

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/2018

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30TH JANUARY 2018

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Agenda Item 3

Air Quality Update

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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the 2017 Air Quality Progress Report and an update on the Air Quality Action Plans for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members scrutinise the contents of the report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Local Authority conducts regular monitoring and review of ambient outdoor air quality within its area to determine compliance to statutory Air Quality Objectives, set by national government to protect public health. The 2017 Progress Report provides the latest examination of local air quality and continues to reaffirm that the vast majority of Rhondda Cynon Taf exhibits good air quality.

3.2 There are some localised areas of RCT which continue to be vulnerable to poor air quality. It is acknowledged that local air quality will vary over time in response to changes to local, regional and national sources of pollutants as well as fluctuations in climate and weather. The Council has been monitoring Local Air Quality since 1998 and the 2017 Progress Report confirmed there are currently 16 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in Rhondda Cynon Taf which reflect breaches of a relevant air quality standard for Nitrogen Dioxide. The following table includes the location of the AQMA's, the year of declaration and estimated number of properties in the relevant AQMA.

Air Quality Management Area	AQMA - Year of Declaration	Estimated Number of Properties
Aberdare Town Centre	2007	270
Broadway	2007	259

Church Village	2015	21
Cilfynydd	2007	173
Cymmer	2009	146
Ferndale	2009	102
Llanharan	2016	7
Llwynypia	2009	28
Mountain Ash	2009	57
Mwyndy	2007	1
Nantgarw	2007	8
Nightingales Bush	2009	11
Pontypridd Town Centre	2007	84
Tonyrefail	2018	20
Treforest	2018	8
Tylorstown	2007	65

3.3 Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is a toxic gas, which in concentrations above the relevant Air Quality Objective may reduce the quality and length of life of chronically exposed individuals. Most combustion activities are sources of NO₂, with the transport sector being a major contributor. In RCT motor vehicles are believed to be the largest local source of NO₂. The evidence suggests that the lowest social economic groups are most likely to experience poor air quality and be adversely affected by it, as circumstances dictate they often reside alongside heavily trafficked roads and may also experience underlying health concerns.

4.0 **Overview of 2017 Progress Report**

4.1 The Progress Report identified that the level of NO₂ within a limited area of Mill St, Tonyrefail and separately Cardiff Rd, Treforest is in breach of the annual mean Air Quality Objective for NO₂. The combined areas in breach is expected to incorporate 28 properties. The elevated levels of NO₂ at these locations has been linked, in the case of the former to local road traffic moving through a congested built up urban environment, and in the latter, large volumes of regional road traffic using the A470. As such new Air Quality Management Areas will be produced for each area respectively.

4.2 In 2007, the original Llantwit Fardre-Church Village-Tonteg AQMA covered 428 properties. Following the completion of the by-pass in 2010, further air quality monitoring demonstrated a significant reduction in NO₂ along the newly

classified B4595. As such in 2015 the AQMA was replaced with 2 significantly smaller AQMA's in Llantwit Fardre (12 properties) and Church Village (28 properties). The 2017 Progress Report further highlights the evolving nature of local air quality and that, in certain circumstances, areas previously experiencing poor air quality can improve. The Llantwit Fardre Air Quality Management Area, which previously experienced elevated levels of NO₂ associated with significant traffic congestion along the B4595, has in recent years shown dramatic improvement. This improvement has largely been the result of a significant volume of traffic being relieved by the Church Village Bypass, with a number of years of monitoring data demonstrating continued and sustainable compliance. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to revoke the existing Llantwit Fardre Air Quality Management Area, covering 12 houses, albeit continued vigilance will be maintained to assess the continuing affects of increased local urbanisation.

- 4.3 To facilitate future Air Quality Action Plans, the 2017 Progress Report also contains information on the source apportionment of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), within several current and proposed AQMA's. This analysis reinforces the importance of road traffic, its management and the local urban environment in the local prevalence of NO₂. The 2017 Progress Report also restates that the Local Authority will continue to aspire to implement its current Air Quality Action Plans where possible. To facilitate delivery of the Plans, the Local Authority will seek to identify dedicated external funding opportunities to deliver any future Air Quality Action Plan actions.
- 4.4 The 2017 Progress Report provides an update on proposed and existing developments and ongoing monitoring. Other pollutants which tend to be associated with emissions from heavy industry or large conurbations, are, in general, not considered to be prominent any longer within Rhondda Cynon Taf. However, long term monitoring has identified the area of Glyncoch near Craig Yr Hesp Quarry as experiencing levels of Fine Particulate Matter requiring further study. It is possible that during 2016 the impact of Craig Yr Hesp Quarry on local Fine Particulate Matter levels may have been subdued. This change, which has been observed since 2015, may be as a result of ongoing improvements to reduce emissions from Craig Yr Hesp Quarry or prevailing meteorological conditions since 2015 being less conducive to the transportation of emissions.
- 4.5 A two month consultation was undertaken on the 2017 Progress Report in October 2017. All submissions have been considered and the report has been widely accepted. The consultation involved an invitation to the public, Elected Members and various interested parties to make comments on the report. The submission from Welsh Government deemed the report to be well structured and a comprehensive assessment of air quality in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which met the necessary requirements. There were also supportive comments from Public Health Wales, acknowledging the informative report and offering to work with the Council in meeting Future Generation obligations to achieve broader air quality improvements in the Cwm Taf region. The 2017 Progress Report can be accessed on the Council's website via the following link:

