



Subject:	Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report
Date:	5 th August 2025
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	Alastair Curran, Environmental Protection Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	Members will be aware that the council is required, as a consequence of the cycle of reporting for Northern Ireland, established via Table 1-2 of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance LAQM.TG(22), to provide either an annual Progress Report or Updating and Screening Assessment (USA) to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), detailing the status of ambient air quality for the Belfast City Council area, together with progress on implementation of the local air quality management regime, and on achieving or maintaining ambient air pollution concentrations below the respective air quality objective levels for human health, as detailed within the 2007 Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.
1.2	Members are advised that for 2025, the council was required to provide a Progress Report to DAERA by 30 th June 2025. An extension to the submission deadline until mid-August 2025 has, however, been obtained to allow the 2025 Progress Report to be considered at the People and Communities Committee and for any necessary revisions to be made, prior to the Progress Report being submitted to DAERA for technical appraisal. Accepted 2025 Progress Reports will be made available to the public later this year on the DAERA NI Air website, via the following weblink: https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/reports/district-council-reports-1
1.3	By way of clarity, Defra have advised that Progress Reports are intended to provide continuity within the local air quality management system, filling gaps between the three-yearly requirement to undertake an Updating and Screening Assessment, whereas Updating and Screening Assessments are intended to identify any significant changes in local ambient air quality that may have occurred since the previous rounds of Review and Assessment were completed.
1.4	Accordingly, Members are advised that this Committee report serves to provide context to, and an overview of the Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report.
2.0	Recommendation.
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Committee is requested to review the attached Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report (Appendix A) and to recommend that the Report be submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (DAERA) independent technical appraisers by the revised submission deadline of mid-August 2025.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members are advised that to ensure standardisation of approach, and in accordance with requirements detailed within LAQM.TG(22), the Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report has been developed by populating the Defra 2025 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template.
3.2	<p>Accordingly, the Defra 2025 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template requires councils to report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New ambient air quality monitoring data, to include a summary of all monitoring undertaken and a comparison of monitoring results with the air quality objectives (Section 2); New local developments that are of a scale or function such that may have an effect on ambient air quality (to include road traffic or other transport sources, industrial sources,

	<p>commercial and domestic sources, and new developments that comprise fugitive or uncontrolled sources) (Section 3);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent planning applications that the council has been consulted upon by the Planning Authority, where some form of planning condition or other control may have been necessary in order to manage ambient air quality impacts (Section 4); • Planning policies designed to manage ambient air quality (Section 5); • Local transport plans and policies (Section 6); • Climate change strategies (Section 7); • Progress with implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021 – 2026 (Section 8) and; • Conclusions and proposed actions (Section 9).
3.3	<p>Members will be aware that Belfast City Council continues to maintain four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) across the city, declared for exceedances of nitrogen dioxide annual and 1-hour mean objectives, and encompassing major arterial road transport routes into and out of the city. Details of these AQMAs and their declarations are provided within 'Section 1.4 Summary of Previous Review and Assessments' of the 2025 Progress Report.</p>
3.4	<p>With regard to new ambient air quality monitoring data, the Committee is advised that Section 2 of the 2025 Progress Report presents and considers new monitoring data for the 2024 monitoring year. During 2024, the council continued to operate four automatic roadside monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide at Stockmans Lane, the A12 Westlink at Roden Street, the Ormeau Road and the Upper Newtownards Road at Ballyhackamore. There is a further automatic urban background monitoring site operated by the Environment Agency, located in Belfast city centre at Lombard Street. There were no exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide annual, or 1-hour mean objectives recorded at any of these monitoring sites during 2024. Indeed, monitored annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations during 2024 were comfortably below the 40 μgm^{-3} objective level at all of these monitoring sites, with the highest nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration of 33.3 μgm^{-3} recorded at the Stockmans Lane roadside monitoring site. Moreover, annual and 1-hour mean concentrations have now been below the respective objective levels for a number of years at all of these sites, as evidenced in Table 2.3 of the 2025 Progress Report.</p>
3.5	<p>In addition to its automatic monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide, the council has also placed 80 nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes at 72 human health receptor locations across the city during 2024. 2024 monitoring data for these diffusion tubes is summarised in Table 2.5 of the 2025 Progress Report, along with preceding years historical data, where available, in Table 2.6.</p>
3.6	<p>During 2024, there was only 1 monitored exceedance of the 40 μgm^{-3} nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective, recorded at diffusion tube monitoring site No. 106 (41.3 μgm^{-3}), situated adjacent to new residential student accommodation, located at the junction of the M3 Motorway off slip with Nelson Street and the A12 Westlink. However, when this annual mean concentration was corrected for distance to the façade of the residential student premises, the resultant annual mean concentration of 31.4 μgm^{-3} was determined to be in compliance with the 40 μgm^{-3} nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective. Members will appreciate that for the purposes of local air quality management, regulations state that exceedances of ambient air quality objectives should be assessed in relation to the quality of air at locations that are situated outside of buildings or other natural or man-made structures, above or below ground,</p>

	and where members of the public are regularly present. Accordingly, examples of where air quality objectives should apply are detailed in Box 1.1 of LAQM.TG(22).
3.7	Diffusion tube monitoring site No. 70 at Henry Place, located further along the A12 Westlink, which had exceeded the 40 μgm^{-3} nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective in previous monitoring years, returned a 2024 annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration of 39.1 μgm^{-3} ; in compliance with the objective. Other elevated monitored nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentrations in 2024 were recorded at Stockmans Lane roundabout (36.2 μgm^{-3}) and further along Stockmans Lane (35.2 μgm^{-3}). These sites were also in compliance with the 40 μgm^{-3} annual mean objective. All other roadside and kerbside diffusion tube monitoring sites across the city were generally within the nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration range of 20 – 30 μgm^{-3} during 2024.
3.8	No monitored exceedances of any of the objectives for other ambient pollutants, under consideration within the 2025 Progress Report were recorded across the city during 2024, including for particulate matter (PM ₁₀ and PM _{2.5}), sulphur dioxide (SO ₂) and benzene (C ₆ H ₆).
3.9	Accordingly, and on the basis of our 2024 monitoring data, the council is content that there are no requirements to either extend or amend the boundaries of any of our four AQMAs at this time.
3.10	Within Section 3 of the 2025 Progress Report, we have considered relevant new local developments across the city, to include new road traffic and other transport sources, new industrial sources, new commercial and domestic sources, and new developments with fugitive or uncontrolled emissions. We have consequently concluded that for 2024, there are no new, or newly identified local developments, which may have an appreciably adverse impact upon ambient air quality within the Belfast City Council area.
3.11	Within Section 4 of the 2025 Progress Report and in terms of planning applications considered, screening or detailed ambient air quality impact assessments were requested for 16 major developments proposed during 2024, that in the council's view, had the potential to have an adverse impact upon ambient air quality. Table 4.1 of the 2025 Progress Report provides summary details of those planning applications, together with information on any actions taken or mitigation measures introduced.
3.12	Section 5 of the 2025 Progress Report provides an overview of local planning policies that may be applied to manage ambient air quality for the city, including the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP), and associated supplementary planning guidance.
3.13	Section 6 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of local transport plans and associated strategies that may have an impact on local ambient air quality, including the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035. DfI have acknowledged that a review of economic, social and environmental challenges for the new eastern plan area has confirmed that a number of key overarching themes, reiterated throughout local, regional and national policy documents, are to be reflected within the ETP 2035, including that pollution from vehicles contributes to poor local ambient air quality and the construction of roads and railways can harm the built or natural environment.

3.14	Section 7 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of local climate change strategies and initiatives that may also have beneficial impacts upon ambient air quality, including formation of a Climate and City Resilience Committee, launch of the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan and delivery of the 2025 Climate Action Plan, as well as details of specific initiatives such as implementation of Phase 1 of the Belfast 'One Million Trees' Programme, which sets a target of planting one million trees across the city by 2035.
3.15	<p>Section 8 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of progress with implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026.</p> <p>https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026</p> <p>Updates have been provided by our competent or relevant authority partners, and by other city bodies and partner organisations on actions taken to improve ambient air quality across Belfast during the Action Plan years of 2021-2026.</p>
3.16	Finally, Section 9 of the 2025 Progress Report provides overall conclusions and proposed actions. In terms of conclusions drawn from 2024 monitoring year data and monitoring data for preceding years, and mindful of recommendations arising from previous DAERA appraisal reports, including the 20 th November 2024 appraisal report concerning our 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment, that the council should move to revoke AQMA No.2 Cromac Street and Albertbridge Road, AQMA No.3 Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA No.4 Ormeau Road, council air quality officers have referred to the minutes of agenda item '7f Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment 2024' of the People and Communities Committee meeting of 3 rd December 2024.
3.17	Accordingly, and on the basis of the Committee decision in respect of agenda item 7f, the 2025 Progress Report advises that with regard to revoking our AQMAs, at this stage, the council has decided not to move to revoke any of its Air Quality Management Areas, and instead to continue to monitor within its AQMAs and in other city locations in order to work towards further improving ambient air quality, having regard to air quality guidelines for ambient air quality as recommended by the World Health Organisation, in its 2021 Global Air Quality Guidelines: particulate matter (PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide publication.
3.18	Members are reminded, however, that with respect to revoking AQMAs, Section 3.57 of LAQM.TG(22) advises that, <i>'the revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance with the relevant objective as evidenced through monitoring. Where nitrogen dioxide monitoring is completed using diffusion tubes, to account for the inherent uncertainty associated with the monitoring method, it is recommended that revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations being lower than 36 µgm⁻³ (i.e. within 10% of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective). There should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period'</i> .
3.19	In addition, the 2025 Progress Report advises that the current air quality monitoring network provides an appropriately detailed representation of ambient air pollution levels for the city and, as a consequence, it is considered that the network does not need to be expanded further at this time. The Progress Report further advises that on an annual basis, council air quality officers will, however, review monitoring locations and relocate monitoring sites to better reflect relevant human health exposure.

3.20	In terms of forward actions, the 2025 Progress Report advises that the council will continue to monitor implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 via at least annual meetings of the Air Quality Action Planning Steering Group, and that we will next report progress with ambient air quality to DAERA via our 30 th June 2026 Progress Report.
3.21	The 2025 Progress Report finally advises that whilst the current Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 will continue to deliver further improvements in ambient air quality within our AQMAs and across the city until its conclusion during 2026, it is the council's intention, in late 2026, to engage with competent authorities and our city partner organisations concerning development of a new 5-year Air Quality Action Plan for the city covering the period 2027 – 2032.
3.22	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no financial or resource implications for the council in the production of this Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report. The Report has been developed from within existing Scientific Unit air quality staff resources.</p>
3.23	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no Good Relations Implications or Rural Needs Assessment implications associated with this Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report.</p>
4.0	Appendices
	<p>Appendix A - Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report</p> <p>In fulfilment of Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Local Air Quality Management. 30th June 2025.</p>