

# **STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**16 October 2019**

## **Council Questions**

### **1. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change received from Councillor Gledhill:**

“Given the recent designation of Leek Town Centre and Cellarhead Traffic Lights as Air Quality Management Areas owing to excess levels of Nitrogen Dioxide being emitted from passing vehicles and causing air pollution, what steps are being taken by SMDC to deal with this situation and its impact on public health?”

#### **Response:**

Now the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) have been declared, Air Quality Action Plans have to be produced within 12 months. The Council will identify steps which can be implemented to try and reduce the level of nitrogen dioxide below the national objectives and will formally consult on the plan.

The range of options for reducing the level of traffic pollution are very wide but not all options will be helpful in the area. Some of these steps could include changing road priorities both within the AQMAs or outside them; using traffic calming to either restrict traffic flow or make it flow more smoothly; or providing alternative routes for the vehicles to travel where the pollution levels will not have a significant impact. Changes could also be made to alter the number of heavy vehicles using roads although the benefits of this appear, at the moment, to be limited. The following promotions have taken place so far:

- 2 members of staff have been appointed to work with schools and businesses
- A business event was held in August
- Links to Air Quality Grants have been placed on the Council’s website in relation to EV Charging Points for business
- An ECO Stars Scheme, a haulage specific campaign, has been launched

The Council has engaged/will be engaging with the following schools in the area:

- Westwood First School
- All Saints First School
- Cellarhead
- St Edwards Middle School (15,16<sup>th</sup> October)
- Churnet View Middle (TBA)
- St Marys (TBA)

An Air Aware Scheme is currently being promoted in partnership with Staffordshire County Council. This is linked to schools and businesses with options to consider including:

- Leave your car at home (public transport)
- Car share
- Turn your engine off
- Cycle/Walk/Scoot
- Alternative routes
- Future proof with alternative fuels
- Energy at home

The Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has just announced the Air Quality Grant for 19/20 to support projects designed to:

- Provide air quality benefits soon (in the next 1 to 2 years)
- Develop solutions over the longer term by increasing awareness and encouraging

Meetings and engagement scheduled to support the development of the Action Plans include:

- Integrated Transport Plan 2018 review
- Staffordshire Air Quality forum meeting on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019, to commence formal engagement with the Highways Authority
- Air Quality Project Board meeting on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019 (including representatives from the County Council and Public Health service) to discuss promotion and aligning activities with our partners.

The Council currently has 45 monitoring tubes across the Moorlands. The monitoring point locations are reviewed at the end of every year and the Council will target areas of concern. The next review will be January. The Monitoring points are rotated throughout the District. Councillors and members of the public can suggest areas of concern and the Pollution Team will look to respond and site monitoring points accordingly.

## **2. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Councillor Yates:**

“The recent work undertaken to resolve and remedy the blight of long term empty houses, and for that matter redundant buildings in general, has highlighted the shortcomings in the Council Tax and Business Rates policy for vacant properties.

Could a review, under the auspices of the Community O&S Work Programme be undertaken to review and amend the terms and the application of this policy to encourage timely redevelopment and return to use by giving Council Tax/Business Rate holidays for these properties and to prevent "land and property banking" by owners by increasing charges if properties are left empty over time?”

**Response:**

In line with the relevant regulations, the Council currently offer discounts and exemptions in relation to uninhabitable properties and short-term empty properties to encourage owners to bring these properties back into use.

The Council takes a robust approach to addressing empty properties in the District and more recently, the Council has engaged with an external company to undertake a review of empty properties over 6 months, which involves an initial canvass followed by an inspection if required. Following completion of this review, the Council intends to issue a questionnaire to the owners of those properties that remain empty to understand the reasons why the properties are empty and look to support them where possible in bringing those properties back into use.

There is a commitment in the Committee work programme to provide an Empty Property Update at a future Resources Overview & Scrutiny meeting. Alongside this the Council will also be reviewing the Council Tax/Business Rates Discounts, Exemptions and Reliefs policies – which will include a review of the current long-term empty premium.

**3. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Councillor Cawley:**

“To ask the Leader of the Council what progress she has made in her discussions on the provision and improvement of bus services in the Staffordshire Moorlands.”

**Response:**

A verbal response will be provided at the meeting.