appoint an Air Quality Officer on a fixed term contract until September 2023 to support the anti-idling campaign. The post holder left WBC in April 2023 and since then the work has been undertaken within PPP and recharged to the grant.</p>
Legal:	<p>Under the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) system local authorities are legally required to assess air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) if improvements are necessary.</p> <p>Where an AQMA is designated, of which there is one in Bracknell Forest (in Crowthorne), local authorities are required to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) describing the pollution reduction measures it will put in place. Where the pollutant levels no longer exceed the Objectives then the AQMA should be revoked. Where a Local Authority no longer has any AQMA then an Air Quality Strategy is to be produced. Where a Local Authority still has an AQMA the AQAP is to be regularly reviewed and must be revised no later than every five years.</p>
Risk Management:	<p>This is a legal requirement under the Environment Act 2005. Failure to comply with our statutory obligations could present the risk of challenge to the PPP partner authorities.</p>
Property:	<p>There are no direct property implications arising from this report.</p>

Policy:	<p>The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) identified Environmental Protection as one of the five Strategic Priorities for the Joint Public Protection Committee. The 2024-2027 Strategic Assessments includes Protection of the Environment as one of the key priorities for the Service over the next three years.</p> <p>West Berkshire has declared a climate emergency. They have embedded Air Quality improvements into their Environment Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plans.</p> <p>Bracknell Forest Council's Climate Change Strategy was completed and published in January 2021 and have a target of net carbon zero by 2050.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		No specific groups are affected by the contents of the proposals as there are no decisions being made. Air quality can be particularly harmful to the young, elderly, pregnant and those suffering ill health. Consideration to all these matters is given in this report and appendices and / or the national clean air strategy.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		No specific groups are affected by the contents of the proposals as there are no decisions being made. Air quality can be particularly harmful to the young, elderly, pregnant and those suffering ill health. Consideration to all these matters is given in this report and appendices and / or the national clean air strategy.
Environmental Impact:	x			<p>Under the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) system local authorities are legally required to assess air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) if improvements are necessary. Where an AQMA is designated, local authorities are required to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) describing the pollution reduction measures it will put in place.</p> <p>These reports are therefore designed to have a positive impact on the environment.</p>

Health Impact:	X		<p>The Air Quality Objectives have been put in place to protect people's health and the environment.</p> <p>Although there has been a reduction in air pollution since the 1970s, poor air quality is still the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It shortens lives and reduces quality of life, particularly amongst the most vulnerable, the young and old, and those living with health conditions.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring and where appropriate the creation of action plans is designed to improve the quality of lives of our residents.</p>
ICT or Digital Services Impact:		x	<p>None</p> <p>The Air Quality Status Reports are published on the PPP website.</p>
PPP Priorities:	x		<p>The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) identified Protecting and Improving Health as one of the five overarching themes with Environmental Protection one of the Strategic priorities for the Joint Public Protection Committee. Under this heading the Committee in turn identified improved air quality as a priority for 2021-2024. Going forward Air Quality, within the area of the Protection of the Environment, is a targeted priority in the Strategic Assessment 2024-2027.</p>
Data Impact:		X	None
Consultation and Engagement:	Each local authority within PPP is required to submit an Annual Status Report (ASR) to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) each year and a template is provide.		
Other Options Considered:	None – The production of the reports is a statutory requirement.		

4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 Local authorities are required to submit an Annual Status Report (ASR) to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) each year and a template is provided. The overall aim of this document is to report on progress in achieving reductions in concentrations of emissions relating to relevant pollutants below air quality objective levels. It is also where local authorities identify new or changing sources of emissions.

4.2 On completion, local authorities should submit their report to the Secretary of State (DEFRA) for consideration, who will provide comments back in a timely manner and to which the local authorities are expected to have regard.

4.3 The core requirements of the ASR:

- To report progress on the implementation of measures in the local air quality action plan and other measures and their impact in reducing concentrations below air quality objectives.
- To provide a summary of monitoring/modelling data (either locally retrieved and/or from the national network) to assess the air quality situation in the area and the likelihood of air quality breaches, and to provide the necessary evidence base for the impact of air quality measures.
- To report on significant new developments that might affect local air quality.
- To encourage joint working with other agencies, such as Public Health, and the Highway Authorities.
- To present information in a public-facing executive summary for the lay reader so that the local public can more easily engage with local air quality issues and measures taken to improve it.

