



**ENVIRONMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>WIRRAL AIR QUALITY STRATEGY 2024-2028</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

The Wirral Air Quality Strategy 2024-2028 covers all wards and outlines the work that the council will undertake to support the government's long-term air quality goals, including a steep percentage reduction to population exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5). The strategy will prioritise the actions that will be taken to achieve the overall aim and objectives.

The implementation of this strategy will support the vision of the [Wirral Plan 2021-2026](#), which focuses on making the borough a more equitable and fairer place to live, work, and visit, reducing inequalities across Wirral. Wirral's Air Quality Strategy supports this vision for Wirral by addressing all of the thematic priorities, in particular, Sustainable Environment; "Working towards a clean-energy, sustainable borough that leads the way in its response to the climate emergency and is environmentally friendly", Brighter Futures "Working together for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background" and Active and Healthy Lives "Working to provide happy, active and healthy lives for all, with the right care, at the right time to enable residents to live longer and healthier lives".

This is an overarching strategy that cross-cuts work through numerous council departments.

This report affects all wards and is a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Environment and Climate Emergency Committee is recommended to: Approve the Wirral Air Quality Strategy 2024-2028.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The risk of moving forward without implementing an Air Quality Strategy, will mean that the council is not fulfilling the statutory requirement of the Environment Act 1995 as amended by the Environment Act 2021 to publish an Air Quality Strategy setting out air quality standards, objectives, and measures for improving ambient air quality. This would have both reputational and service delivery consequences and would result in criticism of the council by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- 1.2 Poor local air quality affects the health of those living and working in Wirral. The highest impacts on human health come from particulate matter (PM), but evidence for the effects of nitrogen dioxide is growing.
- 1.3 Deaths in England linked to air pollution are estimated to be between 26,000 and 38,000 each year. Although air pollution can be harmful to everyone, the most susceptible to the effects of air pollution are typically the young, the old, and those with pre-existing health conditions. It particularly affects people living in more densely populated and polluted areas, which are often areas of higher deprivation, which can widen health inequalities.
- 1.4 Short term exposure to air pollution can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Long-term exposure can cause respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression, dementia, diabetes, and can affect foetal development.
- 1.5 Air quality and climate change are inextricably related. Many common air pollutants are greenhouse gases and therefore reducing air pollution will lessen the warming effect on climate. Poor air quality and climate change have a direct impact on the health and well-being of both humans and the natural environment.
- 1.6 The strategy will align with Environment and Climate Emergency (ECE) Policy and will deliver the following: ECE Policy 9: Supporting and increase in use of 'active travel', ECE Policy 10: Working to support an increase in public transport use, and ECE Policy 11: Securing investment to support the necessary shift to ultra-low carbon vehicles. This will prevent duplication and ensure efficiency savings. An Air Quality representative will sit on the ECE action group.
- 1.7 The strategy will also support the Cool Wirral objectives including; Clean Travel: A complete transition to fossil fuel-free local travel by around 2030, Adequate Resourcing, Stronger Partnerships And Networks, and Evidence Informed Action.
- 1.8 It will also align with local and regional actions being taken to address the ecological and climate crisis faced, by helping to cut climate-damaging air pollution locally, in line with global targets.

## **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Agree to implement the strategy as it is written.
- 2.2 Members could ask for further changes to be made to the strategy. Whilst this is not recommended it is within the gift of the Committee.
- 2.3 Members could refuse to approve the strategy. However, this would mean that the Council would not fulfil the statutory requirement of the Environment Act 1995 (as amended) to publish an Air Quality Strategy setting out air quality standards, objectives, and measures for improving ambient air quality. This would have both reputational and service delivery consequences and would result in criticism of the council by Defra. If the Air Quality Strategy is not approved, it will prevent the Council from ensuring that air quality is a material factor in all relevant decisions and could lead to a deterioration of air quality within the borough.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The UK Government has set a requirement that each local authority must develop and implement an Air Quality Strategy by the end of 2023, regardless of whether they have declared an Air Quality Management Area.

