



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

## Environment and Energy Board

<b>Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> September 2023
<b>Report title</b>	Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan
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### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

#### The Environment and Energy Board is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the draft Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan for approval at the November 2023 WMCA Board.
- b) Endorse this paper for presentation to the WMCA Board in November 2023, subject to any updates made by the Environment and Energy Board.

### 1. Purpose

The Environment and Energy Board previously considered the West Midlands Air Quality Framework at the meeting in July 2023. The Framework was taken forward for consultation over the summer; this included a prioritisation of measures into an Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan to take forward over the next 2 years. This Plan will be presented to the WMCA Board in November 2023 for approval, with a link being made to the more extensive Framework for information and context.

### 2. Background

2.1 An Air Quality Options Paper was taken to WMCA Board in February 2022 that outlined the challenges the region is facing in relation to air pollution. The options paper highlighted the inequality of exposure to poor air quality across the region and drew attention to the need to address pollution from particulate matter with more urgency. The options paper outlined 122 possible interventions that could be adopted to improve regional air quality, taken from the literature and work undertaken by Public Health England (now the UK Health Security Agency), but also recognised that a more detailed piece of work would be needed to develop these further, or to add any additional interventions. As a result, the Air Quality

Framework has been produced (a fully designed version will be made available ahead of the WMCA Board paper send out on the WMCA Environment and Energy web pages – current link to the draft is here:

<https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s11066/DRAFT%20WM%20AQ%20Framework.pdf>). This document is not a strategy, but a review of all the measures possible to accelerate improvements to regional air quality. It is accompanied by an Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan (AQFIP), which is a shorter document prioritising the measures to be implemented/ commenced over the next 2 years. The AQFIP is attached to this Board paper as Appendix 1.

## Summary of the issues

2.2 There are a number of different air pollutants that affect the West Midlands and have implications for human and public health. The main ones are nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (especially PM<sub>2.5</sub>). Both of these have environmental, social and economic impacts for the region that have previously been set out in our Air Quality Options Paper.

2.3 Since the Air Quality Options Paper was produced, DEFRA has published the national air quality targets (following on from the Environment Act 2021) and the National Air Quality Strategy. The targets are as follows:

- NO<sub>2</sub> 40 µg m<sup>-3</sup> [this is a retained target]
- PM<sub>2.5</sub> 20 µg m<sup>-3</sup> [new Env Act: 10 µg m<sup>-3</sup> (by 2040)]

There have been questions about the level of ambition in these targets, which have predominantly been established to accommodate the challenges faced by London in reaching them. It would be feasible for the West Midlands to achieve these targets sooner and then reduce exposure even further. For context, the World Health Organisation Air Quality Guidelines (which are not legal limits) are as follows:

- NO<sub>2</sub> 10 µg m<sup>-3</sup>
- PM<sub>2.5</sub> 5 µg m<sup>-3</sup>

2.4 To put this in a West Midlands context:

- The highest annual average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations in the West Midlands are modelled in central Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell and Walsall.
- DEFRA provide air pollution estimates of pollution concentrations at 1km resolution. When averaged to ward level, these data show annual average PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels in 72 of the 192 wards within the West Midlands exceed 10 µg m<sup>-3</sup>
- 1.2m people or ca. 40% of the West Midlands' population live in wards exceeding PM targets of 10 µg m<sup>-3</sup>.
- The least advantaged areas (highest IMD score) tend to have the worst air quality.

2.5 The constituent local authorities have been working to address this through measures identified in Air Quality Action Plans (as required by DEFRA) or, in the case of Solihull MBC, an Air Quality Strategy. The focus of these is largely the reduction of NO<sub>2</sub>, which is produced (and can be reduced) locally. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is different because it lives longer in the atmosphere and therefore spreads further geographically – this means that regional approaches may be more appropriate in addressing it.

