Air Quality Action Plan - FAQs

1. **What is the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)?**
This is a Policy document that contains series of 18 actions and measures to be taken by the Council to try to improve nitrogen dioxide levels within Air Quality Management Areas and across the wider borough. Research has shown that there is no simple single option and that a number of complementary actions are proposed.

2. **Why does Warrington need one?**
The Council has a statutory duty to assess air quality across the borough and to compare pollution levels against national objective limits. If these objective limits are exceeded then the Council must designate that area an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and produce an Action Plan to try to improve the air quality. This Action Plan is proposed following designation of the Warrington AQMA in November 2016 and is to replace the existing Plan contained within the Local Transport Plan.

3. **Does Warrington have a major problem with pollution?**
The majority of Warrington has good air quality but there are areas close to major roads that slightly exceed the national objective limit for nitrogen dioxide. Air quality levels in Warrington are similar to other authorities. Across the UK there are over 700 Air Quality Management Areas in over 300 local authorities. The original motorway-related Air Quality Management Area was designated in 2002. National predictions based on improvements in engine technology suggested that air quality would improve. These predictions were not realised and due to pro-active increased monitoring and growing knowledge of air quality issues, additional areas were found to exceed the limits close to major roads. The Warrington Air Quality Management Area was then designated in 2016, and follows the major arterial routes into and out of the town centre. While we have found new areas of poor air quality, we have concluded that generally across Warrington air quality levels have remained static over recent years.

4. **What are the main aims of the AQAP?**
The main aim is to improve air quality within Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and therefore improve the health of residents. Whilst the actions are targeted towards nitrogen dioxide and the AQMAs, there is expected to be a wider health benefit from reductions in other pollutants, such as particulates, across the wider borough.

5. **How many action points are there within the plan?**
There are an initial 18 actions proposed covering 3 areas: policy; infrastructure; and additional measures. Whilst the Plan is to run from 2017 to 2022, it is expected to evolve with regular reviews over this time, enabling additional actions to be included within this timeframe when required.
6. How have these action points been developed?
An Air Quality Programme Board, chaired by the Director of Public Health, has been set up to oversee the Plan. The Board is made up of senior managers and Councillor Portfolio Holders representing Transport, Planning, Public Health and Environmental Health teams. These have assigned delivery teams to identify initial actions that can be developed.

7. How does the plan support Warrington’s health and wellbeing priorities?
Air quality is the largest environmental risk to the public’s health. It is estimated that there are almost 50,000 premature deaths from poor air quality in the UK each year. For Warrington, we have estimated poor air quality causes approximately 145 premature deaths per year (approximately 80 due to PM2.5 and a further 65 from nitrogen dioxide exposure). People who live in deprived areas; near major roads; and due to their age and any existing medical conditions are more at risk. Pollution peaks can make existing health conditions worse and lead to increased hospital emissions and affect peoples’ quality of life. Health studies from around the world have highlighted potential impacts on cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, diabetes, cancer, stroke and heart attack risk, dementia and certain cancers.

Evidence of health impacts at a local level though is sparse, however. Therefore, the Council is preparing a Joint Needs Strategic Assessment to look further at air quality levels and health data.

8. What are the major challenges facing Warrington in regards to air quality?
A number of areas are outside of the Council’s direct control. For example the motorway network is operated by Highways England; and national policies such as taxation that encourage the growth in diesel vehicles, national public transport infrastructure and planning policies. Warrington also has a specific road network with the Ship Canal and swing bridges that cause issues with congestion. Additionally, the borough is also bi-sected by the River Mersey and is surrounded by a motorway network that puts added pressure on local roads.

It is important that we address our infrastructure needs and plan for future growth. The way we live is also based around car use, and long term actions need to encourage alternative forms of transport.

9. What work is already being carried out to improve air quality in Warrington?
A number of actions are already been carried out to try to improve air quality, through the previous Action Plan. For example:

- Cycle infrastructure has increased significantly, with over 100 km of cycle ways and two bike hire schemes introduced at Bank Quay and Central train stations.
- To encourage uptake in electric vehicles, a new Parking Standards Policy was introduced for 5% of all new parking to include charging points and all new residential with off road parking to have external points fitted. From this the new town centre multi-story car park will have 60 electric charging points from date of opening.
• An Eco Stars Fleet Recognition Scheme has been introduced to encourage freight operators to reduce their emissions.

Whilst those and other actions carried out are positive for improving air quality, levels have remained static and more radical solutions need to be considered. Therefore the new draft action plan is being proposed.

