



Subject:	Motion: Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland – Response from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Date:	17th December, 2020
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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 or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a response from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to a motion on a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to consider the response.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	The Committee will recall that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd November, passed the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor O'Hara and seconded by Councillor Groogan:

“This Council recognises our failure to meet EU legal limits on air pollution values despite significant progress made over recent years. The World Health Organisation and the UK Government recognise that air pollution is the largest environmental health risk we face today. This Council recognises that air pollution leads to between 28,000 and 36,000 early deaths each year in the UK. This Council also recognises that medical evidence is mounting around the dangerous link between Covid-19 and air pollution.

The Belfast Agenda aims for Belfast to be a city that is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable, where everyone experiences good health and wellbeing. In order to achieve that vision, we must address air pollution. This Council already supports adopting the more stringent World Health Organisation air pollution limits where appropriate and has moved ahead with the first detailed assessment of air pollution sources across this city since 2010 with the welcome support from the Department. Our ambition for Clean Air Zones in the city cannot be achieved without enabling legislation from the Assembly. This Council passed a motion supporting more stringent targets and ambition for Clean Air Zones in September 2019 and has included addressing air pollution in our corporate priorities. The Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has committed to bringing forward a ‘Clean Air Strategy discussion document’ which is a roll back from previous commitments in response to Assembly questions. Further delay will lead to continuing early deaths and ongoing breaches of the EU legal limits.

The Council also recognises that deprived communities are more likely to suffer from the impact of air pollution, and accordingly also recognises this issue as a class issue, impacted by socioeconomic inequalities.

The Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs requesting the immediate development of a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, rather than a discussion document which further delays progress on addressing harmful air pollution in the City.”

3.2 A response has now been received from Minister Poots, a copy of which is attached.

3.3 The Minister welcomes the Council’s interest in the development of the first Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland and its commitment to protecting public health. He points out that both he and his officials share the Council’s concerns around the environmental health risks created by air pollution and that they were working to develop an effective strategy which would deliver meaningful improvements in air quality across Northern Ireland. They also support the Council’s detailed assessment of Nitrogen Oxide and particulate matter within Belfast and have offered £125,000 in this financial year to assist with that project.

3.4 He then addresses the call within the Council motion for the immediate development of a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, rather than a discussion document. He explains that air quality is a complex and cross-cutting issue and that it is influenced by policy across government through, for example, agriculture, domestic heating, industry and transport. The impacts of poor air quality can be felt across our society and have consequences for health, the environment and the economy. He is, therefore, adopting a two-stage approach for the development of the Strategy. In the first stage, a discussion document, which presents an in-depth analysis of air quality in Northern Ireland and sets out current policy and evidence, was launched for a twelve week consultation period on 23rd November. The document seeks views on a wide range of matters relating to air quality and includes a series of questions aimed at promoting discussion around air quality issues. It is envisaged that issues relating

	<p>to Clean Air Zones, World Health Organisation standards and socio-economic deprivation would be raised, which the Minister welcomes. However, the document does not set out policy options or articulate a particular policy position.</p>
3.5	<p>The public consultation will, he points out, help to identify gaps in current policy and contribute to developing effective outcome-based measures aimed at reducing levels of air pollution across Northern Ireland and will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to put forward suggestions.</p>
3.6	<p>The Minister goes on to state that, in the second stage, all responses received as part of the consultation will be reviewed and a range of proposals will be formulated. Once he has decided upon a policy direction, officials will begin the process of drafting the first Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy will be more focused and shorter than the discussion document and will contain specific proposals around policy and other measures to improve air quality. It will, he adds, be subject to additional public consultation and, due to the cross-cutting nature of the policy area, will require Executive approval.</p>
3.7	<p>The Minister stresses that the adoption of a two stage approach for the development of the Clean Air Strategy, based upon an analysis of the evidence, assessment of current policy and stakeholder views, will ensure that it receives stakeholder buy in. Rather than delaying the process, this ongoing, thorough best practice approach will result an effective Clean Air Strategy which will deliver positive improvements in air quality for Northern Ireland. He concludes by encouraging the Council to review the discussion document and would welcome its response.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.8	<p>None associated with this report.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.9	<p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Document Attached
	<p>Copy of response from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</p>