DEFRA's National Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Action Plans set out how Government will improve and protect ambient air quality, as part of the creation of a sustainable environment.

Although strategy development has come via a new Government directive, it is also very much a new opportunity for Wirral stakeholders to work together borough-wide and focus on improving air quality in a more strategic approach.

- 3.2 Wirral officers have established an Air Quality Steering Group from across Council services and with partner support, to oversee this work. A strategy will also allow a wider public conversation and debate on air pollution, and its importance to public health and the Wirral environment.
- 3.3 The World Health Organisation has updated its health-based air quality guideline concentrations, due to a much stronger body of evidence showing how air pollution affects health at lower concentrations. The Government has set legal limits, known as air quality objectives, for air pollution, in line with European Directives. In addition, new lower objective levels have recently been introduced for particulate matter. Local Authorities in England have duties regarding local air quality management and must regularly review and assess air quality to determine whether objectives are likely to be achieved. As part of these duties, all Local Authorities in England are now required to produce an air quality strategy.
- 3.4 Although the air quality in Wirral does not exceed legal limits, no safe level of exposure to air pollution has been identified, below which there are no negative health effects. In Wirral, 4.9% of deaths are attributed to Air Pollution, the Northwest average is 5.3% and the England average is 5.5%. The aim of the strategy is to reduce emissions and improve air quality across Wirral and it has been developed by collaborating with stakeholders across Wirral such as; housing associations,

community, voluntary and faith sectors, local businesses, the National Health Service (NHS), Schools, Chamber of Commerce and transport sector, to ensure that it represents the priorities of the local community.

3.5 The draft strategy has highlighted 5 priority areas which are outlined below. It also highlights the work that is currently being undertaken across the Council in each of the 5 priority areas and outlines what the Council intends to do in the future.

#### 3.6.1 Priority Area 1- Reduce emissions from transport.

The 2022 Chief Medical Officer's Report states that "Road vehicles have been sources of some of the most important air pollutants, especially PM2.5 and NO2, which are of health concern, particularly in urban areas where there is large population exposure." Road transportation is a primary source of pollution in Wirral. Data shows that across the Liverpool City Region, emissions from transport account for approximately 30% of NOX and particulate matter (PM10) emissions.

Wirral's transport system therefore has an impact on community health, because of exposure to emissions. This can also impact the economy, by harming productivity and increasing costs to society through medical and social care. Older people, children, those with disabilities, and those on lower incomes are most likely to be affected by the problems associated with poor air quality from vehicle emissions. Car use and public transport are part of many people's daily routine, moving to public transport and encouraging those that can to actively travel, will provide wide benefits to both air quality and health.

#### 3.6.2 Priority Area 2- Improve indoor air quality.

Outdoor air pollutants can move into indoor spaces through air exchange. Pollutants can be generated inside the home through tobacco smoke, burning of fuels in open fires or log burners, unvented gas appliances or combustion equipment. Chemicals are released from many household products such as cleaning products and air fresheners, in addition to those released from textiles and building materials over long periods. Inadequate ventilation can compound this issue along with its role in the production of damp and mould in the home, further compromising indoor air quality.

#### 3.6.3 Priority Area 3- Reduce the impact from housing development and regeneration.

Housing developments and area-based regeneration has the potential to bring new or increased sources of localised air pollution into an area such as through changes in vehicle access and additional sources of pollutants generated through heating the homes. Equally, new developments can introduce newer, cleaner technologies, rather than reliance on older more polluting technologies.

Land use planning can have a critical role in air quality, as it can provide for more sustainable transport links between the home, workplace, educational, retail, and leisure facilities. Planning can also support people to move to active travel where possible, reducing the reliance on motor vehicles. This, in turn, can reduce air pollution, providing a better living environment for all, and directly improving the health of those increasing their activity levels. Control of building processes during

both demolition and construction activities, can reduce air pollution, for example by applying dust management controls to reduce the release of particulates and dust.

