

Cover Note – Air Quality Action Plan 2026-2031

The purpose of this cover note is to present the draft Kirklees Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2026–2031 for scrutiny prior to consideration by Cabinet in October 2026.

The AQAP has been prepared to fulfil the Council's statutory duties under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 and sets out how the Council, and its partners will work to improve air quality across the borough over the next five years. Improving air quality is not solely a regulatory requirement. Air pollution is recognised as one of the most significant environmental risks to public health and is associated with a range of adverse health outcomes, particularly for children, older people and those with existing heart and lung conditions.

The timing of the AQAP review and consultation programme coincided with both the pre-election period and the requirement to submit the AQAP to Defra by 31st July 2026. As a result, there has been limited opportunity to engage with the Scrutiny Panel at an earlier stage in the development of the AQAP. Officers are therefore presenting the draft AQAP at this stage to enable Members to consider the AQAP before Cabinet is asked to approve the final document.

The AQAP has been developed in accordance with Defra guidance and statutory requirements. This has included review of local air quality monitoring data, source apportionment studies, air quality modelling, stakeholder engagement and public consultation. The draft AQAP was submitted to Defra by the statutory deadline for technical appraisal. Following consideration by scrutiny and cabinet, the final AQAP will be updated to reflect Defra's recommendations before formal adoption and publication.

The AQAP is structured around three priorities:

- Reducing emissions from buses
- Reducing emissions from cars, and
- Working with communities to raise awareness and encourage behaviours that contribute to cleaner air.

Air quality across Kirklees has improved significantly since the previous AQAP was adopted in 2019, resulting in the revocation of three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and the reduction in size of a further three AQMAs in 2025. The remaining seven AQMAs were declared because concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) exceeded the national annual mean air quality objective. Whilst progress has been made, the Council is required to maintain an AQAP setting out how further improvements will be achieved in the remaining AQMAs.

The evidence underpinning the AQAP identifies Huddersfield Town Centre, particularly the Westgate area, as the location where air quality challenges remain greatest. Source apportionment indicates that bus emissions are the principal contributor at this location, whilst road traffic remains the dominant source of emissions across the majority of the remaining AQMAs. The AQAP therefore brings together a coordinated package of measures that are already in place, in progress or planned and which collectively are intended to reduce emissions, support achievement of the air quality objectives within the remaining AQMAs and improve

air quality across Kirklees. Many of the measures are borough-wide and will support wider environmental and public health improvements across Kirklees. These include bus fleet improvements, cleaner vehicle technologies, traffic management initiatives, sustainable transport measures and public awareness campaigns.

Successful delivery of the AQAP will require continued collaboration between Council services and external partners, including West Yorkshire Combined Authority, bus operators, National Highways and neighbouring local authorities. The Council will continue to work closely with these organisations to implement the measures set out within the AQAP, monitor progress and identify further opportunities to improve air quality, reduce exposure to air pollution and protect public health.

In May 2026, the draft AQAP was submitted to Defra for appraisal, in line with the technical guidance and statutory consultation framework. In July 2026 Kirklees Council received the appraisal feedback from the Defra, the headline from the appraisal is the AQAP has been accepted, however, Defra made some commentary on aspects of the action plan.

Defra did not identify any fundamental concerns with the evidence base, modelling, priorities or proposed measures contained within the AQAP. The recommendations provided in the appraisal commentary are principally intended to strengthen supporting evidence and reporting and are currently being addressed by Environmental Health and its consultants.

They do not affect the assessment findings, modelling outcomes, identified priorities or overall direction of the AQAP, and are not expected to result in any significant changes to the AQAP.

The AQAP presented to Scrutiny is the draft APAQ as submitted to Defra, the version submitted to Cabinet in October, will be a version of the AQAP with changes made in line with Defra commentary. As these changes are not substantial and do not change the main technical modelling, detailed findings, actions or priorities it is not considered to undermine the functions of scrutiny.

Defra have confirmed that there is no need to re-submit any amended draft AQAP for re-appraisal. The next steps following scrutiny will be for the AQAP to be presented to Cabinet for adoption. Following this the adopted AQAP will be submitted to Defra.

Finally, whilst the draft AQAP has already been submitted to Defra to meet statutory requirements, Members are invited to review the AQAP, provide constructive challenge and support the Council's ongoing commitment to improving local air quality and protecting public health.

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