<http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Business/LicencesandPermits/Pollutionrelatedlicences/RelatedDocuments/2017ProgressReport.pdf>

5.0 **Action Planning**

5.1 On declaring AQMA's there is a duty on the Council to produce Air Quality Action Plans (AQAP's) to seek to improve air quality in each of the respective areas. The action planning process requires a number of stakeholders to work together to identify and implement solutions to achieve the required reductions in NO₂. This involves working with Officers from the Highways and Planning Departments, as well as external agencies such as the Natural Resources Wales (formerly the Environment Agency) and Public Health Wales. An agreed methodology is used to progress and produce the AQAP's. Furthermore, close integration with other environmental agendas, such as Climate Change, Noise Action Planning and Active Travel, is critical to maximise the efficient use of available resources.

5.2 The actions detailed within the AQAP's incorporate a broad range of aspirations and mechanisms to affect local air quality. Some of the actions are specific to a particular Air Quality Management Area, where others may provide borough wide improvement. The range of actions identified are outlined below:

- Identifying high risk areas where targeted local changes to existing traffic management could reduce or displace traffic congestion.
- Exploring targeted local increased traffic waiting and parking restrictions and their enforcement at specific areas to improve traffic flow.
- Possible local rearrangement of a bus stop to reduce the impact of bus waiting on local traffic congestion.
- Advocating the reduction in permitted speed along part of the A470.
- Encouraging borough wide behavioural change by the use of existing resources and policy mechanisms to influence greater uptake of public transport, car sharing, active travel and efficient journey planning.

5.3 The Council has benefited from Welsh Government Grants to fund actions contained within the AQAP's. In 2013 this included the examination and modification of existing traffic lights at targeted road junctions within Aberdare, and Mountain Ash, which led to reduced congestion and improved air quality. Further grant funding was awarded in April 2017 via the Single Revenue Grant, this has been utilised to produce an Integrated Travel Map for Pontypridd Town and to undertake work to encourage greater use of Active Travel Routes in RCT.

6.0 **Welsh Government and next steps**

6.1 Improving air quality is seen as a key priority for Welsh Government and it contributes significantly to the well-being goals established via the Well-being of Future Generations legislation. Pursuant to The Well-being of Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the "level of Nitrogen Dioxide in ambient air" has been set

as National Indicator No. 4. The National Indicator will take a burden reduction approach aimed at achieving a reduction in the general level of Nitrogen Dioxide throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf. Progress in achieving improvement will be gauged against milestones, the achievement of which will be reported in a "Future Trends Report" produced by Welsh Government.

6.2 The Welsh Government has also outlined its intentions to develop and produce a Clean Air Plan for Wales in 2018. The plan will include the following actions:

- improvements to local authority reporting on air quality problems and their plans to deal with them
- a clean air zone framework for Wales to ensure consistent and effective establishment of clean air zones by local authorities wherever they are needed
- establishment of a national air quality assessment and monitoring centre for Wales
- the delivery of ongoing cross-Government communications and interventions to raise public awareness of poor air quality.

6.3 Welsh Government also plan to strengthen the air quality provisions in 'Planning Policy Wales', and funding is being made available for the single revenue grant in 2018 for local authorities to support local action on air quality. The Welsh Government has recognised there is not one single solution to the challenge and plan to embed air quality improvement in policies on planning, infrastructure, transport, active travel and public health.

6.4 The newly created Public Service Boards also need to take account of local authorities' air quality progress reports when putting together assessments of local well-being. This has paved the way for more collaborative work on air quality between public bodies and provides opportunities to consider public health improvements on a regional basis. Further work is being planned with Public Health Wales and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to assess the interaction between air quality and health in Cwm Taf, particularly with regard to the most deprived communities.

7.0 **Conclusions**

7.1 The vast majority of Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to exhibit good air quality. The Local Authority has identified that it is necessary to declare new Air Quality Management Areas at Treforest and Tonyrefail for breaches of the annual mean Air Quality Objective for Nitrogen Dioxide. In addition, the Local Authority has identified that it is necessary, to revoke the existing Llantwit Fardre AQMA, previously declared for a breach of the annual mean Air Quality Objective for Nitrogen Dioxide. This gives a current total of 16 AQMA's in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

7.2 The Local Authority will strive to build-upon and improve joined-up working, both inter-departmentally and with external bodies, to enable a partnership approach to local air quality management.

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