4.4 DEFRA set a deadline each year for submission of these reports and there are implications for late submission in respect of whether air quality grant bids will be favourably received. The Service has again completed and submitted the reports for all three authorities within the appropriate timescales.

4.5 The PPP understands the importance of DEFRA approving the reports as the data is used by third parties in planning applications, as well as in-house decisions by Highways and Transport Planning colleagues. In addition, the increased significance is recognised as identified actions are now intrinsically linked with Climate Emergency Plans and Environmental Strategies.

5. Report Submission

5.1 Air quality monitoring and improvement contributes to a number of principal priorities of the PPP, and continues to be identified as such in 2023-24 with synergies directly with climate change and environmental protection. In Summer 2019 all PPP local authorities made commitments with respect to climate change, and air quality continues to be regularly in the news, alongside, the cross cutting climate change theme.

5.2 Although Wokingham Borough Council has opted to withdraw from the Partnership the PPP continues to undertake air quality work for the local authority under a new agreement. The three Annual Status Reports were completed in-house by the deadline of the 30 June 2024. The reports were submitted as follows:

- Bracknell Forest 14 June 2024
- West Berkshire 14 June 2024
- Wokingham 14 June 2024

6. Impact of the Covid Pandemic and beyond on Air Quality

- 6.1 Members were previously informed that, as was to be expected, the Covid pandemic did have an impact on air quality due to reduced traffic movements. A management decision was taken during the various lockdowns and restrictions in 2020 and 2021 to continue monitoring air quality. The 2021 levels of nitrogen dioxide generally increased compared to 2020. This was due to the increase in traffic levels. However the Nitrogen Dioxide levels were lower in both years when compared to 2019 with a significant reduction during the periods of the national lockdowns. In 2022 the levels showed a very minor increase.
- 6.2 The traffic flows for 2023 were still lower than the pre-pandemic year 2019. Comparing 2019 and 2023 the monthly trends in traffic, the pattern is broadly the same. Of the five years 2019 to 2023, as expected, the pollution and traffic levels are the lowest in 2020.
- 6.3 A summary for each area can be found in the Executive Summary at the beginning of the individual reports.

7. Bracknell Forest

- 7.1 There is now one Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared across the Borough known as "Area 2: The Bracknell Road (B3348) and Crowthorne High Street, Crowthorne AQMA".
- 7.2 AQMA "Area 1: The Bagshot Road (A322) Horse and Groom Roundabout Downshire Way AQMA" (Bracknell AQMA) was revoked on 14 March 2024 following a reduction in pollutant levels, as brought to JPPC in December 2023, and after consultation, approved at the March 2024 JPPC.
- 7.3 The major source of air quality pollutants in Bracknell Forest is emissions from road transport. In particular, the contribution from the A322 in Bracknell, the B3348/High Street and Sandhurst Road Crowthorne have been identified as significant. The main pollutant of concern is Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and to a lesser extent the increased levels of particulate matter.
- 7.4 The levels of Nitrogen Dioxide in 2023 have shown a decreasing trend since 2019. The annualised continuous monitored NO₂ Annual Mean in 2023 of 29.4 µg/m³ at Downshire Way did not exceed the Air Quality Objective level of 40 µg/m³. This is a reduction from 33.6 µg/m³ in 2019.
- 7.5 There were no exceedances of the 1-hour Objectives of 200 µg/m³ (not to be exceeded 18 times / year) in 2023.
- 7.6 There were no exceedances of the ratified, bias corrected, annualised and distance corrected diffusion tubes within the Bracknell and Crowthorne AQMAs. There were no locations greater than 60 µg/m³ which further indicates that there are unlikely to be any exceedance of the 1-hour Objective. All of the 2023 sites showed a decrease from the 2019 data. There were nine sites with marginal increased levels and 17 decreased. The fluctuation and gradual reducing trend is to be expected in 2023 due to hybrid working and increase in cleaner vehicles.