## Scope of the West Midlands Air Quality Framework

- 2.6 In terms of cost or time taken for deployment, nothing is off the table, but the means of assessing the implementation opportunities (described in the Methodology section below) has taken account of these factors in terms of likelihood of deployment. The main consideration in determining if a measure is in or out of scope is the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. is it the case that there is (or could be) added value from adopting a regional approach to delivery.
- 2.7 In terms of defining 'regional' we mean where a measure could be better delivered by more than one authority acting alone. This has meant that anything that is clearly within local remit to deliver has been excluded, likewise anything that would need a national intervention has also been removed.
- 2.8 There are some 'grey areas' in that, of course. Communications and behaviour change initiatives, for example, can be delivered by a local authority independently. However, from the work undertaken in developing the Framework, it has become clear that there are advantages in consistent messaging to business and the public and collaborating to deliver behaviour change programmes. There might also be instances where economies of scale make a difference for procurement, for example on the purchase of low-cost sensors.

## Methodology

- 2.9 In preparing the Air Quality Framework, all options outlined within the initial Air Quality Options Paper, and other key sources (such as from DEFRA), were considered at the outset. These were supplemented with additional options identified at the initial consultation stage of the Framework development with TfWM, constituent local authorities and partners such as WM-Air. Any options which were clearly outside of the Framework scope, or were unlikely to be in the future, were excluded from the long list. All options which may be at all feasible or within the scope of the Framework were carried forward.
- 2.10 There is a total of 156 measures identified in this Framework that could be taken to tackle air pollution across the region; 143 were taken forward to full appraisal following an initial assessment with consultees identified in Section 2.11 below. They have been grouped into the following categories (although there is synergy between many of these):
- Engagement and behaviour change
  - Domestic emissions and indoor air quality
  - Transport
  - Natural and built environment
  - Commercial, industrial and agriculture
  - Public health
  - Planning, policy, governance and mechanisms for change
  - Monitoring and digital
  - Climate/net zero considerations
- 2.11 Each of the measures identified within these thematic groups has been assessed against the following criteria:

- Health outcomes, including direct improvement to human health and reducing health inequalities.
- Spatial impact, including whether a regional approach brings benefit.
- Alignment with local and national policy.
- Cost, implementation and timescales, assessing measures against feasibility, timescales and cost.
- Co-benefits – do the measures have any additional environmental or economic benefit?

2.12 The tables produced in each of the sections of the Framework highlight the measures that deliver most effectively against the criteria identified. The entire list of measures is provided in a technical appendix to the Framework. Each of these summary tables gives:

- Where a particular measure ranked in the overall theme, as well as the score it was given against all the criteria
- The outcome that we would look to achieve through its implementation
- The potential approach to implementing it
- First implementation costs and indicative timescales
- Any constraints

This has been taken into account in relation to the preparation of an Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan (see 2.15 – 2.21 below).

2.13 Extensive consultation has been involved in developing the Framework. These include: WMCA Directorates; WMCA panels/groups (e.g. Strategic Transport Officers Group and WM Environmental Protection Group); TfWM; Birmingham University/WM-Air team; constituent local authorities; non-constituent local authorities; external organisations (e.g. Asthma and Lung UK, Clean Air Justice Network, EarthSense, Friends of the Earth and Mums for Lungs); and the Greener Together Citizens' Panel. A consultation event took place on 17<sup>th</sup> August to review the Framework, which is being updated in response to feedback received – 48 people from the organisations referenced above attended.

2.14 The measures identified in the Framework are comprehensive, and we do not expect them to become out of date in the short-term. However, we would expect to build in a review process every five years to ensure that they are still supporting regional ambition to reduce air pollution in total, and inequality of exposure overall. We would also want to make sure that the Framework is taking account of innovations in technology, as well as national policy.

### **Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan**

2.15 The Air Quality Framework provides us with an extensive list of measures that could be put in place to address poor air quality across the region. To make a start on delivery will require a focused list of priorities for collaboration. This has been developed into a two year Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan, which will be overseen by an Air Quality Framework Delivery Group (see 2.17 – 2.19 for more on proposed governance).

