

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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| Title of Report: | Local Air Quality Management - Vehicle Anti Idling | |
| Report No: | OAS/SE/19/001 <i>(This item was deferred from its meeting held on 7 November 2018, due to the meeting being inquorate)</i> | |
| Report to and date: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee | 9 January 2019 |
| Portfolio holder: | Councillor Susan Glossop Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth Tel: 01284 728377 Email: susan.glossop@westsuffolk.gov.uk | |
| Lead officer: | Matthew Axton Environment Officer Tel: 01284 757041 Email: matthew.axton@westsuffolk.gov.uk | |
| Purpose of report: | The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested officers to bring forward a report to assess the challenges of vehicle idling in St Edmundsbury, and potential options to address potential issues. | |
| Recommendation: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 1) The Committee is asked to <u>NOTE</u> the technical information on vehicle idling (Appendix 1); and 2) <u>RECOMMEND</u> the proposals to Portfolio Holders to undertake a public campaign in conjunction with other Suffolk Local Authorities where this can be undertaken in appropriate timescales. | |

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| Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i> | | <i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| Consultation: | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As this report seeks to explore options, consultation has not been undertaken at this stage. | |
| Alternative option(s): | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not undertaking any action to prevent vehicle idling. This could result in criticism from the public and / or campaign groups on this high profile environmental issue. Section 4 of this report outlines the other options considered. | |
| Implications: | | | |
| <i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are small scale financial commitments associated with the developing of campaign materials. Further details are set out in the options appraisal and technical report. Further financial commitments could be considered if the campaign is successful. | |
| <i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | |
| <i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | |
| <i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are legal implications associated with the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices. See the sections 1 of the technical report for more information. | |
| <i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A brief assessment of any equality and diversity implications has been undertaken and summarised in section 3 of the technical report | |
| Risk/opportunity assessment: | | <i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i> | |
| Risk area | Inherent level of risk (before controls) | Controls | Residual risk (after controls) |

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| Statutory Responsibilities – although responsibilities relating to vehicle idling do not classify, failure to comply with responsibilities that exist around air quality means the council may be open to challenge. | Low | This is not directly a statutory responsibility, however it will support statutory work. | Low |
| Reputational – air quality and the associated public health impacts are increasingly being debated in the public domain, therefore any actions taken by the council may be viewed with increasing scrutiny. | Medium | The Councils’ work will help achieve a credible pathway to improving air quality. | Low |
| Financial – spending on new initiatives receives a high level of scrutiny given the current constraints on the public purse. | Low | Cost-benefit of key work will continue to be reviewed and adjusted. | Low |
| Ward(s) affected: | All Wards | | |
| Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i> | <p>Work programme addition proposal submitted by the Chair: Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting 18 April 2018</p> <p>NICE report 2017</p> <p>Unicef UK report 2018</p> | | |
| Documents attached: | <p>Appendix 1 – Technical Assessment of Vehicle Idling and the enforcement options.</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Options Appraisal</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Results of research in to other Local Authorities work on vehicle idling</p> | | |

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Air quality has direct implications for human health. Research shows that poor air quality can reduce the quality of life by causing health problems, especially in those who are more vulnerable such as children, the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. There is considerable research showing a link between exposure to air pollution and effects on health. This has led to numerous papers and guidance documents from health bodies including, among others, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Public Health England (PHE) and Unicef.
- 1.2 Improving the air quality will help to improve the long term health of our local communities, makes our towns more attractive places to visit and therefore improves the local economy.
- 1.3 The Council has statutory duties to monitor and report on local air quality and declare special management areas where pollution exceeds nationally set objectives. Tackling vehicle idling does not form part of these statutory duties, however, it is complementary to the statutory duties and is one tool among many which may be used to help improve the local air quality, especially in more sensitive areas described by a recent NICE report below
- 1.4 NICE guidelines (Air Pollution: outdoor air quality and health. June 2017) suggest a number of non-statutory actions to improve air quality, one of which is introducing:

"Bylaws and other action to support 'no vehicle idling' areas, particularly where vulnerable groups congregate (such as outside schools, hospitals and care homes) and in areas where exposure to road-traffic-related air pollution is high"