- 7.7 The Particulate Matter PM₁₀, which is monitored in the Bracknell AQMA (when annualised) measured 17.2 µg/m³ and did not exceed the Annual Mean Objective of 40 µg/m³. The results also showed no exceedances of the 24-hour Annual Mean Objective of 50µg/m³, which is not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year. This is a reduction on the 2022 figures demonstrating a decreasing trend since 2018 when the level was 19.0 µg/m³.
- 7.8 Bracknell Forest Council produced an Air Quality Action Plan in 2014 which was updated in 2016. The Plan outlined local measures to improve pollution levels within the them two AQMAs and more widely across the borough. The action plan is integrated with the delivery of the adopted Local Transport Plan (LTP) to improve local air quality and climate change, through joint working with the Council's Environmental Health, Transport Planning and Planning Divisions. Following the revocation of the Bracknell AQMA the Action Plan for Crowthorne 2024-2029 has been reviewed, updated and following consultation was approved by the March 2024 JPPC.

Actions to Improve Air Quality

- 7.9 Reducing queuing traffic, smoothing the traffic flow, reducing journey times and major highway improvements along the A329/A322 Bracknell corridor have resulted in a 41.5% reduction in 2023 NO₂ levels when compared to 2011. Works to reduce the bottleneck on Downshire Way have now been completed as have other works on the A322 roundabouts. These road improvements have led to improved air quality along the A322 in 2022 and this trend was carried forward in to 2023.
- 7.10 The speed humps along the High Street in Crowthorne have been upgraded and replaced with speed cushions to reduce stop start driving. As a result the NO₂ levels have dropped from 41.7µg/m³ in 2011 to 21.5µg/m³ in 2023.

Commentary from DEFRA

- 7.11 DEFRA have confirmed that the report 'is well structured, detailed and provides the information specified in the Guidance' and 'On the basis of the evidence provided by the local authority the conclusions reached in the report are accepted for all sources and pollutants.' They also noted good quality discussion regarding trends of the results shown in good quality graphs; good quality discussion about the Quality Assurance /Quality Control procedure; and good quality discussion about additional air quality work undertaken by Bracknell Forest Council.
- 7.12 DEFRA noted a small number of grammatical and formatting errors within the report and these have been rectified in the final report as published.
- 7.13 DEFRA acknowledged that the Bracknell AQMA had been revoked in March 2024 and noted that a new Air Quality Action Plan for Crowthorne had been published in 2024.
- 7.14 DEFRA agreed with the plans to wait until compliance (concentrations recorded as below 10% the Air Quality Objective) has been achieved in 2022, 2023 and 2024 before considering if this AQMA can be considered for revocation.

8. West Berkshire

- 8.1 The two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) declared across West Berkshire Council in Thatcham (on the A4) and Newbury (A339, St John's Roundabout) were both revoked on 23rd April 2024 following a reduction in pollutant levels, as brought to the JPPC meeting in December 2023, and after consultation approved at the JPPC in March 2024.
- 8.2 The major source of air quality pollutants in West Berkshire are road transport and in particular the contribution from the A339 and A4. The main pollutant is NO₂ in Newbury and Thatcham. However, the decreases seen is likely due to changes in traffic patterns with peak hours dispersing creating better flows and less congestion, as well as cleaner vehicles and more hybrid working.
- 8.3 The NO₂ levels in 2023 have shown a decrease on the pre-pandemic levels since 2019 and only 12 of the 34 monitoring sites have increased since 2022, and none of the monitoring locations within West Berkshire exceeded the Annual Objective of 40µg/m³ with the maximum being at 1 Winchester Court (26.7µg/m³). The 1 Hourly Objective Nitrogen Dioxide was not exceeded in 2023 (permitted level of 18 exceedances of 200µg/m³ per year).
- 8.4 Over the past five years there has been a general decrease of NO₂, at a number of sites both within, close too and away from the previous AQMA's. Overall, the levels in West Berkshire have been reducing over the five years up to 2023.

Actions to Improve Air Quality

- 8.5 The Service continues to work with the Development Control team to review the air quality impact of planning applications and has completed all Pollution Prevention and Control inspections as required for the control of emission to air from industrial processes for the 2023/24 financial year.
- 8.6 There are a considerable number of initiatives that have been and continue to be implemented to support this area of work, including installation of electric vehicle charging points (by 2023 there were 58), ongoing development of the cycle routes infrastructure, improvements to the cycle lesson provision and bike storage facilities at schools, reduced bus fares and enhanced services.
- 8.7 Promoting alternative and active travel to schools and the implementation of the School Street Scheme has been successful near Calcot Infant and Junior Schools and Francis Baily Primary School.