10. What are the causes of poor air quality?
Air pollution is not a new problem in the UK. At the start of the 20th century, power stations and factories were the main sources of air pollution. This led to infamous 'pea-souper' smogs in London during the 1950's which caused thousands of deaths. New legislation was passed (the Clean Air Act) to reduce air pollution, leading to a dramatic drop in smoke and sulphur dioxide levels through the introduction of Smoke Control Areas and tighter controls on industrial emissions.
Since then, changes in the way we live have changed dramatically and this has also changed the air pollution that we breathe. The problem has not gone away, the source and exposure has just changed. Emissions are still mostly caused by combustion, but instead of coal burning, the main local sources are from road traffic. In particular, older vehicles, larger vehicles and diesel vehicles are disproportionately the worst emitters on the road. Sometimes pollution comes from other sources and can cause short term pollution peaks: certain weather conditions can blow pollution from industrial areas of Europe, from forest fires and even dust from the Sahara.

11. Which areas of the borough are affected by the plan? Why those areas?
The Plan concentrates on improving air quality in the Air Quality Management Areas, as these areas have been assessed as breaching the national standards which have been set based on health grounds. Actions though, are expected to have wider benefits across the borough as a whole.

12. What is an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)?
An AQMA is a specified geographical area where pollution levels have been assessed to exceed the national standards. Warrington currently has two AQMAs: the Motorway AQMA; and the Warrington AQMA.

13. Are there any examples of steps that local authorities around the country are taking to improve air quality?
There are a number of examples of best practice across the country which the Council has considered when drafting the Action Plan.
A Workplace Charging Levy was introduced in Nottingham, which has been used to make major investment in the public transport network.
Clean Air Zones are being considered by a number of authorities, with the London Low Emission Zone being the most well-known example.
A number of Councils, including Warrington, have introduced parking standards to include electric vehicle charging points.
14. **What steps can the public take, right now, to help improve air quality?**
The way everyone chooses how to travel affects air pollution. Residents can opt for less polluting cars and consider the ever increasing range of electric vehicles. Instead of using the car for short journeys, consider walking or cycling as these not only reduce pollution but improve general health. For longer journeys, consider whether public transport could be used instead. For further information please see the document “15 Top Tips to Reduce Air Pollution”.

15. **Won’t many of the proposals have a negative impact on motorists?**
The Council’s aim is to improve congestion and journey time flow which will reduce emissions and ultimately benefit motorists. Clean Air Zones can contain a number of measures such as restricting older vehicles from certain areas or introducing road charging. At this time, the action is to assess the feasibility of how such a zone may work and at this stage there is no firm commitment to a zone.

16. **How does air quality in Warrington compare with other, similarly-sized towns and cities?**
Air quality levels in Warrington are similar to other authorities. Across the UK, there are over 700 Air Quality Management Areas in over 300 local authorities.

17. **The World Health Organisation (WHO) recently identified Warrington as one of 44 towns and cities with ‘dangerous’ air. Is the AQAP a response to that?**
The AQAP is in response to exceedances in the nitrogen dioxide national objective limit whilst the WHO report is based on PM2.5 particulate levels. Even though actions are aimed towards nitrogen dioxide, there are expected to be benefits in reducing PM2.5 particulates. The WHO report uses computer modelled, not measured, levels of particulates (PM2.5) that are then compared against their guideline figures which are not statutory. There is a national “target” for PM2.5, which we do meet, but this is higher than the WHO recommendation. There are no actual UK statutory limits for PM2.5 as even at low levels there is still considered to be a health impact. We do though, measure PM2.5 levels at one location in Warrington and these are marginally above the WHO guideline figure.

18. **How does the AQAP link to Warrington’s Local Plan and Western Link proposals?**
The Council has consulted on the local plan and western link. We are grateful for peoples’ comments and views.

The new Local Plan has therefore been included as an action to ensure that air quality is assessed and is a major consideration at an early stage for preferred options and planning policies to aim for long term sustainable growth. Planning policies to mitigate, for example policies on building design and infrastructure, will be included to reduce exposure and encourage public transport.

Any new major infrastructure is assessed for the impact on air quality. Care has to be taken that any major new roads do not displace air quality impacts from one area to another. Where infrastructure is listed as actions within the Plan, for example the
Western Link Road, they are included as they are designed to reduce traffic volumes within problem areas, but will require a full assessment to ensure that changes in air quality are considered and do not cause problems elsewhere.

Planning and infrastructure proposals will be considered as part of our overall plans to manage air quality.

19. **How can people have their say on the plan?**
We are encouraging residents and business to make comments on the AQAP. Comments can be made via the on-line questionnaire on the consultations page of the Council website. This seeks views on each the 18 actions proposed and allows any comments on additional additions that could be considered. Paper copies are available of the questionnaire if requested and we will also consider any general email comments made.
In addition a public drop in event will be held at Orford Jubilee Hub on 27 November 2017 where the public can talk to members of the air quality team.

20. **What will happen at the end of the consultation?**
At the end of the consultation, all comments received will be reviewed and if necessary the plan will be amended. A summary of the responses and the details on the next stage will be presented on the Council website.

21. **What are the timescales for the adoption of the AQAP?**
The consultation is proposed to run until the 15 December 2017. Depending upon comments received, the finalised AQAP is expected to be adopted by February 2018.