- 1.5 In general, air pollution in West Suffolk is below (compliant with) the nationally and internationally set objectives, other than for some small isolated areas. However, evidence is being published that confirms that health impacts are possible below these objectives and work to reduce air pollution will have a positive impact outside of the statutory framework.
- 1.6 Suffolk Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) officers from all local authorities meet on a regular basis with representative from Suffolk County Council, Public Health England and Highways England to share best practice and ensure a coordinated countywide approach. This network is well established.
- 1.7 Within West Suffolk we have received a small number of complaints from members of the public relating to vehicle idling in Bury St Edmunds over the last year, including:
 - 2 complaints relating to idling on Westgate Street associated with pick-ups from the two primary schools in the area
 - 1 complaint relating to idling in the Spring Lane associated with pick-ups from the nearby secondary school
 - 1 complaint relating to idling in the town centre.

We don't have any recorded incidents regarding the other sensitive areas (hospitals and care homes) mentioned in the NICE guidance.

2. Vehicle Idling – Summary of Technical Information

- 2.1 The act of idling in a vehicle (i.e. leaving your vehicle engine running when you are parked) and the impact on air quality is not a simplistic relationship in that turning off your engine is not always beneficial for very short periods. The air quality benefit from turning your engine off and restarting the car is dependent on numerous factors, however, in most instances idling for greater than 1 minute is considered to have a negative impact on air quality, although this may vary depending on a multitude of factors and should not be taken as an absolute figure. Further detail is provided in the technical review in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 Enforcement powers do exist with regards to vehicle idling, as laid out in the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002. These allow for the local authority to issue a £20 Fixed Penalty Notice where drivers refuse to turn off their engines when requested to do so by an authorised officer.
- 2.4 Measuring air quality benefits with relation to any reduction in vehicle idling would be a difficult given the lack of existing data at sensitive locations as listed in the NICE guidelines and the transient nature of the problem. It should also be noted that a reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide (which is measured locally) levels may not be reflected in a reduction in other contaminants such as particulates.
- 2.5 Following on from themes in the NICE report around the impact of air quality on sensitive areas in our communities, a Unicef UK report on the daily risk to UK children from air pollution, dated September 2018, finds children are disproportionately exposed to higher doses of pollution during the school run. The report suggests that major gains for children's health could be made if funding, interventions and policies were targeted to pollution reduction around schools and nurseries and on the school run itself. Although this report is not specific to West Suffolk, the conclusions are considered relevant.
- 2.6 However, the formation of formal 'no vehicle idling' areas, as suggested by the NICE report, could cause a significant burden on the local authority due to the consultation required and the need for bespoke solutions at each locality. It is also considered this would provide a mixed message, in that it was acceptable to idle outside of these areas.
- 2.7 There is evidence, published by University of East Anglia, to suggest that road signs at junctions can cause a behavioural change in drivers, with the number of people switching off engines when signs were placed at the junction increasing from 9.6% to 17%, however, this research did not link directly to improvements in air quality as this was not measured as part of the study.
- 2.8 Evidence suggests that campaigns and education can have a significant effect on behaviour. Idling Action London record an 80% switch off when making a direct request to drivers, with many pledging to give up the habit of idling for good when provided with educational message.

3. Summary of other Local Authorities

- 3.1 A review of other local authorities has taken place, which identifies a number of approaches taken with regards to reducing vehicle idling. The review represents a cross section of local authorities as well as targeting our Nearest Neighbours (i.e. those identified as being similar to FHDC or SEBC by CIPFA). This review identifies a variety of approaches from formal enforcement and high profile campaigns through to taking no action. The level of action is often linked to the magnitude of the air quality problems in the corresponding authority. Further details of the research in to other local authorities is provided in **Appendix 3**.
- 3.2 Multiple authorities or public bodies are involved where there are significant engagement campaigns (Idling action London, Sussex, Surrey, Staffordshire), although lower key, website based, campaigns tend to be run by single authorities. Defra notes Sussex and Surrey as best practice examples, with county wide campaigns targeting schools to encourage behaviour change, and reduce idling, predominantly in the areas around schools.
- 3.3 No authorities have adopted the 'no idling areas' in line with the recommendations of the NICE guidelines. Action is either taken district/borough wide or campaigns target particular areas, but without formal 'areas' being designated.
- 3.4 Where formal enforcement is used, this is used infrequently and as a last resort, with education being cited as a more effective method of behavioural change in most cases.

