Relevant Background Information

1.1 In 2004, the Council declared four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) across the city in the areas with the poorest air quality. These areas are significantly affected by pollution from traffic which includes particulate matter (PM$_{10}$) and nitrogen dioxide (NO$_2$). Detailed information regarding the AQMAs is provided in Appendix 1 of this report.

1.2 In 2006, the Council published an Air Quality Action Plan for the city designed to reduce pollution levels and achieve health-based air quality standards by 2010 in accordance with European Commission (EC) legislation. As pollutant emissions within the AQMAs were attributed principally to road transport, the Action Plan predominantly comprised actions which fall within the remit of the Department for Regional Development and its agencies.

1.3 A recent review has indicated that around 90% of the Action Plan projects have been completed but, although the air quality standards for particulate matter have been achieved, standards for nitrogen dioxide continue to be exceeded across the AQMAs in Belfast. Moreover, in other parts of the city close to major road transport routes, increasing levels of nitrogen dioxide are of particular concern.

1.4 Other UK cities and regions including London, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow are experiencing similar problems. Accordingly, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has drafted a UK application for a 5-year extension to the EC deadline of 1st January, 2010 for achieving the air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide. Failure to achieve these standards by this revised deadline could result in Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK becoming subject to EC infraction proceedings.

1.5 As of 9th June 2011, DEFRA is consulting on the draft application to extend the deadline. The consultation comprises 4 components; a UK overview document, a list of national air quality measures, draft air quality action plans for regions of the UK where extensions are required and a technical background report. Since the Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast forms the basis of the DEFRA draft UK Air Quality Action Plan for the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area, the proposed Council consultation response concentrates principally on this document.
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<th>Key Issues</th>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>In order to determine the likelihood of EC air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide being achieved by the proposed extension deadline of 2015, DEFRA commissioned a series of air quality projections across the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA). The Belfast study indicates that EC air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide were expected to be exceeded widely across the BMUA in 2010 but are predicted to be achieved in all locations by 2015.</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>Members are advised, however, that our own ambient monitoring data indicates the DEFRA assumptions to be optimistic. Indeed, the monitoring data indicates that nitrogen dioxide air quality standards will be achieved on the Ormeau Road AQMA in 2015, may be achieved along the Newtownards Road and Cromac Street AQMAs, but will not be achieved in the vicinity of the M1 motorway / Westlink AQMA.</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>Moreover, as part of the consultation process, DEFRA has collated a list of measures that are expected to contribute towards to air quality improvements by 2015. Northern Ireland specific measures include proposals to review the Regional Development Strategy, to develop a Regional Transportation Strategy, to implement the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) and to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling. They also include the completion of the remaining outstanding actions in the 2006 Air Quality Action Plan.</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>Members are advised that, when these measures are contrasted with the more distinct actions proposed for comparable cities in Great Britain, it is considered unlikely that they will bring about significant additional improvements within the AQMAs and across Belfast as a whole. In addition, Members will be aware that the Council has indicated already to the Department for Regional Development that it does not support proposals within the BMTP for the construction of the City Centre Ring (Bankmore Link). It is the Council’s view that this proposal will lead to a further deterioration in air quality in the vicinity of Cromac Street and Victoria Street.</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>Accordingly, the proposed Council consultation response recommends to DEFRA that the air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide are unlikely to be achieved by the revised 2015 deadline and therefore, the Council should lead, with appropriate support from the Department of Environment, the development of a supplementary Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast, predominantly involving a requirement for significant contributions from the Department for Regional Development and its Agencies. It recommends further that the Action Plan should be prioritised, lead to direct air quality benefits within the AQMAs and comply with the requirements of EC legislation for maintaining ambient air quality where it is good and improving it in other cases.</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>Finally, DEFRA has indicated, in its draft proposal, that Belfast is not included in the proposals for the national framework for ‘Low Emission Zones’ (LEZs). Our response requests that Belfast’s inclusion be considered. LEZs are a geographic area where entry of the most polluting vehicles is controlled through compliance with a particular Euro emission standard. Members are advised, however, that the applicability of LEZs for Belfast will have to be researched thoroughly prior to introduction in order to assess their capacity to control the most polluting road vehicles. In addition, it is considered that extensive consultation will have to be undertaken with representatives from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, etc.</td>
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### Resource Implications

#### 3.1 Financial
Funding to meet the additional expenditure associated with development and management of a supplementary Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast will be sought from the DoE NI Local Air Quality Management grant process.

#### 3.2 Human Resources
Development of a supplementary Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast will be led by existing staff from within the Environmental Protection Unit.

#### 3.3 Asset and Other Implications
N/A

### Recommendations

#### 4.1
The Committee is invited to endorse the attached covering letter (Appendix 2) and consultation response (Appendix 3) in respect of the DEFRA Consultation on Air Quality Plans to meet the EU Limit Values for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO$_2$) in Northern Ireland. At the time of submission (5th August), DEFRA will be advised that the comments are subject to ratification by the Council at its meeting on 1st September.

### Documents Attached

- **Appendix 1** – Belfast Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs)
- **Appendix 2** – Covering letter to accompany the Council’s consultation response to DEFRA
- **Appendix 3** - Belfast City Council response on air quality plans to meet European Union limit values for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO$_2$) in Northern Ireland