West Midlands Combined Authority Greener Together Citizens' Panel: Air Quality Report

PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING

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1. Executive Summary

Background

The West Midlands Combined Authority (through Transport for West Midlands) have been working with the constituent local authorities on air quality for a number of years. The focus of this work has largely been transport-related and, with the increased focus on air pollution from particulates, a renewed approach was needed. In February 2022, the WMCA Board approved the production of a West Midlands Air Quality Framework. The Framework is a review of all the measures possible to accelerate improvements to regional air quality. A total of 145 measures have been identified that could be taken to tackle air pollution across the region. With the Framework due to be published in the latter part of 2023, the WMCA wanted to take this to the Citizens' Panel so they had an opportunity to influence its production. Whilst we could not expect the Panel to provide comments on all of the WMCA's 145 measures, we wanted them to be able to influence how the measures overall are implemented. As such, the work focused the panel on establishing a set of guiding principles by the end of the second session.

Session 1 set out the key question; the problem with air quality, what causes it and what can be done to tackle it. Guest speakers gave presentations, after which members were able to comment and ask questions. Small groups then reviewed 12 potential actions (c.3 each) based on a short description alongside a high-level outline of cost, impact and timescales. Each action was considered by only 1-2 groups so these responses do not necessarily reflect the whole panel.

- **Some of the actions received mostly support:** route planners including air quality (action 11), having a publicly accessible tool showing air quality information (action 12), priority parking for low emission vehicles (action 7), and putting up road signs to indicate poor air quality levels (action 2).
- **Several actions received mixed reviews and improvements were suggested:** introducing support to remove household appliances (action 9), air quality campaigns on health impacts (action 8), implementing a congestion zone (action 3) and constructing new cycle lanes (action 6).
- **Some actions received very little support:** workplaces charging levies (action 10), speed limit reduction and enforcement (action 4), and each home having a rating indicating air quality level (action 1).
- One action - planting trees (action 5) - was not discussed in the session.

Overall, their reactions to these 'sample actions' indicate:
- More support for / less concern about measures that provide people with information they can use to make more informed choices, or measures which incentivise / reward more positive behaviour.
- Less support for / more concern about measures that appear to increase cost and inconvenience for individuals, with the argument that those on lowest incomes will be disproportionately impacted by such measures.
- Surprise and frustration at the length of time needed to get measures in place.

In Session 2, members developed a set of principles to guide and inform decisions on air quality measures. Members were asked to discuss the importance of each principle, who needs to be involved and what it would look like in practice, potential obstacles implementation could cause and

proposed solutions to the obstacles. We have grouped the principles into three categories: Cost, responsibility and accountability; Engagement, education and awareness; and Implementation.

Summary of Guiding Principles

Engagement, education and awareness: Air quality measures should be…		
Guiding Principle 6: Done with, not to, people, involving a range of people and areas in the design process.	**Guiding Principle 7:** Clearly explained clearly to the public, including why they are necessary and what impacts they are designed to have.	**Guiding Principle 8:** Making people aware of what changes are taking place and how to manage those accessibility, alternative provision and any support if they need it.

Cost, responsibility and accountability: Air quality measures should be…				
Guiding Principle 1:	**Guiding Principle 2:**	**Guiding Principle 3:**	**Guiding Principle 4:**	**Guiding Guiding Principle 5:**
Brave and bold.	Clear and transparent in their purpose and, where they generate income, how this will be spent.	Placing the burden of change on the broadest shoulders, ensuring that specific groups are not disadvantaged by higher living costs and protecting the most vulnerable.	Good value for money for councils so that council tax bills don't increase as a result.	Putting public benefit before corporate interests and avoiding monopolies being created.

Implementation: Air quality measures should be…				
Guiding Principle 9: Putting new services in place before removing old ones.	**Guiding Principle 10:** Achievable, sustainable, measurable and long-term.	**Guiding Principle 11:** Taking into account how impacts will be felt by neighbouring areas.	**Guiding Principle 12:** Data-driven and evidence-based, learning where possible from other countries and other parts of the UK.	**Guiding Principle 13:** Using incentivisation rather than punishment where possible and enabling people to change their behaviour in positive ways.

