

21 March 2023

Report of	Strategic Director - Place and Client Services	Author	Emily Harrup
Title	Air Quality – Schools activity.		
Wards affected	All		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates on the activities being undertaken locally to change driver behaviour around schools to improve air quality. Members have requested this update following concerns about the level of engine idling outside schools and the impact this has on children's health and development as part of their consideration as to whether legislation to fine drivers who idle their engines outside schools should be adopted. Included is an overview of Healthy School Streets provided by Essex County Council and an update on the City Council's CAREless Pollution campaign activity with schools.
- 1.2 In 2019 the City Council received funding from Defra to develop a No Idling campaign. The campaign aimed to raise awareness of air pollution and its impact on health and to implement a campaign to encourage drivers to switch off their engine every time they wait. In 2021 a further successful Defra bid funded the continuation of this work. In 2023 a fifth successful Defra bid is providing further funding to embed the campaign within schools and to cement the peer-to-peer approach to encourage schools to support each other.
- 1.3 The CAREless Pollution campaign was developed following extensive community engagement of which schools were a key target audience. During phase 1 of the campaign (Oct 2020 – Oct 21) we worked with 13 primary schools. In phase 2 (Oct 2021 – to date) we are working with or have shared materials with 28 schools.
- 1.4 As part of the evaluation of phase 1 of the CAREless Pollution campaign, a survey was conducted outside Colchester schools in the Autumn of 2021. Feedback from 101 parents and carers was received.
- 1.5 Respondents were asked how their behaviour had changed compared to 12 months earlier and if they switch off their engine more or less. 65% of respondents said that they switch off more than they did before suggesting the campaign is impacting positively on behaviour.
- 1.6 Of the 35% who hadn't changed their behaviour 21% of parents/carers said they never switch off their engine. This reaffirms that idling outside schools is a problem, and it underscores that this audience should continue to be a priority for the educational campaign.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 For the panel to support and help facilitate the ongoing educational approach to changing driver behaviour around schools in relation to engine idling and active travel.

- 2.2 To support ECC's plans for school streets and the CAREless Pollution campaign by:
- Providing funding where possible (particularly towards Healthy School Streets)
 - Use community connections to help develop a volunteer network to increase capacity and therefore localised action
 - Provide named contacts and introductions at local schools
 - Encourage schools to engage and take up support offered

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To continue the current educational approach to discourage engine idling outside schools and to support activity to make it easier and safer for children to walk, scoot and cycle to school through reducing vehicle movements outside schools during school drop off and pick up.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not Applicable

5.0 Activity to discourage engine idling outside schools

5.1 Essex Healthy School Streets

- 5.1.2 Healthy Schools Streets is an initiative to improve road safety around schools, encouraging more walking, wheeling and cycling and protect children from the damaging health effects of air pollution and to improve activity levels and road safety around schools.
- 5.1.3 Essex County Council is responsible for delivering schools streets as it requires making changes on the Highway. Essex County Council defines a healthy school street as 'any street outside a school where changes have been made, in particular to make drivers aware that they are in close proximity to schools. ECC want to encourage as many children as possible - as well as their parents/carers - to walk, cycle or scoot to school, particularly for shorter journeys.
- 5.1.4 There are several different approaches to implementing school streets. Essex County Council's approach is not based on the Hackney model, which demarcates streets around a school as Pedestrian and Cycle Zones at set times in the morning and afternoon, but rather focuses on a combination of behavioural and physical interventions based on persuasion and enforcement if supported by the local and school communities. The attached slides set out ECC's approach to Healthy School Streets.
- 5.1.5 ECC are currently developing a School Street Strategy aiming for completion in the summer of 2023. The strategy will include a set of criteria that will inform how to prioritise funding. The ethos of ECC's approach is to listen to schools, parents and residents and develop solutions based on a localised agenda.
- 5.1.6 With limited funding ECC will prioritise schools that demonstrate an appetite for collaboration and change and are in areas with significant traffic congestion issues. Schools will be expected to show commitment and proactivity towards encouraging a change in behaviour through developing their own Travel Plan and working towards national Modeshift accreditation.
- 5.1.7 ECC has undertaken community Healthy Schools Streets surveys across selected parts of Essex to better understand local school parent/pupil, resident and business needs and concerns relating to travelling within their area.