#### 3.6.4 Priority Area 4- Reduce domestic, commercial, industrial and agricultural emissions.

The industrial sector is diverse, and there are numerous air pollutants, with potential impacts on health, linked to industrial activities. Nationally, there have been significant improvements to emission levels linked to industry. These improvements have been supported by regulations which have encouraged a move to processes that generate fewer emissions or that have improved abatement techniques, which reduce or remove pollutants before they are released. Changes to how electricity is generated, with more electricity generated using renewable sources, such as wind and solar, and less reliance on burning of fossil fuels which releases pollution, have also reduced emission levels nationally, as has the changes to UK industrial activity.

Despite these national improvements, there is however, still a need for local action to ensure that pollutants emitted by local industry are controlled. Local Authorities have duties to regulate and inspect installations in line with permits and current guidance, ensuring all 'Part A2' and 'Part B' installations, which are regulated by the Council, are compliant with the conditions of their Permit. Complex and large-scale processes are permitted by the Environment Agency and less complex, often smaller processes are usually permitted by the local authority.

#### 3.6.5 Priority Area 5- Raise public awareness and encourage behaviour change.

Raising public awareness regarding both indoor and outdoor air pollution, using available guidance on community engagement and behaviour change, will be key to improving health outcomes. Ensuring healthcare professionals are aware that information on air quality is available, what it means for patients and what actions are recommended, and targeting the most vulnerable groups will also be key.

3.7 It is proposed that delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Wirral Air Quality Steering Group, which has representatives from numerous departments across the council, including Environmental Health, Public Health, Highways and Infrastructure, Transport infrastructure, Transport management, Licensing and Forward Planning, and strong links to NHS and wider local partners key to strategy delivery. Annual updates on progress in delivering the strategy will be presented to the Environment, Climate and Transport Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board. Progress will also be reported within the Annual Air Quality Status Report, which is approved by DEFRA and published on the Wirral Council website.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There will be future costs associated with the implementation of this strategy. The potential capital and revenue costs of implementing the strategy will be determined and will need to be considered in the context of the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy. The strategy will be implemented through a plan that will be owned by the Air Quality Steering Group, any actions within the plan will be developed with the relevant departments, and any associated costs will be assessed, and the source of funding agreed.

- 4.2 Projects will be delivered via various funding methods or already have funding in place to deliver. Where they are council actions they will be delivered within business-as-usual operations or via capital funding bids. There may be an opportunity to apply for future additional funding to deliver local improvements and projects from external partners, for example, DEFRA, United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Capital bids, Town Deal funding, Sustrans and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The costs associated with production and publication of the Air Quality Strategy are met within the service budget.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Part 4 of the Environment Act 1995 (as amended) requires the Council to publish an Air Quality Strategy setting out air quality standards, objectives, and measures for improving ambient air quality, places a duty on the Council to monitor air quality in its areas and report to DEFRA on an annual basis.
- 5.2 The development of this Strategy provides a framework for future action to improve air quality within Wirral.

It is consistent with national guidelines and will assist the Council to achieve its objective of improving the air quality within Wirral to help to better the environment and the health and well-being of all residents and visitors to the area.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The Strategy can be implemented fully using existing staffing resources. Financial resource is currently in place to maintain the current air quality monitoring equipment. Capital expenditure would be required if the air quality monitoring equipment needed replacing.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 By not identifying and taking action to enable all people in Wirral to live healthier lives free from the harmful impacts of air pollution there are a range of direct and indirect risks that impact on individuals, communities, health services and the economy. Local system partners will support honest and open discussions regarding system risk and risk mitigation. The key risks include: poor individual and population health outcomes such as ill health, premature mortality, or negative impact on quality of life, excessive pressure on emergency, health and social care services and related opportunity cost of ill health, personal, societal, and business economic impact of ill health.
- 7.2 Risks to the successful implementation of the Air Quality Strategy include failure to engage with partners and, the impact of development on traffic levels. These risks are monitored as part of the Council's Local Air Quality Management responsibilities and changes can be made to the Air Quality Action Plan as appropriate once it has been developed. The risks will also be monitored by the Air Quality Steering Group that meets regularly throughout the year, involving various council departments and any risks will be escalated via the Directorate Risk Register.