2. Air Quality - Session 1

2.1 Introduction to air quality

Members heard presentations introducing air quality issues and challenges in more detail, then had an opportunity to think about what stood out for them and ask questions of the speakers.

Panel members reflected that the presentations had increased their knowledge about the problem of air quality. They were surprised at some air pollution statistics and thought people should be better informed about the nature and scale of the challenge. They talked about:

- The importance of **residents, businesses and government working together** to get results, based on people having the right information to start with.
- The need for **political will** to drive change.
- **Fairness**, both in terms of the impacts of poor air quality being experienced unequally in society and in terms of the potentially unequal impacts of actions to improve air quality.
- **Potential trade-offs between short term costs / difficulties and longer-term health benefits**; and between improved physical health and quality of life negatively impacted in other ways through measures to make air quality better.

2.2 Discussion of WMCA Strategic Actions on Air Quality

Working in groups, panel members looked at up to three potential air quality actions that the WMCA could take. 12 actions we covered in total. The main purpose of this session was to familiarise the panel with tangible air quality measures and to explore the pros and cons they thought each could bring, prior to the second workshop. The section below highlights the main messages from the small group discussions in relation to each action. Note that each action was only discussed by one or two groups, so feedback for each is based on discussions amongst c.7-16 panel members.

Actions that received the most positive response

Action 11: Route planners including air quality information
Description: An app that shows people where the most polluted routes are so that alternative ways to walk/ cycle can be identified and the most affected roads avoided. This could also include public transport use.
Overall people were supportive of this as: • It would provide useful, practical information to help people make choices as walkers or cyclists. However: • Some people were concerned the app could result in drivers taking other routes too, thus creating congestion and worse air quality in other places. People didn't understand: • Why this wouldn't have a greater health impact than predicted. • Why it was thought this app would take so long to develop and roll-out.

Action 12: Publicly accessible tool showing air quality information
Description: A web-based platform showing the air quality being picked up by the network of sensors put in place to monitor pollution. Also providing additional context for what this means for your health and what you can do.
Overall people were supportive of this as: • It would provide useful, practical information to help people make choices in their daily lives, similar to Action 11 (some thought the two could be merged whilst others were concerned this would delay both). • Local news / weather presenters could include this information in their bulletins. Some wanted to see sensors spaced closely enough that information could be provided at a very local level. People wondered if this would impact house prices in more polluted areas.

Action 7: Priority parking and/or reduced charges for low emission vehicles
Description: The action would promote the uptake of low emission vehicles for trips into urban areas by providing incentives for those who have low emission vehicles and discouraging those with more polluting vehicles.
Overall people were supportive as: • This would incentivise the move towards less polluting vehicles and was "less onerous on the individual" than some potential measures. Some were concerned that the impact overall could be negative as: • It could perpetuate car-use in city centres – and catered for wealthier individuals able to afford EVs – rather than incentivising more innovative solutions that reduce car use. • Congestion could be worsened with other drivers having to search harder to 'regular' parking. Some also suggested: • Solar panels at car parks that could support the charging of Evs.

Action 2: Local signage to indicate poor air quality levels

Description: Signage could be installed to nudge behaviour change – different approaches have been tried from the informative to the more hard-hitting.

Some support for this measure as: • It would benefit people with respiratory issues. • It would be a good way to educate young people. However: • Some questioned what impact this would have, and thought this would be "just another sign that people will ignore." Some people said this can also be a problem for people whose first language isn't English if the signs are only in one language.

Actions that received a more mixed response

Action 9: Support to remove household appliances that cause poor indoor and outdoor air quality
Description: In the same way that homes are being changed to improve their energy efficiency, there are also changes that could be made to improve air quality (e.g. removal of solid fuel burners and gas hobs).

There was support for this measure as: • It looked likely to improve overall indoor air quality. However: • Some were concerned about the disruption it would create and negative impacts of this, especially for vulnerable people. • Some wondered about the costs to individuals as whatever the support would involve, people would still need to purchase new appliances and pay for installation. • Some thought people would be reluctant to change if accustomed, for instance, to cooking with gas. Some suggested starting with a focus on the oldest appliances and offering incentives to change those.