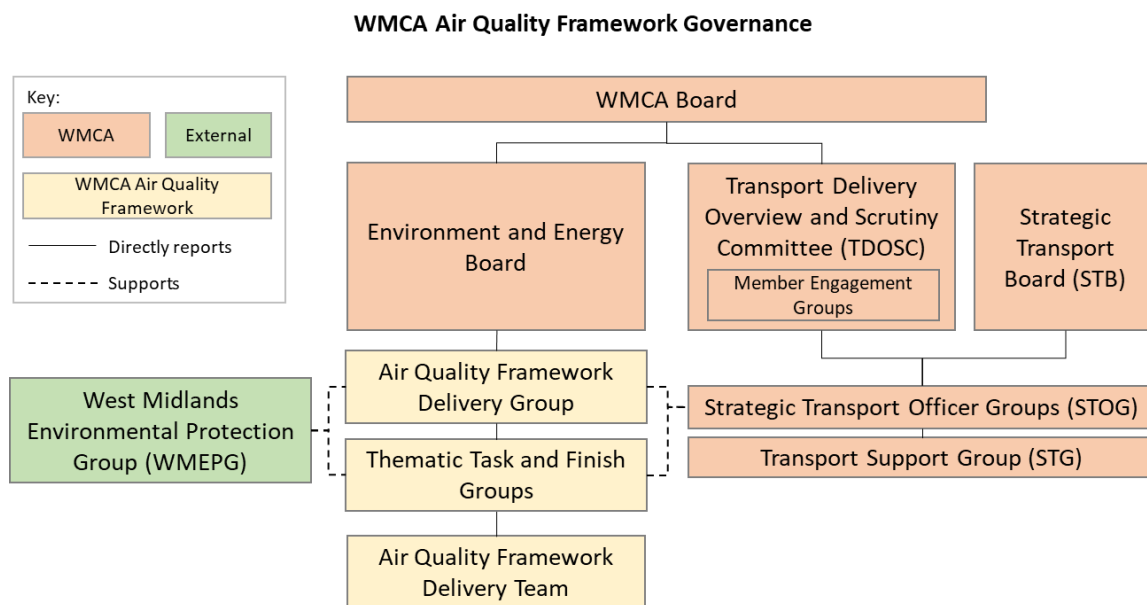
2.16 The measures included in the Framework have been assessed to consider potential impact on addressing air pollution. However, it was also important to take into account the views/ expertise of regional stakeholders in prioritising what should be

taken forward over the next 2 years. This was done at the Framework consultation event on 17<sup>th</sup> August. All the measures were made available for people and a simple prioritisation exercise was undertaken. This was then considered alongside input from colleagues in local authorities, TfWM and the Framework prioritisation. The result is an Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan, consisting of 9 packages of work and 10 standalone measures.

- 2.17 In addition to the measures themselves, the consultation also gave participants the opportunity to discuss potential governance for delivery. To ensure that the Framework is delivering for the whole WMCA, we will establish an Air Quality Framework Delivery Group. This is something that has been flagged in conversations with constituent local authority partners as a helpful route to continue coordination. This will also facilitate engagement with air quality partners (as identified in the Environment Act, 2021) as well as bringing additional expertise on board to support different air quality issues that are common to all partners.
- 2.18 The Framework Delivery Group membership would comprise the 7 constituent local authorities, WMCA and TfWM as well as other relevant partners with a focus on public health, environment, research and innovation. Suggestions made through the consultation process include:
- Public health (Directors of Public Health as well as the UK Health Security Agency),
  - Community group representation
  - A member of the University of Birmingham's WM-Air Team
  - Business representative
  - Birmingham International Airport
  - National Highways
  - National Express/ National Rail
  - West Midlands Fire Service

We would envisage that some of these organisations would be involved in specific task and finish groups (outlined in 2.19 below) rather than as part of the ongoing group. A terms of reference will be established, following approval from the WMCA Board, with a proposal to meet quarterly.

2.19 The Framework Delivery Group will sit within existing governance in the following way:



2.20 In terms of the measures, and delivery, there is no proposition here to change roles and responsibilities for local authorities. We have assumed that this work will continue as previously, although there may be opportunities to bring economies of scale/ benefits from collaboration. In addition, we also assume that actions related to TfWM, and its governance and actions, will continue to be delivered through existing routes. Where it has become clear that the WMCA could add immediate value is through behaviour change/ awareness raising and scaling up of monitoring capability and data collection.