- 5.1.8 Working with Sustrans, in Winstree Road, Colchester where there are 5 schools which are located close to each other, a Community-Led Street Design (CLSD) has so far introduced tactile paving and new kerbing. This project had a working group made up of local residents, parents, Councillors, North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and other stakeholders. ECC are currently working with NEPP to commission a Parking Study for Winstree Road and some of the surrounding area. The aim of the study is to collect data on the number of cars parking in the vicinity, as well as understanding the reasons why parents/staff may be using these areas. While the original has now been concluded future work will be carried out under the Healthy School Streets programme and associated funding streams.
- 5.1.8 Healthy School Streets are currently being looked at for schools located on roads just off Lexden Road (apart from Kingswode Hoe) and the school off North Station Road. Schools in these areas are being engaged with and a survey has recently been carried out regarding Norman Way, Sussex Road, Rembrandt Way, Constantine Rd, Wellesley Road and surrounding roads. Views were sought on the community's lived experience of the area, and this feedback will help inform how the Healthy Schools Street project in this area develops.

5.2 CAREless Pollution background

- 5.2.1 CAREless Pollution is a Defra funded campaign that was developed in 2019 to encourage drivers to switch off their engine whenever they wait. The campaign was co-produced with the community following 3 months of intense community engagement where over 3000 views were gained. A stakeholder and advisory group were then involved in the development of the campaign materials and campaign delivery.
- 5.2.2 Feedback from the community showed that concerns about the health of their loved ones was a key factor that would influence personal behaviour when it came to engine idling and campaign materials were formulated with health as a key message and motivator.
- 5.2.3 Creating a sustainable legacy where the community through Clean Air Colchester a local volunteer group were equipped and enabled to continue the campaign once the funding was finished was a key objective of the project.
- 5.2.4 Working with local schools within or close to the AQMA was a key focus of the initial project and that work is outlined in section 5.3.
- 5.2.5 In 2021 a further successful bid to Defra enabled the Council to continue the campaign with the aim of further embedding it within the community but with a move towards a more peer to peer approach. This was due to concerns raised by volunteers about the level of abuse from the public when asking drivers to switch off their engine. This included outside schools as well. Hence moving to a more pupil focused approach empowering children with knowledge and information to influence their parents.
- 5.2.6 In February 2021 a 5th successful bid to Defra has secured further funding to continue to work with schools to expand the CAREless Pollution campaign.

5.3 CAREless Pollution school's activity – core schools in or near the AQMA

- 5.3.1 The CAREless Pollution campaign has undertaken the following specific work with schools located in or near the AQMA. This includes St James', St John's Green, St Thomas More's and St Georges.

5.3.2 St James' Primary School

St James' hosted the campaign's main Clean Air Day activity in June 2021, which saw us run a stunt with a giant Zorb ball (to represent the ball of toxic air pollution trapped in a stationary car with the engine idling). The event was filmed by ITV Anglia and featured on the local news as well as in the Gazette. The campaign banner has been displayed on the railings outside the school and students have completed the Key Stage 2 activities from the campaign toolkit, which has included writing down their individual pledges for how they will tackle air pollution, writing letters home to their families about the issue and a tree planting scheme in the school grounds. We have a meeting with the Head Teacher scheduled at the end of March 2023 to discuss plans for continued support of the campaign amongst staff and pupils.

5.3.3 St Thomas More's Primary School

During 2022, pupils at the school have been involved in a programme of activities to raise awareness of air pollution. This included a group of pupils from the Eco Club borrowing the Council's portable monitors to take air quality readings outside their school and on East Hill over a period of three months and analysing the results. They also displayed the campaign posters around the school site. Year 6 students took part in a street demonstration along Brook Street on Clean Air Day in June 2022, to promote the campaign to passing vehicles. This generated a full-page story in the Colchester Gazette, including photographs.

5.3.4 St John's Green

The school has been engaging with both pupils and parents, making use of free campaign materials by sending out a postcard in each child's book bag. They have used our template social media graphics to raise awareness on the school's Facebook page and put up an outdoor banner in the turning circle outside the school entrance.

5.3.5 St Georges

We have made regular contact with the school but to date no specific activities have been scheduled. We hope they will participate in awareness-raising for Clean Air Day 2023.