Action 8: Air quality campaign on health impacts
Description: We know that poor air quality is harmful to health and is responsible for early deaths in the West Midlands. Health messaging has effectively been used to reduce smoking - would something similar work for air quality?

People were not against this, but were questioned how impactful it would be. Ideas included: • A campaign highlighting specific impacts on children's health focusing on roads around schools. It could be combined with practical projects such as school 'walking buses' that reduced car journeys to and from school. • Air quality messaging along the highway and accompanying this with reduced speed limits on the M6. • Campaigns to discourage short journeys of under two miles.

Action 3: Widening the Clean Air Zone or implementing a Congestion Zone

Description: This action would result in additional restrictions placed on areas of poor air quality to better air quality and reduce health impacts. This could be achieved by charging the most polluting vehicles and therefore reduce the number of car trips, funding other projects and promoting the uptake of active travel, public transport and newer vehicles.

Some support for this measure:
- As it would make the air cleaner and disincentivise driving, especially the most polluting vehicles.
- As public transport is easier for getting into big cities like Birmingham and London anyway, hence some felt for them the negative impact would be low.
- Only if public transport was made quicker, cheaper and easier to use with better parking solutions outside city centres.

However:
- Some thought this would be unfair with disproportionate financial impact on poorer people.
- Some wanted to see the emphasis on businesses paying for the impact of their more heavily-polluting vehicles, rather than individuals.

Action 6: Constructing new cycle lanes

Description: Putting in place segregated spaces for people to cycle safely with the aim of reducing the need for car travel and subsequent pollution.

People were supportive but focused on challenges that would need to be addressed, including:
- The need to design new cycle lanes and associated road signage with cyclists to make sure they are usable and enable safe cycling in reality as well as on paper.
- The need to better train people to cycle on major roads so that they are better placed to use new cycle infrastructure safely.

Actions that received the least positive response

Action 1: Each home to have a rating that indicates air quality level

Description: The rating would be associated with your home to show the level of air pollution where the home is. This would be similar to the Energy Performance Certificates each home has, or the energy performance of appliances.

Some support for this measure as:
- It could help to raise awareness of air quality and thus generating public pressure for improvement.
- It could support people to make choices when buying a home, in particular for people with families and people with health issues.

However
- It could be seen as intrusive and end up punishing those living in poor air quality areas through lower house prices and other financial impacts e.g. on insurance premiums.
- It could become another way to stigmatise people living in poorer areas where air quality is more likely to be worse.
- It could disincentivise concern about air quality amongst those in 'cleaner' areas.

Action 4: Speed limit reduction and enforcement
Description: In some places (including the M5 motorway in the West Midlands) speed limits have been reduced as a specific measure to improve air quality. Trials in Wales have proved to be very successful at locations close to the road.
Some people were concerned that: • The project appeared costly and the timescales for implementation too long. • Measures like this would unfairly increase inconvenience for individuals unless public transport is significantly improved first so that people have more viable alternatives to travel by car. • People suggested an alternative of utilising surplus capacity on motorways by mandating businesses to use roads between 7pm to 7am, and making the speed limit 50 where this is effective.

Action 10: Workplace charging levies
Description: In some areas of the UK (such as Nottingham) employers/companies are charged per parking space they operate, with the funds raised used for other projects and discourage commuting car use. The employer can decide whether to subsidise the cost or pass this on to the employee.
Support for this was low as: • Most people did not like the idea of paying for parking and did not want to further increase the financial burden on individuals. • It was seen by some to 'punish people for going to work' and would be bad for equality and fairness as poorer workers would feel the impact more. • Some thought it would be seen as 'just a way to raise money' as its link to positive impacts would not be clear to people. However • Some thought it was reasonable for car drivers to pay more than currently. Some suggested additional elements such as: • Incentivising use of electric cars. • Charging more to people who live nearby who could more reasonably be expected to use alterative transport. • Incentivising car pooling. • Clearly showing how revenue raised was being spent to encourage support for the policy.

3. Air Quality – Session 2 – Guiding principles

3.1 Developing a set of guiding principles

Discussion of 12 potential air quality measures in Session 1 helped panel members to understand what sorts of actions could be taken to improve air quality. It also gave them an opportunity to discuss what they liked and disliked about different types of measure. With 145 measures contained in the Air Quality Framework, however, discussion about specific measures could only ever scratch the surface. We were also conscious that with limited time in the sessions, it was difficult to explain measures fully enough for panel members to feel they had sufficient information to make judgements about their relative value.

