

City breaches air pollution targets

CITY

AIR pollution in parts of Sheffield is getting worse, and some areas may not meet air quality targets for at least eight years without major action, according to a new report.

Although local air quality has generally improved, concerns are being raised again about the impact of heavy lorries in the city centre and near the M1.

As Sheffield prepares to adopt a revised Air Quality Action Plan, it is still breaching UK and European targets, as are many UK cities, says the council report.

It is estimated that poor air quality accounts for up to 500 premature deaths each year in Sheffield and costs the NHS an annual £160m. Especially at risk are the young and the old and those with pre-existing heart and lung conditions.

The council has been trying to address the issues for several years and areas such as Tinsley, next to the M1, and London Road have been highlighted as vulnerable parts of the city. More recently, residents

By PETER KAY

in Broomhill have complained about high levels of air pollution.

The latest council assessment sets the scene for an updated strategy for the next three years.

One strand envisages a low-emission zone in which operators of lorries and buses must comply with a low emissions policy, using alternative fuels and achieving better engine performance.

In general, commercial operators and the public will be urged to switch to cleaner fuels, and the drive to promote public transport will continue. Hopes for the area near the M1 focus primarily on the Government lowering speeds on the motorway. Without that commitment, the council admits it is unlikely that it can adequately address air quality in Tinsley.

In a report to councillors next Wednesday, executive director Simon Green says: "Sheffield reflects the national picture in

that generally air quality is improving. However, in many areas, near the motorway and within the busy urban centre, it has not improved, with some places seeing air quality worsening."

Reflecting national trends, Sheffield currently breaches UK and European Union thresholds, says Mr Green, and the Government could be fined if EU limits are exceeded past 2015.

"Nitrogen dioxide levels are so high in some areas of Sheffield that without major intervention the objectives are unlikely to be achieved until at least 2020."

"These areas are adjacent to arterial routes into the city where there are large numbers of heavy diesel vehicles. This is of major concern where there are people living close to the roads."

Mr Green adds that Fitzalan Square and Haymarket, which see high numbers of diesel vehicles, experience some of the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the city.