5.4 Activity with other Colchester schools

5.4.1 Unity Primary Academy

As part of the School's Green Day activity, the CAREless Pollution team used the Zorb ball as a conversation starter about the dangers of air pollution. We ran activities with Year 4, 5 & 6 pupils including a quiz and air pollution monitoring around the school site.

5.4.2 Cherry Tree Academy

Pupils decorated the campaign emoji masks in a creative activity to explore how air pollution makes them feel. Pupils also participated in a whole-school assembly run by the CAREless Pollution team and undertook air quality monitoring outside the school.

5.4.3 Home Farm Primary

Pupils borrowed air quality monitors to use around the school site and recorded their findings, which were then shared with other pupils. The school also received some campaign materials including posters and postcards to display and hand out.

5.4.4 St Mary's School

Year 8 pupils, all members of the school's Eco Team, used monitoring sheets and portable air quality monitors to measure air quality outside their Senior School site on Lexden Road. The results were shared with other pupils at the school during a themed assembly. The school has several of our outdoor signs on the railings facing Lexden Road.

5.4.5 Colchester Prep & High School

To mark Clean Air Day in June 2022, the Headteacher used the ready-to-go assembly presentation in our Toolkit for Schools. In addition, members of the school's Eco Club have been monitoring air pollution in the streets surrounding the school and devising a range of solutions, notably planting urban vegetation, to help improve air quality. Outdoor signs have been placed at both entrances to remind visitors to the school to switch off their engines. The school has recently been awarded the Eco Schools Green Flag and has applied for external funding to extend their air quality work.

5.4.6 Additionally:

- Social media posts to promote the campaign – CCHSG, St Benedict's, St Helena, Roach Vale Primary
- Signs at the school gates/on railings – Hamilton, Stanway Fiveways Primary, Stanway, Birch Primary (in addition to St John's Green, St James', St Mary's and CPHS mentioned above)
- Information about the campaign included in e-communications to parents – Stanway Fiveways Primary, Birch Primary, Kendall
- Posters up within the school – Brinkley Grove
- Emoji mask activity – North Primary
- Campaign materials distributed to parents – Philip Morant

We have also been in direct contact with a range of other primary and secondary schools, reminding them about the Toolkit materials and offering support for any upcoming events or themed days they may be running. This includes: CRGS, Gosbecks, Hazelmere, Birch, Icen Academy, Highwoods, Parsons Heath, Queen Boudica and Oxford House, as well as maintaining ongoing contact with the previously mentioned schools.

5.5 Evaluation of CAREless Pollution phase 1

- 5.5.1 As part of the evaluation of the first phase of the campaign in Autumn 2021, a survey was conducted among 101 parents/carers outside Colchester schools. Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents reported spontaneous awareness of information or promotional materials about a campaign in Colchester to encourage drivers to switch off their vehicle engines when stationary. A similar number (63%) stated that they had specifically seen information or materials about the CAREless Pollution campaign. This is around 50% more than amongst the general public who participated in the street survey and is likely to reflect the more intense campaign activity that has taken place in and around schools.
- 5.5.2 Parents and carers were asked whether they felt the campaign messages were useful and important. Almost four-fifths (79%) of respondents agreed 'Yes, definitely' and an additional one in six (15%) said 'Yes, a bit'. Only a small minority (6%) felt that the messages were not useful or important.
- 5.5.3 Just under one-third (31%) stated that they switch off their engine some of the time and one-fifth (21%) saying they always switch off. This compares with 23% of the general public we surveyed on the streets of central Colchester saying some of the time and 9% saying always.
- 5.5.5 Respondents were asked how their behaviour has changed as compared to 12 months ago and if they switch off their engine more or less. Two-thirds (65%) of respondents say that they switch off more than they did before. This suggests that the campaign is impacting on behaviour and is encouraging a positive improvement. Among the one-third (35%) that answered no included those for whom there had been no change.

- 5.5.6 One-fifth (21%) of parents/carers responded that they never switch off and this reaffirms that idling outside schools is a problem, and it underscores that this audience should continue to be a priority for the campaign. We know from anecdotal reports by schools and other parents that there seems to be a resistant minority who continue to idle on a regular basis. This cohort are therefore the primary target for our ongoing behaviour change work. The qualitative feedback we have received suggests that among some parents and carers they don't believe that their actions have a significant impact and that they have their engines running in order to keep the heating or air conditioning running while they wait.
- 5.5.7 Qualitative feedback from teachers who have been involved with the campaign has consistently been positive with compliments about the quality, usefulness and effectiveness of the materials produced. Our approach is therefore to extend awareness of the existing materials to more schools, and to future cohort of students within the existing schools we are working with, rather than produce additional materials.

