

Agenda Item	8.
Report No	CLH 64/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 10 October 2019

Report Title: Air Quality and Highland Schools

Report By: Interim Chief Officer Resources (Community Services)

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report details the work being undertaken by the Council to improve air quality in the Highlands and specifically at schools.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. note the continued promotion of the resources available to schools to enable Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets projects;
- ii. note that Environmental Health will further promote awareness of measures that can be taken by the public and businesses to improve air quality and, where resources permit, undertake projects aimed at reducing idling vehicles at schools; and
- iii. agree to Road Safety and Environmental Health developing a pilot project on air quality improvement with a willing and appropriate school.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

3.1.1 Limited staff resources are currently available for air quality work.

3.1.2 The Environmental Health team has 0.45 FTE (0.05 Senior EHO, 0.30 specialist Technical officer, 0.10 Technical Officer for monitoring). On a very limited basis other enforcement staff can participate in projects e.g. related to idling.

3.1.3 The road safety team currently has 2 posts to cover the Highlands, down from previous 6 posts.

- 3.2 **Legal**
The Council have statutory duties on Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) as set out in Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. The Council have a statutory duty under the Road Traffic Act 1991 to carry out measures designed to promote road safety.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)**
Active travel and actions to improve air quality will bring positive community impacts.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever**
Work on air quality supports the Council's climate change commitments.
- 3.5 **Risk**
Failure to deliver on air quality statutory responsibilities will impact on the health of residents and visitors to the Highland and bring reputational risk to the Council. Following the Scottish Government's Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy will help mitigate this risk. General air quality in the Highlands is good.
- 3.6 **Gaelic**
No implications identified.

4. Background

- 4.1 The impact of Air pollution on health has been long recognised and legislation on emissions has greatly improved air quality over the last century. Despite these improvements air pollution is still a risk to health and research is demonstrating the significant public health risks linked to air pollution. Health Protection Scotland have estimated that there are 1700 deaths a year in Scotland attributable to the impact of exposure to manmade fine particulate matter (PM2.5), much of which is derived from road transport vehicles.
- 4.2 A recent Public Health England report on interventions to improve air quality noted a need to focus on reducing the impact of air pollution on children. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution and exposure to air pollution in early life can have a long-lasting effect on lung function. The report emphasised the key role Local Authorities have in this objective.
- 4.3 In Scotland, the Council is following the Scottish Government's Cleaner air for Scotland (CAFS) strategy, and the legal requirements Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) as set out in Part IV of the Environment Act 1995.
- 4.4 The duties around air quality fully support the Council's programme and priorities to make the Highlands a healthier region and as a place to thrive.

5. Air Quality in the Highlands

- 5.1 The first review of air quality in the Highlands by Environmental Health was published in 1998. From that initial review to the most recent, the sampling and reports have concluded that general air quality in the Highland Council area is good.
- 5.2 Over the years reviews have identified other possible localised issues and detailed assessments have been carried out:
- benzene levels at petrol terminals in Inverness Harbour and Nigg (2003);
 - Sulphur dioxide levels due to solid fuel in housing in Castletown (2003); and
 - Sulphur dioxide levels due to Alcan Smelter in Fort William (2003).

The detailed assessments concluded that there was no likelihood of air quality objectives not being met due to these processes.

- 5.3 The Council has declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2014 following Nitrogen dioxide sampling in Inverness on Queensgate and Union Street. Measured concentrations in excess of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels were found that could impact on the residential properties in the area. Results since have generally been improving and Environmental Health will be reviewing the status of the AQMA.
- 5.4 Active monitoring is ongoing by the Council in Inverness, Fort William and Dingwall. National monitoring is also carried out at 3 sites in the Highlands: Inverness, Fort William and Strath Vaich in Ross-shire. Daily reporting from the sites is available on <http://www.scottishairquality.scot/latest/>
- 5.5 The Environmental Health team has recently made a successful bid for a number of portable air quality monitors that can provide rapid assessment of local air quality. These will be used to support work related to the AQMA and can also be used for education projects with schools.
- 5.6 Idling vehicles - The Council has adopted the fixed penalty powers available under the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Regulations 2003. This makes vehicle idling an offence and offenders may be issued with a £20 fixed penalty notice (FPN).
- 5.7 The legislation covers all vehicles on public roads including buses, taxis and private cars. The legislation does not apply to:
- vehicles that move slowly due to road works or congestion;
 - vehicles stopped at traffic lights;
 - vehicles under test/repair; or
 - vehicles defrosting a windscreen in very cold weather.
- 5.8 It must be noted that the Scottish Government Guidance on the regulations stress that the intent is to encourage all motorists to have due regard to the local environment. An educative approach is suggested with enforcement action purely advisory in the vast majority of cases. To date, the Council has not issued any FPNs for idling.

6. Air quality and schools

- 6.1 In terms of schools, in 2016 the Council undertook monitoring at Nairn Rosebank Primary School investigating the impact of A96 traffic pollution at the school. The monitoring found that Nitrogen dioxide concentrations were significantly below the UK Air Quality Objectives within the school grounds. Other than the work in Nairn at Rosebank Primary School, there has not been any specific monitoring at schools as wider screening has not identified particular issues.
- 6.2 Many of the air quality recommendations focussed on children, such as interventions at schools to work with children and parents to increase active travel, reduce idling and increase public awareness of air pollution are already being undertaken by the Council through the Road Safety team.
- 6.3 Through various projects, the Road Safety team has made significant contributions to promote active travel and consequently reduce use of vehicles. In summary, this includes:

- active engagement with 175 schools throughout the Highlands; and
- £5.7m of funding to schools in the Highlands since the year 2000.

