

Local Authority:	<b>Wokingham District Council</b>
Reference:	<b>ASR23-1649</b>
Date of issue	<b>July 2023</b>

## Annual Status Report Appraisal Report

The Report sets out the Annual Status Report, which forms part of the Review & Assessment process required under the Environment Act 1995 and subsequent Regulations.

Wokingham District Council (WDC) have declared three Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) across the district: The Wokingham AQMA declared in 2001 and amended in 2004, The Twyford Crossroads AQMA, declared in 2015 and the Wokingham Town Centre AQMA declared in 2015. All of the AQMAs are declared for exceedances of the annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> objective with the Wokingham AQMA also declared for the 1-hour mean objective for NO<sub>2</sub>.

WDC have reviewed all three AQMAs and the potential to revoke the AQMA's. The ASR states that data in 2020 and 2021 should be removed due to COVID-19. As LAQM.TG22 states AQMAs should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance, WOK state that due to the 2020 and 2021 data being effected by COVID-19 only 1 year of the three consecutive years below the 36 µg/m<sup>3</sup> limit can be considered and that two further years of data is needed before revoking the AQMAs. This is sufficient for the Wokingham Town Centre AQMA as it has only 3 years of compliance, two of which are during 2020 and 2021. However, for Wokingham AQMA and Twyford Crossroads AQMA, NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have been below the AQO since 2018 and have shown a downward trend into 2022.

The revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance with the relevant objective as evidenced through monitoring. Where there have been no exceedances for the past five years, local authorities must proceed with plans to revoke the AQMA. The LAQM Technical Guidance 2022 is clear in this respect:

"There should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period." (Point 3.57, page 50).

Please be aware that unless a likely exceedance has been identified in the area, Defra will not appraise AQAPs for AQMAs that have been in compliance for five years. Local Authorities will instead be advised to revoke the AQMA.

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AQMAs should identify areas where air quality objectives are not being met or are likely to be at risk of not meeting them. Keeping AQMAs in place longer than required risks diluting their meaning and impacting public trust in LAQM.

Local authorities that do not have an AQMA should continue to monitor for exceedances and should still have a local Air Quality Strategy in place to ensure air quality remains a high-profile issue, thereby enabling a quick response should there be any deterioration in condition. See LAQM Statutory Policy Guidance 2022 for more information. The LAQM Covid Guidance note states: Where 2020 is one of many (i.e. at least three) consecutive years of compliance, this may still be considered for revocation where the supporting evidence is considered suitably robust. If authorities wish to make any changes to AQMAs, whether declaration, amendment or revocation, based upon 2020 data, please contact the LAQM Helpdesk to discuss your approach.

Wokingham District Council undertakes automatic monitoring at two sites one within the Wokingham Town Centre AQMA, the other the Twyford AQMA. Monitoring is undertaken for NO<sub>2</sub>. None of these sites recorded exceedances of relevant AQOs. Wokingham District Council also carry out monitoring by 'Low Cost Sensor' (Vortex) at 14 selected schools between February 2022 and 2023 for a minimum of 3 months. While these low cost sensors provide a useful indication of pollutant concentrations, as they are not an established reference method sensor, they cannot be used to inform LAQM decisions which is referenced in the report. It is recommended that results from this monitor are included as a separate appendix. Further information on the use of Low Cost Sensors is included within this FAQ:

<https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/faqs/faq140/>

Non-automatic (passive) monitoring of NO<sub>2</sub> was conducted at 47 sites during 2022, including two sites where a colocation triplicate study was undertaken at each automatic monitor. No exceedances of the annual mean objective were recorded. The ASR states that overall, there has been a slight increase in annual mean concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub> in 2022 compared to 2021 bar one monitoring site. However, all 2022 concentrations were below the pre-pandemic 2019 concentrations except for one site.

Some QA/QC procedures have been applied with details of automatic monitoring QAQC procedures as well as passive monitoring. A local bias adjustment factor was used, with detailed justification behind this. The report provides a clear breakdown of historical data

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(and maps) of each monitoring site in detail. Annualisation has also been undertaken at all required sites.

There are some discrepancies for the naming of AQMAs particularly the Wokingham AQMA as detailed on the LAQM portal and the M4 AQMA as referenced in the ASR. Additionally some diffusion tube monitoring sites are not consistent in the site classification of kerbside or roadside given the distance to kerb values.

There is an appropriate level of detail on the Progress and Impact of Measures to address air quality, though this could be more specific to the measures taken during 2022 to tackle air quality within table 2.2 which replicates much of the data in the 2022 ASR. Although sufficient information on the ongoing measures and measures to be progressed and discussed outside of Table 2.2. Priorities during the next reporting year are clearly outlined.

The report contains discussion on existing measures to improve air quality that would also act to reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions.

The ASR has been signed off by the director of public health.

On the basis of the evidence provided by the local authority the conclusions reached are **acceptable** for all sources and pollutants. Following the completion of this report, Wokingham District Council should submit an annual status report for 2024.

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## Commentary

The report is well structured, detailed, and provides some information specified in the Guidance. The following comments are designed to help inform future reports.

1. There is justification to revoke the Wokingham and Twyford Crossroads AQMA despite the ASR stating a further two years of data is required. Although TG.22 states three consecutive years, WDC have stated that data from 2020 and 2021 should be excluded in this period. This would still give three years below the AQO, however the trends in data showing a decrease from 2018 at all monitoring sites in the AQMA. As such there is considered sufficient evidence to suggest that NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations will not be exceeded in the Wokingham and Twyford Crossroads AQMA. Although there is merit in the exclusion of data from 2020 and 2021 due to COVID, given the concentrations within the Wokingham and Twyford Crossroads AQMA prior 2020 and the increase between 2022, 2021 and 2020 with all results still well below the AQO, there is sufficient data to revoke the AQMA. It is considered that three consecutive years of data from 2022 is not necessary to revoke the AQMA. The 2024 ASR should look to revoke the Wokingham and Twyford Crossroads AQMA or discuss the data with the LAQM Helpdesk for support.
2. WDC should confirm if the information on UK-Air regarding their AQMAs is up to date however this should be reviewed as the description of the AQMA on the LAQM portal and in the 2023 ASR compared to UK-Air differs slightly.
3. WDC have used a different name for the Wokingham AQMA in the ASR, referring it to the M4 AQMA despite the LAQM portal and UK-Air stating the Wokingham AQMA. This should be clarified and consistent in future reports.
4. Table 2.2 Progress on measures should be regularly updated, the details within the 2023 ASR are similar to the 2022 ASR despite many measures being progressed. It should also be noted that WDC AQAP is to be developed over the next year, this is welcomed.
5. There are some formatting errors and incorrect links within the report, these should be reviewed in future reports.
6. WOK841 is stated to be 0.2m from the kerb. This would classify the site as a kerbside site not a roadside site which is currently states in the ASR in Table A.2. this is also the case for WOK870. WOK874 states the distance to kerb and relevant exposure is 0 for both. Exceedances of the AQO in Table A.4 should be in bold. These should be clarified in future reports.

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7. Detailed justification over the bias adjustment factor is provided, this is welcomed.
8. Trends of annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are clearly presented in detail and discussed and a robust comparison with air quality objectives is provided.
9. Maps of the diffusion tube network are clear and comprehensive, showing the AQMA boundaries and monitoring undertaken in this area.
10. Measures to address PM<sub>2.5</sub> are detailed within the ASR.
11. Monitoring of PM<sub>2.5</sub> at 14 schools was undertaken in 2022, although this was undertaken using 'low cost sensors' the results would be welcomed in an additional appendix in future reports.
12. It is not clearly stated whether Diffusion Tubes have been deployed in line with the Defra Calendar. Please clearly state this in future ASRs.
13. The ASR has been signed off by a director of public health, this is welcomed.

This commentary is not designed to deal with every aspect of the report. It highlights a number of issues that should help the local authority either in completing the Progress Report adequately (if required) or in carrying out future Review & Assessment work.

**Issues specifically related to this appraisal can be followed up by returning the attached comment form to Defra, Welsh Assembly Government, Scottish Government or DOE.**

For any other queries please contact the Local Air Quality Management Helpdesk:  
 Telephone: 0800 0327 953  
 Email: LAQMHelpdesk@uk.bureauveritas.com

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## **Appraisal Response Comment Form**

Contact Name:	
Contact Telephone number:	
Contact email address:	

**Comments on appraisal/Further information:**

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## LAQM Guidance Notes – 2023

### Changes to the Local Air Quality Management Framework

Through the Environment Act 2021 and updated Local Air Quality Management Statutory Policy Guidance 2022, the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) framework has been considerably strengthened. This page highlights some of the changes for delivery to help you prioritise action for improved air quality:

#### 1. Strengthened Criteria for Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs)

Where a Local Authority is not meeting air quality objectives, they must create an AQAP setting out their intentions to improve air quality in the area. Without current action plans in place, Local Authorities risk negatively impacting their communities by not proactively working to reduce air pollution in the area.

The requirements and guidance around AQAPs were recently strengthened under the Environment Act 2021 and revised LAQM Statutory policy guidance, which Local Authorities must have regard to. The key criteria for action plans are that they:

- set out the measures they will take to secure the achievement, and maintenance, of air quality standards and objectives
- specify a date by which each measure will be carried out
- are revised no later than every five years

#### 2. New Escalation Process for Reporting

Government is committed to increasing transparency by requiring timely and accurate publication of Annual Status Reports (ASRs) and AQAPs by local authorities, as set out in the [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#). These documents are public-facing and serve to keep local communities informed of the steps being taken by their local authority to improve air quality.

To ensure ASRs and AQAPs are delivered on time, Defra has introduced a new reminder and warning letter system for Local Authorities. This system was set out in the [LAQM Statutory Policy Guidance 2022](#) and started to apply from 30 June 2023.

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If reporting requirements continue to be missed, the matter can be escalated to a Section 85 Secretary of State direction to the relevant Local Authority Chief Executive specifying action. You are therefore advised to ensure all statutory reporting duties for LAQM are met on time.

### **3. Public Bodies Required to Contribute to Action Plans**

The Environment Act 2021 amended the Environment Act 1995 to increase the number of public bodies that have a duty to co-operate with Local Authorities for LAQM. Air quality partners are certain other public bodies that a Local Authority identifies as having responsibility for a source of emissions contributing to an exceedance of local air quality objectives. This could be a neighbouring authority, National Highways, or the Environment Agency. Once identified, there is a statutory requirement for such public bodies to engage and to contribute actions they will take to secure achievement of the local air quality objective and to maintain achievement thereafter.

All tiers of local Government are also now required by law to collaborate to address exceedances of Air Quality Objectives. County councils, the Mayor of London and combined authorities have similar duties to air quality partners. The difference is that, when requested, they must contribute to an action plan being prepared by a Local Authority, regardless of whether the local authority has identified them as being responsible for a source of emissions.

Under the new legislation, you may choose to request the support of another public body in the development of an AQAP and the same may be requested of your organisation.

Please refer to the LAQM Statutory Policy Guidance 2022 for more information. Should you require further assistance, please contact the LAQM Helpdesk: <https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/air-quality/featured/england-exc-london-policy-guidance/>

Web: <http://laqm.defra.gov.uk/helpdesks.html>

FAQs: <http://laqm.defra.gov.uk/laqm-faqs/>

Tel: 0800 032 7953

Email: [laqmhelpdesk@uk.bureauveritas.com](mailto:laqmhelpdesk@uk.bureauveritas.com)

The Air Quality Hub also provides free online information and is a knowledge sharing resource for local authority air quality professionals: <https://www.airqualityhub.co.uk/>

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**Comments on appraisal/Further information:**

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