5.6 CAREless Pollution Phase 2 evaluation

- 5.6.1 In May 2023 we have scheduled to evaluate Phase 2 of the campaign. This will again comprise a street survey among randomly selected members of the general public, as well as targeted evaluation among business and schools. The school evaluation will include quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, parents and carers.

5.7 Next steps for CAREless Pollution campaign

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- 5.7.1 In February 2023 we were awarded £310k from Defra following a 5th successful bid to continue work delivering sustainable travel initiatives to improve air quality.
- 5.7.2 Over the last year, engagement with schools, residents and businesses has shown that although there is interest and a momentum building in understanding the damaging effects of air pollution and the desire to make changes, there is still a gap in knowledge, understanding, experience and confidence that prevents widespread travel behaviour change.
- 5.7.3 Specifically in relation to schools, experience since our initial successful Defra bid in 2020 had shown that engagement with schools is difficult and takes time. Schools are time and resource poor with even the most committed of schools struggling to deliver additional activities. We have seen increasing demand from schools looking for help to address idling and reduce pollution outside their gates, hence the following commitments were built into our bid and will be delivered during 2023 and 2024 by a new and dedicated Clean Air Resident and Schools community engagement officer.
- A continued focus on 'no idling' work, getting more schools using the toolkit and strengthening the peer-to-peer work with support from the multi schools' council.
 - Expanding the pollution monitoring section of the schools' toolkit to include walking and cycling.
 - We will build upon the strengths of the existing toolkit and relationships with schools to include more information on walking and cycling; something which is missing from the current toolkit.
 - We will work with schools to broaden the scope of the toolkit to include lesson plans and activities that link to pollution generated from different modes of travel to help bring to life the difference walking and cycling to school can make to the air quality in addition to switching of the engine.

- Create a checklist for schools with easy measures for reducing pollution and highlighting where to get support. Bringing together information from ECC, 3PR and Living Streets.
- Explore a mapping tool for schools engagement to provide primary schools with sustainable travel information to support and influence the journey to school

5.7.4 Once we have more schools on board, the campaign better established and have a network of schools who can help each other, we will be in a stronger position to step back with some confidence that the work can continue in the hands of volunteers and Clean Air Colchester with reduced support from the Council.

5.8 Synergies, collaboration and joint working

5.8.1 We and ECC face the same challenges with working more closely with schools to address engine idling and irresponsible driver behaviour outside of schools. Our recent successful Defra bid will provide the officer time needed to explore all the synergies between the different school related projects and to improve communication and a more coordinated and collaborative approach which will enable more bespoke and intense work with Colchester schools to address idling but also encourage a move away from driving to school.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 This report has no specific equality, diversity and human rights implications; however, it should be noted that it is often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged that are most impacted on by poor air quality, which highlights the importance of our commitment to improve air quality.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The projects outlined in this report help meet three of the objectives contained in the strategic plan:

- Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability
- Creating safe, healthy and active communities
- Growing a better economy so everyone benefits

8. Consultation

8.1 There are no consultation considerations for this paper, although these projects all involve close community engagement.

9. Publicity Considerations

9.1 There are no specific publicity considerations.

10. Financial implications

10.1 There are no specific financial implications from this paper. These projects are already being funded via Defra and other government departments.

11. Community Safety Implications

11.1 There are no specific community safety implications from this paper.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no health and safety implications from this paper, however cleaner air will help reduce the 1 in 20 deaths currently attributed to poor air quality in the city. (Public Health England) Enabling children to travel safely to school by foot, scooter and bike will help increase activity, independence and physical and mental health.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no risk management implications from this paper.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The projects and initiatives outlined in this report are all relevant to tackling climate change and/or improving the environment as well as increasing the level of sustainable transport, allowing people to reduce their car use. Actions and projects highlighted in the report all have co-benefits outside of environmental improvements for residents.

Background Papers

Essex County Council slides on Healthy Schools Streets
CAREless Pollution campaign activity in schools sheet