With that in mind, we decided that in session 2 we would focus not on specific air quality measures but on developing a set of guiding principles which could be applied to any prospective measures. We began by playing back the main messages from session 1 discussions on the 12 'sample actions', invited groups to sense-check these, then asked them to move on to shaping some principles.

For each guiding principle agreed in their groups, panel members were then asked to consider why it was important, who would need to be involved in making sure it was followed, what could it look like in practice, and what barriers might get in the way.

3.2 Introduction to the guiding principles discussion

Each group recorded their principles and the thinking behind them, sharing the headline messages with each other during plenary discussion. The facilitation team brought each group's work together to create a single list of principles which were then shared with the panel for their agreement. In seeking to reduce duplication we have combined some principles and done some rephrasing but have sought to stay true to the original spirit of their text.

3.3 The guiding principles in detail

No	Principle	If someone asked you why this is so important, what would you say?	Who needs to be involved to ensure this principle is followed? What would that look like in practice?	Think about the obstacles the WMCA might face around air quality measures - how could these principles help them navigate those and make good decisions?
	Cost, responsibility and accountability			
1	**Brave and bold**	We have seen how tough decisions have been avoided over many years because four-year political cycles are not an incentive to long-term planning. So we need our leaders to grasp the nettle on these issues, even when it is difficult.	This is about people in positions of power showing leadership, taking the actions they know need to be taken even when they are difficult. This does not mean forging forward without us, it means being ambitious and bold in centring fairness, inclusion, transparency and equality. We should treat this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to produce a landmark proposal that seeks to compel the authorities to invest in infrastructure to make meaningful change.	Where decisions could be hard or unpopular, this principle needs to be in their minds. Conflict between groups and their different interests may hinder decisions.

2	**Clear and transparent in their purpose and, where they generate income, how this will be spent.** .	It is important that people know how money to improve air quality is being spent - where does it come from and where does it go? A good decision is one that involves stakeholders as much as possible, and people are more likely to engage with something when they understand why it is necessary and how it will work.	The council and others who receive revenues from this type of scheme (like businesses) should be involved to ensure this principle is followed. In practice a regulatory board that is impartial could check that the WMCA is being transparent and making fair decisions.	An obstacle is that people trying to be transparent can end up using jargon which is unhelpful. Messages need to be clear. This will make it more likely that the decisions and implementation will be accepted.
3	**Placing the burden of change on the broadest shoulders, ensuring that specific groups are not disadvantaged by higher living costs and protecting the most vulnerable.**	Transition needs to be fair. Some people can't afford to make the lifestyle changes that will be asked of them so need to be helped - otherwise people won't support the change. It is important that all voices are heard and more dominant voices don't crowd the space. Making sure that it is inclusive and practical for all, including people on low incomes, will allow everyone to have access to the same information and to benefit from the measures implemented.	Representatives of the population, like councils and government, should be involved in implementing this. If businesses are making decisions that pass costs onto customers they should also be involved. Representative organisations, housing associations, community anchor organisations and community centres should all be involved to extend outreach to different groups. A people's panel should be created to address decision makers directly each month. This should start with the WMCA	By considering the difference in cost to different people when making decisions, people will be more bought into the decisions.

			at the top and include the people and citizen panel. Engaging with schools is also important as education from early years is a different approach to change.	
4	**Good value for money for councils so that council tax bills don't increase as a result**	Money is needed to maintain existing council services such as social services and libraries and this should not be reallocated. People will not want their council tax to increase to cover the costs of making these changes. *"Public services are diminishing anyway, and we don't want to add to that or there will be nothing left."*	Environmental charities, local organisations and volunteers, transport agencies, and MPs should be involved in making this happen as well as councils. WMCA and councils should ring-fence funds so that they do not evaporate, and big stakeholders in local businesses should use something like a cost-sharing scheme, rather than drawing on public funding.	An obstacle is that council budgets and funding set aside for green initiatives will not be equal in all council areas.