4. Options and Recommendations

- 4.1 We have undertaken an options appraisal to help assess the various actions that could be undertaken, which is included as **Appendix 2**. For each option, the costs and benefits of undertaking the action as West Suffolk alone and as a Suffolk wide partnership were considered.

- 4.2 **Option A:** Undertake a campaign, initially targeted at schools and expanding as necessary:

Based on the research and options appraisal, it is recommended that this is option taken forward as a Suffolk Wide campaign. Evidence shows campaigns in other areas have been successful and have had a positive impact on driver behaviour. Identified best practice is to undertake regional or county wide campaigns which makes best use of county functions such as schools, transport and public health.

- 4.3 This option has been discussed at Suffolk Air Quality Officers meetings and has been supported in principle by all authorities. Initial work is underway to establish the scope of joint working, subject to Councillor endorsement.
- 4.4 **Option B:** Adopt delegated powers to use Fixed Penalty Notices under the traffic regulations 2002.

Based on the research and options appraisal, it is not recommended that this option is taken forward on a West Suffolk wide basis due to the possible negative impacts, as explored in the options appraisal. There may be slightly more benefit from undertaking a county wide approach, however, it is proposed this is not sufficient to warrant undertaking this option.

- 4.5 The focus of attention on this matter should relate to delivery of a proactive campaign to raise awareness of the issue. However, it may be necessary, on an exceptional basis only, to use the powers set out in the 2002 Regulations and serve a fixed penalty notice. If these recommendations were adopted by cabinet, we would seek delegation solely for officers to issue a fixed penalty notices to those not turning off their engine when asked to do so where it was identified these are drivers who have been asked previously to turn their engine off and where such request has been documented and the offence repeated.

It should be noted that this option is not preferred as both the evidence base and options appraisal highlight its difficulties.

4.6 **Option C: Road signs**

Based on the research and options appraisal, it is not recommended that this option is taken forward. Although signs can have a slight impact on behaviour, there is insufficient benefit of signs without the benefit of a campaign and supporting materials.

- 4.7 Where road signs are placed at junctions there is insufficient evidence to suggest this provides suitable air quality benefits. We would be looking to replicate this in areas where vehicles are not stationary in traffic but stationary on the edge of the main highway, such as waiting or parked.

4.8 **Recommendation**

As above, it is recommended that officers continue to pursue opportunities for running public campaigns (**option 1**), such as with local schools. If possible, this will be done with the support of the Suffolk Air Quality Partnership.

- 4.9 As explored in the options appraisal, there are number of factors that should be considered when reviewing the options. These factors have been considered for the recommended option and are summarised below:

Strategic fit: This expands on our existing work to continue improving and monitoring air quality in West Suffolk. This also follows our ambition to work with our partners to build strong and resilient communities. This could also support ongoing work promoting Suffolk as a green county.

Legal implications: there are no direct legal implications for this option.

Financial implications: the costs of developing materials to use in schools could be spread across a number of authorities. Resource could be pooled and there may be efficiencies in terms of officer time as some partners have existing strong links in school and health settings.

Equality implications

| Group | Positive Impacts | (Perceived) Negative Impacts |
|--|---|---|
| Young people | Although the effects are unlikely to be measurable, this option starts to take action to reduce excess air pollutants being created by vehicles waiting around schools. High levels of these air pollutants can cause poor air quality, which affects lung development in children as they are still growing. | Singling out schools as areas could lead people to think these areas have particularly bad air quality. For most areas this is not the case, it is more around protecting sensitive groups in society, those in school being one of them. |
| Those with reduced mobility – e.g. disabled or elderly | | Those with reduced mobility may perceive this negatively if they think it will reduce the time or frequency they can park close to a school for pick up/drop off. This is not the case, the only change is that they would be encouraged to switch off their engine for any time they do spend waiting near the school. |
| Parents/carers | Combatting poor air quality in the environment around the child's school has the potential to also reduce the pollution the parent/carer is exposed to throughout the day | Parents may perceive this as a way of reducing the time spent waiting near schools. This is not the case, the only change is that they would be encouraged to switch off their engine for any time they do spend waiting near the school. |
| Those affected by rural isolation | | Those who have no other option but to drive to school may perceive this as a way of discouraging travelling to school by car. This is not the case, the only change is that they would be encouraged to switch off their engine for any time they do spend waiting near the school. |