

Transport and Air Quality

Summary

1. Due to the failure to meet EU objectives for pollution, there is currently increased focus on air quality, including local authorities' role. Defra is currently reviewing the Local Air Quality Management system, which could have significant implications for local authorities' powers and resources. As transport is a major source of pollution, the review will encompass how air quality work interacts with local transport planning.

Actions

Board members are asked to:

- Note the issues relating to air quality and the potential impact of the review on local authority funding, powers and reputation.
- Attend a meeting with Defra and DfT's consultants to provide political input, along with members of the Environment Board.

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Background

1. Air pollution impacts on the health of local communities and particularly affects vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and people with existing respiratory conditions, for example asthma.
2. Transport is a major source of air pollution in the UK and it is essential that it is considered in a coordinated way with air pollution and climate change, both at national and local level.
3. Many parts of the country are currently failing to meet European health limits for two key air pollutants. The Government has applied for a time extension to meet EU objectives for particulate matter and will seek an extension for nitrogen dioxide early next year.
4. Whilst the Secretary of State is the 'competent authority' for meeting the objectives, local authorities play a key role in trying to improve air quality through the Local Air Quality Management regime. Defra has commissioned in-house consultants to carry out a review of the system, which could lead to significant changes for local authorities' work and funding, as legislative changes are within scope of the review. How air quality work interacts with transport planning will be a key consideration of the review.
5. Emerging issues from the review include:
 - Whether a more stringent duty should be placed on local authorities to work towards the EU objectives and what this might mean in practice, including funding issues
 - Whether there is a need for public awareness raising
6. We are arranging a meeting between the consultants and members of the Environment Board and Regeneration and Transport Board before the end of the year (Friday 4 December, 2-4pm has been suggested) to ensure that elected member views are taken into account as part of the review.
7. LACORS is also working with Defra and DfT to organise an Air Quality Summit on 30 November, which will bring together Ministers from Defra and Department for Transport, local politicians and other stakeholders to explore some of the barriers to improving air quality and potential solutions.

Financial Implications

There are several financial implications of the review:

- The review is considering whether a more stringent duty should be placed on local authorities to meet air quality targets, which could impact on existing funding arrangements;
- As transport is the source of many air quality problems, there is an opportunity to lobby for increased local resources for measures to reduce car use and improve public transport; and
- There is scope to argue for reduced reporting burdens on local authorities, which are currently disproportionate.

Implications for Wales

The Review will cover local authorities in Wales; implications are therefore the same as for England.

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