Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Air Quality Training

Present:

Tunbridge Wells	Maidstone
Cllr Barrington-King (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Street Scene)	Cllr Mrs Marshall
Cllr Mrs Crowhurst	Steve Wilcock (Team Leader, Pollution Team)
Cllr Cunningham	Louise Smith (Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer)
Cllr Elliott	
Cllr Mrs Herriott	
Cllr Ms Palmer	
Cllr Patterson	
Cllr Mrs Slade	
Cllr Simmons	
Cllr Thompsett	
Cllr Waldock	
Karin Grey (Environmental Protection Manager)	
Kat Hicks (Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer)	
Laurence Doig (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)	

Presentation by Steve Hedley, Principal Environmental Health Officer, Environmental Research Group, Kings College London.

Mr Hedley began his presentation by explaining that Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 conferred new responsibilities, duties and powers on Local Authorities (LA). Local air quality management formed a key part of the Government's strategy for achieving its air quality objective. The purpose of Part IV of the Environment Act was to implement European obligations relating to air quality. It also meant that regulations would be stipulated and an Air Quality Strategy would be produced, the latest version having been published in July 2007. The primary objective of the Air Quality Strategy was to ensure that "all citizens should have access to outdoor air without significant risk to their health, where this is economically and technically feasible." It was important that these limits were stipulated so that realistic targets could be set.

Under the terms of the Environment Act LAs were required to carry out an Air Quality Review and Assessment; prepare, implement, and modify an Air Quality Action Plan; make an order designating an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) if an area was of particular concern; revoke or modify this order when appropriate; and consult with other organisations at each step of the process, e.g. neighbouring LAs, Defra, environmental agencies. LAs were required to set an objective level for the concentration of each air pollutant and set a target date by which the level should be achieved. The objectives should relate to public exposure to the pollutants and the assessment should focus on those

locations where members of the public were likely to be regularly present and were likely to be exposed over the period of the objective. LAs must strive to meet objective levels, however, failure to meet these targets does not necessarily constitute failure, the goal being that LAs take measures to attempt to reduce the pollutant level. Seven air pollutants were currently regulated in the UK. These were: Carbon monoxide; Benzene; 1,3 Butadiene; Lead; Nitrogen Dioxide; Particles; and Sulphur Dioxide. Mr Hedley explained that Ozone levels were also high, particularly in the South of England, it was however difficult to take measures to reduce this due to the consensus that the high levels could be attributed to activity in Continental Europe. He stated that air pollution was estimated to reduce the life expectancy of every person in the UK by an average of 7-8 months and that this cost the economy an estimated £20billion.

Mr Hedley went on to talk about the Review and Assessment process. He explained that this provided LAs the ability to undertake monitoring in their area, the intention being to carry out a level of assessment commensurate with the risk of an objective being exceeded. The first stage of the process was to carry out an Updating and Screening Assessment, the objective of which was to identify those matters that had changed since the previous Review and Assessment that could lead to an objective being exceeded. The second stage called for the production of a Detailed Assessment to assess the likelihood of an objective being exceeded at locations with relevant exposure and to designate or amend an AQMA. The data collected during the Detailed Assessment should be quality-assured to a high standard with best estimates, taking account of any uncertainty, being used. Further assessment would then be carried out with an Action Plan, including details of actions and a target timescale, ultimately being produced. The action plan could include hard measures, meaning implementing physical change, and soft measures, which involve educating and training people to change their lifestyles. Following each stage of the process consultation with other organisations would take place. An Updating and Screening Assessment would be carried out every three years with two progress reports being produced in the intervening years. The next Assessment was expected in 2009.

Members were informed that LAs had a responsibility to incorporate local air quality issues into Corporate or Community Plans and Strategies and that they should always strive to provide examples of best practice. Kent County Council produced the Local Transport Plan and was responsible for running the County's highways. The Pollution Team leader from Maidstone Borough Council stated that his department worked well with Kent Highways Services (KHS) and provided them with information and data in order to apply pressure on policy-makers to take action to reduce congestion in the Borough. Communication between KHS and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was crucial because the Tunbridge Wells AQMA was designated due to an excess level of Nitrogen Dioxide, the principle source of which was road vehicle emissions. Mr Hedley explained that in the first two rounds of Research and Assessment more than 150 AQMAs were declared in relation to transport emissions. Areas in which it was predicted that Nitrogen Dioxide would exceed the annual mean objective included parts of major conurbations, town centres with congested traffic and dual carriageways and motorways. Particles (PM10) also derived directly from combustion sources including road traffic. Approximately 50 AQMAs declared during the Review and Assessment process cited the 24-hour mean PM10

objective, the majority of which were in combination with Nitrogen Dioxide levels.

A discussion took place regarding the London congestion charge and other road charging schemes that were currently being piloted. It was stated that these schemes had not been initiated to specifically target problematic air quality. It was agreed that an improvement in the standard of public transport would encourage more users. Mr Hedley stated that a prime responsibility of a District Authority targeting air quality was to present the County Council with compelling evidence, sourced from monitoring stations located in the AQMA, proving that traffic congestion in the area was to blame for high levels of Nitrogen Dioxide. County Councils had the power to act on the details given to them by District authorities. He explained that when District Councils worked together they could form effective partnerships through which to lobby the County Council. This partnership could often exert greater pressure on the County to take action, leading to a greater likelihood of success.

The Environmental Protection Manager explained that the Tunbridge Wells AQMA boundary extended 18 metres from the roadside so that the air behind houses would also be measured. She stated that the draft Action Plan would be taken to the Management Group for consultation, would then be taken to Kent County Council (KCC) to ensure no errors were present, and finally be taken to Cabinet for approval. She explained that KCC had a duty to take the findings of the Action Plan into account as it informed the Local Transport Plan for Kent. She provided details of the Kent and Medway Air Quality Monitoring Network, which obtains complex data from monitoring stations throughout Kent and Medway and made this available for viewing on the website www.kentair.org.uk.

Members were informed that mercury emissions did not form part of the local Air Quality Strategy. The main sources of high levels of emissions were crematoriums. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Street Scene explained that the Council had invested £600,000 to produce two chimneys and that these would reduce mercury emissions from the Kent and Sussex Crematorium by 50% by 2010. He emphasised that budgetary constraints meant that there was a limit to the amount of work that the Council could undertake with regard to improving air quality but that the cabinet viewed it as a corporate social responsibility.

The Environmental Protection Manager provided details of the Tunbridge Wells Air Quality Monitoring Site, which was located on St Johns Road and had been in operation for the past two years. She explained that the site was set up four years ago and cost approximately £60,000, subsequent service costs being £6000 per annum. The site had to be serviced twice per year and calibrated every two weeks to ensure accurate readings. The gathered data was sent directly to AEA Energy and Environment to process and check for errors. The Environmental Protection Manager stated that NO2 was also measured in the approximately 150 diffusion tubes located throughout the Borough. This form of measurement was labour intensive and a yearly average was necessary due to the high risk of potential inaccuracies in recorded data.

Mr Hedley and the Officers were thanked for the presentation and for organising and attending the event.