5	**Putting public benefit before corporate interests and avoiding monopolies being created**	If the aim is profit, only a minority of people will benefit, so the interest of profit-making must be secondary to the needs of stakeholders. "(The)people are the majority". *"Money gets spent and it disappears, and the people get to hear about it years later. We need to be involved in the process and it needs to be transparent and clear and accessible all of the time."* *"Private companies are not going to pay for Citizens assemblies are they?"*	Citizens' Panel members should be able to sit for a sufficient period of time (12-24 months) in order to make an impact. *"Council lead, citizen accountable."* Local organisations should oversee where the money goes and how it is managed. A robust supply chain with trusted suppliers should be ensured. If it is to be privatised, the government should ensure this is well regulated so that no unethical practices occur.	The impact on stakeholders should be put above profits for shareholders. Non-profit organisations could be used to support these services, rather than companies and businesses. This will lead to accountability and transparency, and in turn lead to a successful council being held in power for benefiting a majority of people.

		Engagement, education and awareness		
No	**Principle**	**If someone asked you why this is so important, what would you say?**	**Who needs to be involved to ensure this principle is followed? What would that look like in practice?**	**Think about the obstacles the WMCA might face around air quality measures - how could these principles help them navigate those and make good decisions?**
6	**Done with, not to, people, involving a range of people and areas in the design process**	It is important for people to have ownership and be part of decision-making processes. The more people are engaged, the easier it is to make change, and representing different parts of a community means more people are involved. This is empowering for communities and creates more opportunities for continuous improvement. The public has a right to know where their taxes are being spent. *"We need to continue the Citizen panel approach. We are the people of the West Midlands Combined Authority and we should be heard."*	Continue the Citizens' Panel approach for decision making and think about the infrastructure changes that will support behaviour change. The sortition approach used to select the Greener Together Citizens' Panel should be the goal, and the net should be cast wide to bring diverse individual citizens on board. SME's, local authorities, and representatives from the national government should be involved. Continuity of the same people on the Citizens' Panel will ensure an understanding of the issues and increase the chance for impact. Also, citizens should have more rights to support and develop green initiatives in their local area.	Conflicts between different groups that can be reduced by having diversity and representation of all groups and support of all to understand the process ,e.g through training. Engaging a wide range of people: working through existing organisations that have credibility with different parts of the community (e.g. older people) could help overcome this. Resources: good engagement may require a lot of time and money to work. This would require politicians to buy-into its importance.

7	**Clearly explained to the public, including why they are necessary and what impacts they are designed to have.**	People won't make changes if they aren't educated on the problem. Increasing people's knowledge will encourage shared ownership of the problem and help make a sustainable long-term change. *"If people are going by hearsay then they are less likely to follow campaigns for air quality."* Misinformation can jeopardise any campaigns that you are trying to implement.	"Everybody" should be involved in educating, including parents, schools, neighbourhoods and community groups. Social media and TV organisations should work with local councils, experts and the central government to create and distribute knowledge.	An obstacle is to consider what education will look like in practice for different people.
8	**Making people aware of what changes are taking place and how to manage those accessibility, alternative provision and any support if they**	Some measures will require people to make changes in their lives which some will find difficult. Where support is put in place to help people through that change, or to make sure they can still access a service they need in other ways, they need to know about it. *"If people don't know about it they won't*	Schools, colleges and universities should all be involved to help publicise and increase awareness. Community centres, impartial community leaders and local small businesses should also be involved. Local councils can spread information	An obstacle is that people who already live in 'green areas' think these problems don't concern them so may be less engaged in the changes they need to make too.

		need it	use it".	through leaflets, TV, radio and the internet. The councils can gain widespread publicity via for example council tax bills, posters in public libraries and swimming pools and tags on dustbins.	