- 7.3 The risk of not implementing an Air Quality Strategy, will mean that the Council is not fulfilling the statutory requirement of the Environment Act 1995 as amended by the Environment Act 2021 to publish an Air Quality Strategy setting out air quality standards, objectives, and measures for improving ambient air quality. This would have both reputational and service delivery consequences and would result in criticism of the council by Defra. If the Air Quality Strategy is not approved, it will prevent the Council from ensuring that air quality is a material factor in all relevant decisions and could lead to a deterioration of air quality within the borough.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 This Strategy has been developed following wide consultation with housing associations, community, voluntary and faith sectors, local businesses, the National Health Service, Schools, Chamber of Commerce and transport sector, to ensure that it represents the priorities of the local community and outlines how local partners will work effectively together to achieve the collectively agreed vision, aims, and objectives.
- 8.2 A Strategy has been produced, which has been informed by feedback from a June 2023 workshop, which included both internal and external stakeholders. Their views and important themes gathered via this feedback have been fed into the Strategy. Representatives from 49 key partners and a wide range of local organisations attended a successful Strategy Development Workshop.
- 8.3 The Strategy public consultation exercise commenced on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 for a 4-week period and press releases were issued in line with the communications plan. The aim of the consultation was to understand residents' priorities for action to reduce air pollution.
- 8.4 The final Strategy has then been developed taking into consideration the feedback from the public consultation and relevant stakeholders.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and can be found at: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>.
- 9.2 The purpose of the Strategy is to reduce emissions of pollution which are harmful to health and the environment. Those affected most by poor air quality are people with existing medical conditions, the young and the elderly and so these groups will receive the greatest positive benefit from the Strategy. Pollution concentrations are highest beside busy and congested roads, so the populations living in these areas will also receive greater benefit from the Strategy.
- 9.3 As discussed in the recommendations of the report, poor air quality particularly affects people living in more densely populated and polluted areas, these areas often have higher volumes of social housing and privately rented property and are often

areas of higher deprivation. Tackling poor housing stock in these areas can have positive impacts on addressing health inequalities.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The declaration of a new Wirral Air Quality Strategy requires periods of consultation, which will create the opportunity to raise awareness of Air Pollution on Wirral. It is hoped that this will trigger behaviour change. The priority actions will also reduce harmful emissions in the atmosphere and improve the overall air quality of Wirral.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Everyone is at risk from poor air pollution, but people are more vulnerable if they have COPD, asthma or other lung conditions or are elderly or a child. Air pollution can cause coughs, dizziness, inflamed airways and shortness of breath. It increases the risk of pneumonia, COPD and lung cancer, as well as heart disease and stroke, leading to early death. It can also impact pregnancy and the development of children's lungs. The Strategy will therefore have a positive public health impact thus reducing the burden on the NHS, improving health and reducing the health inequity gap on the borough.

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## **APPENDICES**

1. Wirral Air Quality Strategy, 2024 – 2028, A four-year vision to improve air quality in Wirral
2. Wirral's Air Quality Strategy Consultation Report

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
2. Local Air Quality Management: Policy Guidance (PG22).
3. Chief Medical Officers Annual Report 2022. Air Quality
4. Defra. Air quality appraisal: damage cost guidance, January 2023
5. Wirral Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Air Quality 2022
6. National Air Quality Strategy 2019
7. The Wirral Plan
8. Liverpool City Region Preliminary Air Quality Options Study 2019 (Unpublished AECOM, Merseytravel document)
9. WHO review of evidence on health aspects of air pollution
10. Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance (PG22)
11. Air Quality Strategy Framework for Local Authorities
12. WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines

- 13. Health Matters: air pollution
- 14. Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Reducing Ammonia Emissions
- 15. Cool Wirral Cool 2 Strategy Action 2022
- 16. Environment and Climate Emergency Policy 2021
- 17. Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan Progress 2022/23

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with 5.2 A of its Terms of Reference, “in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy”.

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

Council Meeting	Date