

Item 8 - Question Time

To the Chair of the Care, Learning & Housing Committee

“In light of very recent significant increases to the estimate of UK deaths due to air pollution, as well as very recent guidance from Public Health England to all UK local authorities to prioritise protecting children against the effects of air pollution, what steps is Highland Council taking to monitor and reduce air pollution in and around our schools?”

Response to Mr B Thompson

General air quality

The first review of air quality in the Highlands by Environmental Health was published in 1998. From that initial review to the most recent, the reports have concluded that general air quality in the Highland Council area is good. The only exception identified so far has been Nitrogen dioxide in Inverness on Queensgate and Union Street where the Council declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2014. Results since then have generally been improving and we will be reviewing the status of the AQMA in 2019. Routine monitoring is ongoing in Inverness, Fort William and Dingwall.

Air quality at schools

In terms of schools, in 2016 the Council undertook monitoring at Nairn Rosebank Primary School investigating the impact of A96 traffic pollution at the school. The monitoring found that Nitrogen dioxide concentrations were significantly below the UK Air Quality Objectives within the school grounds. Other than the work in Nairn at Rosebank Primary School, there has not been any specific monitoring at schools because the wider screening hasn't identified particular issues.

The increasing concerns on air pollution are recognised and the Council are reviewing the Public Health England guidance. Many of the recommendations focussed on children such as interventions at schools to work with children and parents to increase active travel, reduce idling and increase public awareness of air pollution are already being undertaken by the Council through the Safer Routes to School initiative.

Safer Routes to School has been used by the Council for a number of years and has led to improvements at a significant number of schools. The improvements aim to promote active travel and reduce use of vehicles and reduce idling. Further information on Safer Routes to School including the 'Parksmart' and 'Go For It' initiatives used to reduce school gate parking, can be viewed at www.highland.gov.uk/srts .

Going forward, the Council will continue to promote Safer Routes to Schools and will look at further publicity on air pollution and reducing idling vehicles. This may include promoting educational resources available to schools to encourage pupils to get involved with air pollution projects. Environmental Health will also consider if projects undertaken at other Councils can be used in Highland. Officers are happy to respond to any specific concerns at particular schools.