

'Radical action' needed to curb city's air pollution

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SHEFFIELD is in danger of failing to meet restrictions on air pollution for at least nine years, according to a new report.

With national air quality targets exceeded in many urban parts of the city, especially those near main roads, a stronger and more concerted approach is needed if the health of residents is to be protected, says the council.

"It is apparent that more ambitious and radical actions will be required if national air quality objectives are to be met in Sheffield," says a draft air quality action plan.

The importance is spelled out in a report to councillors next Wednesday. Using national figures, it is estimated that air pollution contributes to between 325 and 500 deaths a year in Sheffield.

It costs the local health service an estimated £95m a year, with poor air quality causing heart and lung disease. There is a particular threat from long term exposure to babies in the womb and to children, who can go on to develop high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

The proposed action plan, which updates one launched eight years ago, includes creating a 'city centre low emissions zone', which would put pressure on bus companies and lorry companies to go greener.

More work is to be done on encouraging the use of gas, electric and hydrogen powered vehicles, including the council looking at its own fleet. Taxi drivers could be required to ensure their vehicles do not emit high levels of fumes as part of



The busy junction of Whitham Road, Crookes, Nile Street and the A57, where the highest reading was recorded

the council licensing process.

The strategy also envisages stepping up a range of green initiatives already underway, especially trying to persuade more people to use buses and trams, reducing the need to travel and encouraging people to walk and cycle.

On the M1 at Tinsley, a traditional air pollution blackspot, the Government will be urged to impose speed restrictions at times of poor air quality to try to curb further pollution.

But the city's pollution problems stretch across the city.

Statistics compiled from air quality surveys around Sheffield show the amount of nitrogen dioxide - a toxic gas produced by vehicle exhausts - is almost

50% higher in Broomhill than the level considered safe.

The joint-second worst areas were Chesterfield Road, which is often choked by traffic jams, and Fitzalan Square in the city centre, where buses often queue.

Unless Sheffield makes better progress, along with other local authorities, it faces the prospect of European Union fines running into millions of pounds.

The action plan says: "Nitrogen dioxide levels are so high in some part of the city that Defra (the Government's Department for the Environment, Foods and Rural Affairs) objectives are unlikely to be achieved until at least 2020, without major interventions.

"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 roads."

The report adds: "The introduction of significant proportions of low emission vehicles could have a very significant effect on air quality. Gas powered vehicles, for example, emit about half the amount of nitrogen oxides as petrol and diesel vehicles and emit virtually no particulate matter."

However, no extra money has been allocated at this stage to help Sheffield step up its efforts. Initiatives will be financed largely through existing budgets, although some extra money may be available from NHS sources and Government grants.