

SCC Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan: Highlight Report

Quarter 4 2023/24 (January – March 2024)

Suffolk County Council (SCC) published its Air Quality Strategy and action plan in May 2023. It consolidates the levers that the County Council has to address air pollution across Suffolk and reduce the health risks associated with poor air quality.

This report provides a summary of the key quarter 3 progress highlights towards each of the eight strategic objectives that the strategy aims to achieve through its action plan (page 2-3), followed by a summary of key areas of added value, concern, and quarter 4 milestones (page 4). A progress report against the full action plan is included at appendix 1 at the end of this document.

The strategic objectives are:

- 1. Partnership working:** encourage and develop closer working relationships around air quality with internal and external partners in the public, private and VCSE sectors.
- 2. Sustainable and active travel:** promote and enable a modal shift from car travel to active and sustainable forms of transport.
- 3. Traffic- and congestion-related emissions:** explore and implement measures to reduce traffic- and congestion-related emissions.
- 4. Carbon reduction:** support and enable homes and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and reduce fossil-based fuel use.
- 5. Policy-level approach:** where appropriate, use available opportunities to include air quality in policies and strategies.
- 6. Monitoring and enforcement:** ensure that decisions and measures relating to air quality are being implemented and enforced as intended.
- 7. Environmental and Green Space Management:** use effective green space management to improve air quality in both indoor and outdoor environments, and enable developments to be more adaptive to climate change.
- 8. Behaviour change and communication:** use behavioural science to promote positive behaviour change around air quality and carbon reduction within businesses and the general public.

The strategy also adopts the [Public Health England \(2020\)](#) air pollution intervention hierarchy, which is a way of prioritising interventions to address air pollution. It means that measures aimed at preventing or reducing air pollution emissions are prioritised over actions to reduce air pollution after it has occurred (mitigation) or actions that rely on avoiding air pollution.



Key highlights in quarter 4 2023/24:

<u>Strategic Objective</u>	<u>Action no.</u>	<u>Summary progress update</u>
Partnership working	4	<p>This quarter the University of Suffolk has been awarded funding to host a Challenge Lab Event in May 2024 to formally launch a Suffolk Air Quality Network. Planning for this event, which will bring together partners and stakeholders from across Suffolk, is underway.</p> <p>Beat the Streets Ipswich launched in February 2024. Air quality has been added as a topic for data collection and evaluation through the course of the project. Data should be available to share in July 2024.</p> <p>Officers attended the Ipswich and East Alliance Executive Delivery Group meeting to discuss opportunities to reduce air pollution emissions generated through their operations. In addition, a meeting with Ipswich Clean Air Now (ICAN) and representatives from Ipswich Borough Council, the University of Suffolk and Growth Highways and Infrastructure took place to discuss research findings from ICAN and next steps for projects in Ipswich.</p>
Sustainable and active travel	14	<p>At the end of March 2024, 110 e-bike trials have taken place or are in progress. This includes a trial with Adult Community Services for 40 carers to use an e-bike instead of carrying out visits by vehicle.</p> <p>Working with local communities, advice and financial support has been given for the creation of walking and cycling hubs. Hubs are now in place in Ipswich and Stowmarket with a launch pending in Felixstowe.</p> <p>Over 100 registrations for the Active Travel Social Prescribing pilot in Ipswich and Lowestoft have been received. The scheme provides access to free walking and cycling activities and equipment to individuals who are referred by practitioners or who refer themselves. Plans are underway to up-scale the trial.</p>
	15	<p>SCC has funded kits for Walk Once Weekly's Walk to School Week which have been given to participating schools. On average, participating schools see a 30% reduction in car journeys taken to the school gate and a 23% increase in walking rates.</p>
Traffic- and congestion-related emissions	11	<p>The Eco Carriers are working with retailers in Bury St Edmunds to offer shoppers delivery of high street items by e-cargo bike to their homes later that day. The trial continues.</p> <p>An E-Cargo Bike Trial with Everlong Farm in North Suffolk also continues. The bike is being used for deliveries in the local area replacing short van journeys.</p>

	16	<p>Suffolk's first School Street scheme at Ranelagh Road Primary School in Ipswich launched in January 2024, involving a road closure at school drop off and pick up times and feedback from the school and neighbouring community has been positive.</p> <p>The School Street scheme at Morland Primary School has been delayed and is expected to launch in May 2024. Plans for additional school streets in Suffolk are underway.</p>
Carbon reduction	8	<p>Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) funding has been utilised to recruit a Schools Sustainability Lead, expected to start in Summer 2024, and provide a package of support to schools covering decarbonisation and biodiversity enhancement.</p> <p>The second youth conference is also in planning and will be held on 3 July. 21 schools and 250 pupils are attending.</p>
Policy-level approach	3	<p>The LTP4 initial consultation launched on the 12 February 2024 and will run to the 8 April 2024. Over 1,000 responses have currently been received.</p>
Monitoring and enforcement	22	<p>There have been no reported breaches of air quality standards across minerals and waste sites. As a result, no further investigations have been undertaken.</p>
Environmental and green space management	25	<p>The Environment Act, which makes biodiversity net gain a legal requirement, is now in full force for all major and minor applications and requires 10% biodiversity net gain across all developments.</p>
Behaviour change and communication	5	<p>Engagement activity continues, with a focus on widening out opportunities to areas that hadn't been covered to date whilst additionally delivering some targeted focus groups with key demographics. Q4 engagement has included:</p> <p>An engagement session with the Hardwicke House Surgery Patient Participation Group (Sudbury) and at Bury St Edmunds Library A focus group with The Limes School Pupil Parliament (Lowestoft) Attendance at the Inspire Inclusion Event at The Hold (Ipswich)</p> <p>The Suffolk Idling Action campaign relaunched on 1 March 2024 and has seen 14 schools, 2 community groups and 6 residents sign up. The launch was featured on BBC Radio Suffolk and Yahoo News.</p>

Key areas of added value:

- The Suffolk Idling Action campaign has helped to further develop relationships with partners and stakeholders (e.g District and Borough Council's and SNEE), who were involved in reviewing the content and have been helping with the promotion of the campaign via social media. This has generated a lot of online discussion and interest meaning that we had to order additional materials to cover demand. The campaign has been well received by schools. Castle Hill School in Ipswich are dovetailing the campaign with the use of our handheld pollution monitors to track the efficacy of the campaign at their school so that children and staff can see the immediate benefits of the campaign, which will help to further raise public awareness of air quality.
- Having electric bikes and electric cargo bikes out in the community is helping to increase visibility of sustainable travel options and will hopefully have a snowball effect encouraging interest in other user groups.

Key concerns:

- Engaging with Primary Care has been proving difficult even with partner support but we have received some feedback that a number of the Patient Participation Groups had ceased to operate through COVID and surgeries are only now getting them back up and running. Engaging with Primary Care is a vital element of the air quality and health work and will take time to find 'ins' and build relationships.

Key quarter 1 milestones (April 2024 – June 2024):

1. Air Quality Strategy – first year achievements report
2. Air Quality Strategy – light touch review of the action plan
3. Suffolk Air Quality Network Launch in May 2024