Commentary from DEFRA

- 8.8 DEFRA commented that the 'report is well structured, detailed, and provides the information specified in the Guidance.' They accepted the conclusions reached for all sources and pollutants. They also noted that details had been included regarding PM2.5, good quality graphs and trends, and justification of the bias adjustment factor.
- 8.9 DEFRA identified a small number of errors, and these have been rectified in the final report as published.

8.10 DEFRA acknowledged that the Thatcham and Newbury AQMAs had been revoked and now the priority is to draft the Air Quality Strategy and continuing work with Transport Policy and Highways Teams in particular.

9. Next Steps

Air Quality Action Plans and Air Quality Strategy

9.11 The Air Quality Action Plan for the Crowthorne AQMA 2024-2029 has been published. PPP need to work with Bracknell Forest Council teams most notably Highways, Transport and Active Travel to implement / progress the actions. Updates are to be provided to DEFRA in the next ASR.

9.12 The West Berkshire Council Air Quality Strategy development has commenced. This document needs to work alongside other Strategies and Plans and is to be produced in consultation with the Director of Public Health. It must set out the steps and progress that has been made by the local authority to improve air quality in their area. Updates are to be provided to DEFRA in the next ASR.

Future Monitoring

9.13 The monitoring programme for 2025 has been confirmed. A passive diffusion tube network will be continued across the borough / district both within the current AQMA and outside the AQMA as well as other locations where there are known hotspot / congestion locations.

10. Other air quality related matters of note

10.1 As mentioned previously the PPP service was awarded £259,000 from DEFRA for a grant to carry out air quality projects which were designed to change the behaviour of those 448,000 residents who drive in the three boroughs by launching an anti-idling campaign as well as monitoring PM_{2.5} near schools within /near the AQMAs. These projects are all now completed, and a Final Report is due to be submitted to DEFRA by March 2025.

10.2 PPP made a further grant application, on behalf of the 3 Local Authorities, as part of the DEFRA Air Quality Grant Applications 2023/24 programme in September 2023 for a focus on PM_{2.5} from domestic burning in order to improve public awareness in local communities about the risks of air pollution and projects that deal with Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}). We were successful in our application and awarded the £183k funding in February 2024, but then notified in April 2024 that the funds for 2023/24 were not to be funded. We await any update on any future funding opportunities following the Government Spending Review process.

11. Concluding Observations

11.1 The improvements to Air Quality across the three local authority areas is to be welcomed. There are many factors that have contributed to this, but it is clear that the range of interventions made by each Council has contributed to this improvement.

11.2 Air Quality continues to be high profile area of work and the links with the sources of pollutants and health impacts becoming more apparent during and after the Covid

pandemic. The authorities must continue to not only monitor the levels of pollutants but ensure that we continue to progress actions set out within the action plan or further actions in the Air Quality Strategy. It is also important to continue to raise the profile of improvements in air quality to support the good health of our residents.

11.3 The evaluations provided by DEFRA are positive and the Committee is asked to both note the reports and the DEFRA evaluations.

11.4 The duty on local authorities to both assess and improve air quality is not just a legal requirement but a public demand. The effects on health of poor air quality are indisputable and Councils have been given a range of tools to tackle the causes.

11.5 In simple terms the causes are known but the solutions are wide ranging. The proposals set out in the plans seek to address several approaches ranging from raising awareness, changing human behaviour and matters of infrastructure.

Appendices

Appendix A – 2024 Bracknell ASR [Air Quality Monitoring - PPP \(publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk\)](https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk)

Appendix B - Bracknell Appraisal Response from DEFRA

Appendix C – 2024 West Berkshire ASR [Air Quality Monitoring - PPP \(publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk\)](https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk)

Appendix D – West Berkshire Appraisal Response from DEFRA

Background Papers:

Bracknell Forest Council's LTP3 and supporting documents which can be accessed via the Council's website, at: <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/planningpolicy/transport-policy>

West Berkshire Council's LTP3 and supporting documents which can be accessed via the Council's website, at: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/ltp>

Defra: National Clean Air Strategy 2019
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019>

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

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