2.21 Annual progress reports on the delivery of measures in the Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan will be brought to the Environment and Energy Board.

### Progress to date and ongoing work

2.22 In parallel to producing the Air Quality Framework, we have secured **funding from DEFRA** to begin to collaborate on behaviour change projects, as well as on monitoring and data transparency. This project will be delivering the following:

- Installation of 30 low-cost sensors where there is modelled to be high population exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub>. These monitors will bring consistent data, currently lacking, across the WMCA.
- Creation of a public facing regional air quality platform. The sensor data will feed into a centralised dashboard for the public to see near real time air quality data. The website will be a hub of educational and campaign resources, including toolkits on anti-idling campaigns, domestic combustion reduction campaigns and general awareness raising. We are also going to procure a solution that can accommodate existing sensors already deployed across the region.
- Regional air quality awareness campaign. This project will begin by raising awareness and to start a regional conversation on air quality. There will be

community engagement events (3 in each local authority) to provide information on why clean air is important.

- Behaviour change campaigns in the local community. Design and implement a package of different types of projects to improve awareness of air quality in their communities and implement interventions to reduce exposure and pollution; this will use the outcomes from the awareness-raising activity.
- Air quality literacy programme. We will use this project to develop training materials for politicians and organisations to understand the need for action.
- Communications toolkit. Develop a communications toolkit to be used more broadly by all the local authorities across the region. It will include social media assets, communication materials and key messages that will be co-produced and shared with stakeholders to present a consistent message across the region.

2.23 In addition to this, we have taken air quality as an issue to the **Greener Together Citizens' Panel**. This provided us with a set of considerations that we should take into account when thinking about if, when and how we implement any of the measures from the Air Quality Framework/ Framework Implementation Plan. The Panel met as we were developing the Framework itself, but we are planning to support a future session of the Panel to test the measures that we are initially focusing on through the Framework Implementation Plan, particularly those that may be more challenging to instigate or that require trade-offs to be made.

### **Resourcing delivery of the Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan**

2.24 The DEFRA Air Quality grant, secured in March 2023, will support the implementation of some of the priority measures, especially in relation to behaviour change and establishment of a low-cost sensor network, and availability of data to support decision-making across the region. The successful delivery of other measures will be dependent on resourcing and business cases and subject to the WMCA Board approval.

2.25 In order to drive the delivery of measures in the Framework forward, we have secured initial funding from DEFRA to put in place an Air Quality Lead. This role will work across all the constituent local authorities to support roll out of a low-cost sensor network and implementation of behaviour change programmes. Resourcing to support delivery of the AQFIP beyond this grant funding will need to be evaluated in due course.

## **3. Financial Implications**

There are no immediate financial implications within this paper, as any costs associated with the wider consultation will be covered from existing budgets.

Once the wider consultation is complete, the final Air Quality Framework will be brought to WMCA Board for approval later this year. This will contain financial assessments and priorities where recommended measures will require further funding to be sought and agreed.

## **4. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications as a result of this paper. Any legal implications will be considered on a project-by-project basis.

## **5. Equalities Implications (\*)**

Having clean air to breathe should be enjoyed by all communities across the West Midlands. The current picture indicates that this is not the case, with many communities suffering from poor air quality that leads to harmful impacts on health and other social and economic outcomes. The aim of this Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan is to complement the work already happening in local authorities to address poor air quality across the region, but also to accelerate action in areas that have a regional dimension, especially around particulates.

## **6. Inclusive Growth Implications**

This report links to a number of the WMCA's eight inclusive growth priorities, which are identified as 'a catalyst for improved and sustained outcomes for people place, co-designed with partners and beneficiaries'. The Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan will support outcomes around:

- reduction of health inequalities;
- improving understanding, awareness and knowledge of environmental issues;
- supporting the principle of powerful communities through providing support to deliver change and create better places; and,
- equality (reducing the numbers of people living in deprivation).

## **7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

The Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan covers all constituent local authorities. There is also potential to collaborate with non-constituent authorities on some of the communications tools and messaging being developed through the Framework.

## **8. Other Implications**

None.

## **9. Schedule of Background Papers**

Appendix 1: West Midlands Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan