



Subject:	Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report
Date:	6 th October 2026
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
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	
1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. 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 matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. 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	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Sometime in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

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 ' <i>Phased Approach - Cycle of Reporting for Northern Ireland</i> ' 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 2026, the council was required to provide a Progress Report to DAERA by 30 th June 2026. An extension to the submission deadline has, however, been obtained from DAERA to allow for the 2026 Progress Report to be considered by 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 2026 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 context, 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, the Committee is advised that this report serves to provide background to, and an overview of the Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report. The Committee is additionally advised that the 2026 Progress Report is the final Progress Report associated with the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021 – 2026, which is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2026.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is requested to review the attached Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report (Appendix A) and to recommend that the Progress Report be submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) for independent technical appraisal.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members are advised that to ensure a standardisation of approach, and in accordance with requirements detailed within LAQM.TG(22), the Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report has been developed by populating the Defra 2026 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template.
3.2	Accordingly, the Defra 2026 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template, as in previous years, requires the council to report on:

	• New ambient air quality monitoring data, to include a summary of all monitoring undertaken and a comparison of monitoring results with 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, commercial or domestic sources and new developments with fugitive or uncontrolled sources (section 3); • 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	The Committee 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 (NO₂) 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 '<i>Section 1.4 Summary of Previous Review and Assessments</i>', of the 2026 Progress Report.
3.4	With regard to new ambient air quality monitoring data, the Committee is advised that section 2 of the 2026 Progress Report presents new monitoring data for the 2025 monitoring year. During 2025, the council continued to operate four automatic roadside monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) at Stockmans Lane, the A12 Westlink at Roden Street, the Upper Newtownards Road at Ballyhackamore and the Ormeau Road at Shaftesbury Avenue. It should be noted, however, that during 2025, and as a consequence of commencement a directly adjacent residential development, the Ormeau Road monitoring site had to be closed, pending relocation. Accordingly, Ormeau Road monitoring data capture rates were significantly reduced for 2025. A further automatic urban background monitoring site is operated by the Environment Agency within 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 automatic monitoring sites during 2025. Indeed, monitored annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations during 2025 were comfortably below the 40 µgm⁻³ objective level at all of these monitoring sites, with the highest nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration of 33.5 µgm⁻³ recorded at the Stockmans Lane roadside site. Moreover, annual and 1-hour mean concentrations have now been below the respective nitrogen dioxide objective levels for a number of years at all of these sites (tables 2.3 and 2.4).
3.5	In addition to the above-mentioned automatic monitoring sites, the council has also located 79 passive nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes at 71 human health relevant receptor locations across the city during 2025. 2025 nitrogen dioxide monitoring data for these diffusion tubes is summarised in table 2.5 of the 2025 Progress Report, along with historical comparative data, for the period 2021-2025, in table 2.6.
3.6	During 2025, two monitored exceedances of the 40 µgm⁻³ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective were recorded at diffusion tube monitoring site No. 70 (44.7 µgm⁻³) at Henry Place,

	adjacent to the A12 Westlink, and at diffusion tube monitoring site No. 106 ($46.4 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$), situated adjacent to new residential student accommodation, located at the junction of the M3 Motorway off slip with Nelson Street and the A12 Westlink.
3.7	The Committee 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.
3.8	Accordingly, when the 2025 nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration at Henry Place was corrected for distance to the façade of the nearest residential premises, the resultant annual mean concentration of $26.5 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ indicated compliance with the $40 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective. This distance correction assessment is corroborated by monitoring data for diffusion tube No. 100, located at the façade of flats at Henry Place, which recorded a nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration of $29.9 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ during 2025; substantially below the $40 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ annual mean objective.
3.9	When the nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration at the M3 Motorway off slip monitoring site was, however, corrected for distance to the façade of the nearest residential premises, the resultant annual mean concentration of $45.3 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ indicated an exceedance of the $40 \mu\text{gm}^{-3}$ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective during 2025, and an increase over preceding monitoring years' distance corrected monitoring results. It is noted, however, that relevant human health receptors are located on and above the first floor ($>+8.5\text{m}$ above the ground floor mezzanine level) of the residential development and that an Air Quality Impact Assessment, (AQIA) submitted as an aspect of the planning applications for this development, demonstrated that occupants would not be exposed to air quality concentrations exceeding air quality objectives, including those for nitrogen dioxide, at relevant receptor locations and elevations. Council air quality officers will, nevertheless, continue to monitor nitrogen dioxide concentrations at this location and if determined necessary, we will amend the boundary of AQMA 1 to include this residential location, and work to address any further nitrogen dioxide exceedances in collaboration with competent authority partners as an aspect of any future Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan(s).
3.10	No monitored exceedances of any of the objectives for other ambient air pollutants, under consideration within the 2026 Progress Report were recorded across the city during the 2025 monitoring year, including for particulate matter (PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$), sulphur dioxide (SO_2) and benzene (C_6H_6).
3.11	Accordingly, and on the basis of our 2025 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.
3.12	Within section 3 of the 2026 Progress Report, we have considered relevant new 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. In consideration of AQIAs and associated air quality data for these developments, we have concluded that for 2025, 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.

3.13	Within Section 4 of the 2026 Progress Report and having regard to the various planning applications considered during 2025, screening or detailed ambient air quality impact assessments were received for 14 major proposed developments, that in the council's view, had the potential to have an adverse impact upon ambient air quality. Table 4.1 of the 2026 Progress Report provides summary details of the various proposed developments, their locations and planning application references. Full details of the proposed developments may be obtained via the Northern Ireland Planning Portal public register.
3.14	Section 5 of the 2026 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.
3.15	Section 6 of the 2026 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, which encompasses the following five council areas; Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Ards and North Down Borough Council; Belfast City Council; Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. 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.
3.16	Section 7 of the 2026 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, appointment of a Climate Commissioner and formation of the city's '<i>Our Planet Board</i>', which provides for community oversight of commitments within the Belfast Agenda to create a sustainable, nature-positive city and delivery of an associated programme of work covering three key areas: re-naturing of the city and increasing resilience to climate change; creating a sustainable circular economy and; innovating to net zero.
3.17	Section 8 of the 2026 Progress Report provides details on progress with implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026: https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026 Updates have again 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.
3.18	Finally, section 9 of the 2026 Progress Report provides overall conclusions and proposed actions. In terms of conclusions from the 2025 monitoring data and trends over recent years, and mindful of recommendations arising from DAERA technical appraisal reports concerning recent Progress Reports and Updating And Screening Assessments, including the 20th 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. DAERA again advised the Council in its appraisal report dated the 28th November 2025 concerning our 2025 Progress Report, that the council should move to revoke both AQMAs Nos. 3 and 4. The 2026 Progress Report advises DAERA that the council has decided not to move to revoke any of its Air Quality Management Areas at this time, 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 PM₁₀), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide publication.
3.19	The Committee is reminded, however, that LAQM.TG(22) advises in respect of the amendment or revocation of an AQMA 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 NO₂ 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 NO₂ concentrations being lower than 36 µgm⁻³ (i.e. not within 10% of the annual mean NO₂ objective due to uncertainties and yearly variations). There should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period'</i>.
3.20	In terms of future actions, the 2026 Progress Report advises that the council will continue to review our monitoring locations and to relocate monitoring sites to better reflect relevant exposure, and we will discontinue monitoring from areas of continued low pollutant concentrations, significantly below air quality objective levels.
3.21	Finally, and as already highlighted within section 1.4 of this report, the Committee is again advised that the 2026 Progress Report is the final Progress Report associated with the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021 – 2026, which is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2026. Accordingly, the 2026 Progress Report advises that upon completion of the current Air Quality Action Plan, in consideration of recent ambient monitoring data and trends, and 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 PM₁₀), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide publication, it is Belfast City Council's intention to engage with our competent authority partners, Translink, Belfast Harbour and other significant transport organisations and partners from across the city concerning development of a new 5-year Air Quality Action Plan for the city covering the period 2027 – 2032.
3.22	The Committee will, however, recall that DAERA have recently concluded a public consultation into the tightening of annual average particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) limits, targets and objectives for Northern Ireland. The Committee considered this matter and proposed council consultation response at agenda item 4c of its 11th August 2026 meeting, where the accompanying Committee report indicated that adoption of a tightened annual mean objective of 20 µgm⁻³ for PM₁₀ by DAERA might lead to the designation of a new Air Quality Management Area and associated Action Planning for PM₁₀ for a city centre location. Accordingly, any new 5-year Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast may need to be revised in order to address particulate matter (PM₁₀), in addition to nitrogen dioxide emissions, at a point during its operational period.
3.23	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> There are no financial or resource implications for the council in the production of this Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report. The Report has been developed from within existing Scientific Unit air quality staff resources.

3.24	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no Good Relations Implications or Rural Needs Assessment implications associated with this Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report.
4.0	Appendices
	Appendix A - Belfast City Council 2026 Air Quality Progress Report