Details of some of the projects supported are provided below.

6.4 **Safer Routes to School**

6.4.1 Safer Routes to School improves safety, and removes barriers to walking and cycling to school. Funding is available on application to schools for cycle storage, improving routes to school and addressing road safety issues to encourage active travel.

6.4.2 Small Grant Funding (up to £3,000) and Large Grant Funding (£3,000 to £30,000) can be applied for by individual Highland schools towards Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets projects. For Large Grant Funding applications a School Travel Plan must be produced.

6.4.3 School Travel Plans aim to:

- encourage pupils, parents and staff to think about travel choices and choose alternatives to the car when coming to school;
- encourage active travel like walking and cycling; and
- measure change and shifts in the way we travel

6.5 **Parksmart**

Parksmart provides support to schools where parent parking is an issue. It engages pupils to design a Parksmart banner for the school gate or fence to stop vehicles being parked on the footway, road markings or where they prevent safe road crossing. This can be run as a competition with the best artwork printed on the banner. Leaflets can also be provided through the Road Safety Unit to be handed out to drivers.

6.6 **Junior Road Safety Officer**

The Junior Road Safety Officer (JRSO) scheme promotes road safety by encouraging pupils to raise awareness of road safety issues at their primary school. As a JRSO pupils will:

- present road safety information;
- create a road safety noticeboard;
- run Parksmart; and
- monitor pupils to make sure that they participate in road safety events.

6.7 **Go For It - walking and cycling reward card**

6.7.1 Go For It is an incentive project to encourage active lifestyles and to reduce school gate parking congestion. Pupils gain points for active travel to or from school to gain a reward. For example if pupils walk or cycle 50 times to or from school they earn one Go For It Reward Card from the Road Safety Unit. One reward card is redeemable against one Activity Reward or one Prize Reward. Select a Go For It Reward.

6.7.2 Smaller rewards can be provided to schools as an incentive to encourage pupils that reach half way (25 active journeys) to encourage them to achieve 50 active journeys to or from school. Small rewards include pencils, sharpeners, erasers, rulers, reflective stickers, keyrings and reflective slap-bands.

6.8 **Targeted Active Travel Promotion in Schools**

The Council, via an external grant, is currently funding 3 positions (one iBike Officer and two Go By Cycle Workers) within 5 secondary schools and their associated cluster primary schools within Highland. Their remit is to promote active travel (cycling,

scooting and walking) to and from school and for independent journeys in leisure time at these schools and, in doing so, support staff and volunteers (school champions) in promoting active travel within the school community. Their remit includes the promotion of Bikeability (Cycle Training for Primary School aged pupils). In addition to this the Council are currently recruiting a specific Bikeability Officer (another externally funded post) to work within the Road Safety Team.

7. Future air quality work

- 7.1 In August 2019, the Scottish Government published an independent review of the Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy. The report's overall conclusion is that Scotland is generally performing quite well by EU and global comparison, with ambient atmospheric pollution concentration levels and regulated pollution emissions generally continuing to fall as a result of actions taken thus far. However, the report stresses that further work is required to minimise the risks to public health. It includes recommendations for Local Authorities such as the need to ensure better recognition and integration of the different disciplines and inter-connected policy and delivery areas related to air pollution.
- 7.2 Going forward, the Council will need to ensure that effective liaison continues between all teams with responsibilities and duties that impact on air quality.
- 7.3 For schools, it is crucial the work of the Road Safety team is supported to allow the continued promotion of the resources available to schools to enable Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets projects.
- 7.4 Environmental Health will further promote awareness of measures than can be taken by the public and businesses to improve air quality. This will include promotion of anti-idling advice and of National Clean Air Day held every June.
- 7.5 Where resources permit, officers will participate in projects aimed at reducing idling vehicles at schools. There will be good opportunities to develop this with the access to portable air monitors and linking with schools which are trialling projects such as exclusion zones.
- 7.6 Members are asked to agree to Road Safety and Environmental Health developing a pilot project on air quality improvement with a willing and appropriate school. Given the limited resources available, a single pilot would be a cost effective and proportionate measure. Appropriate schools will be where there is interest in active travel and air quality. This project could include safer routes, Parksmart and localised air monitoring and idling education/enforcement. Close liaison with the head teacher and key staff will be crucial. The participation of SEPA will be investigated as they provide educational resources on air quality and access to funding through e.g. Citizen Science projects.

Designation: Interim Chief Officer Resources (Community Services)

Date: 24 September 2019

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Background Papers:

- Highland Council Annual Air Quality Reports:

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1281/pollution/73/pollution/2>

- Scottish Government independent review of CAFS Strategy
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/pollution/air-quality/>
- Scottish Government CAFS Strategy
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/cleaner-air-scotland-strategy-independent-review/>
- Scottish Government – Idling powers
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-authority-powers-require-drivers-switch-engines-parked-guidance-issued/pages/1/>
- Health Protection Scotland - https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2452/documents/1_air-pollution-health-briefing-%20PM2.5-attributable-mortality-v1%200.pdf
- Public Health England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution#resources>
- Public Health England – interventions to improve air quality
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795185/Review_of_interventions_to_improve_air_quality.pdf