		Implementation		
No	**Principle**	**If someone asked you why this is so important, what would you say?**	**Who needs to be involved to ensure this principle is followed? What would that look like in practice?**	**Think about the obstacles the WMCA might face around air quality measures - how could these principles help them navigate those and make good decisions?**
9	**Putting new services in place before removing old ones**	People need awareness of, and confidence in, alternatives before taking away the service or facility they currently use. For example, make sure public transport improvements are done before making it more expensive and difficult to drive and park. The more disruption caused, the less the public will have faith in the replacement - bike lanes in Coventry were given as an example.	The WMCA and the councils should ensure that the planning and implementation is complete before commissioning new services. The people living in affected communities and areas should be involved to ensure this, as well as health professionals and affected businesses.	A big obstacle is the timescale. There might not be enough time to implement the changes before needing to take away the faulty or outdated services. Public interest might also move onto something else over time. Another obstacle may be rebellion from groups who either don't want change, or have been inconvenienced by the change.

| 10 | **Achievable, sustainable, measurable and long-term** | There needs to be ongoing checks on impact and progress, with both continuous improvement and ongoing investment.

If people consider the long-term benefits they are more likely to participate.

"It needs to be achievable so that ordinary people can do something realistic."

If a project set-up is maintained for the long-term and seen as achievable, people will have more trust and believe in future initiatives instead of thinking they are "just throwing away money." | Field professionals should be involved by regularly testing and overseeing impact and communities should ensure and encourage that measures are being followed.

Councils and the WMCA should be involved by enforcing robust KPIs and local authorities should send out annual impact assessments and surveys.

Big businesses could also be involved in making sure this happens. | The WMCA may face obstacles concerning finances and measuring achievability.

Changes in power and policy through local elections may also cause difficulties, especially as the WMCA relies on the government to prioritise these issues. |

11	**Taking into account how impacts will be felt by neighbouring areas**	There needs to be a 'whole community' focus on impact. An example of when this is needed is when one area implements traffic restrictions which impact a neighbouring area. Taking a joined-up approach maximises the benefits of new measures and helps communities and local organisations build trust. This will draw communities together.	The WMCA should coordinate with the councils and councils in other areas. Local organisations and societies and citizens should report any concerns, and local communities can create focus groups to share ideas and concerns. .	An obstacle is that it is hard to envision impact and changes to surrounding areas. This may make it difficult to build the trust and clarity needed to get people to participate.
12	**Data-driven and evidence-based, learning where possible from other countries and other parts of the UK**	Interventions will be easier to implement if the data clearly supports it and people know you are making good decisions based on evidence. Good use of data should make it easier to create bespoke interventions for different areas where the data shows variance in experience.	The WMCA should play a key role here, and businesses should follow guidelines set out by the WMCA. Learn from other countries and places in the UK and think about what incentives are helpful and which incentives might be short-term but not work longer term.	There is a lot of data available, and there is a need to be clear on what is going to be measured - health being a key measure. There are long-term investments needed to deliver high quality data, and there is likely a need for delivery partners for this. There is also a need to understand the financial trade-offs as much as possible.
13	**Using incentivisation rather than punishment where**	Positive incentives can motivate new behaviours and create new habits and ways of doing things, which can create a culture shift. It can also be cheaper to pay for positive behaviours than	This should start with the WMCA at the top and include people and the Citizens' Panel. The stakeholder organisations should be involved to support the message.	An obstacle may be lack of will from the offset to provide initial costs for long-term gain, and having a budget that reflects the significance of the challenges we face.

possible and enable people to change their behaviour in positive ways	paying to fix things. This is important as it supports other principles.		People need a good design to make it easier to do good and live positively. A clear communication plan will be needed to reinforce positive impact and retain buy-in.

3.5 How the guiding principles will be used

These principles will be included as an appendix to the Air Quality Framework. As work progresses to implement measures amongst the current 145, decision-makers will be expected to consider whether their plans live up to the principles created by the panel. The Framework, along with the principles, will be published in November 2023 and will support the regional ambition to reduce air pollution in total, and inequality of exposure overall.

Two members of the Panel were invited to present at the WMCA's Energy and Environment Board in July 2023 to share their experiences so far. The meeting minutes can be downloaded here.

3.6 Concluding reflections

Looking across the principles and the discussions that generated them, some themes stand out:
- **Fairness:** panel members were concerned about measures impacting people unfairly and making daily life more expensive for people who are already struggling. These conversations also covered concerns about vested interests and cynicism that change would benefit big corporations instead of communities.
- **Citizen voice and participation:** panel members thought the public should be engaged in shaping change. In particular they wanted to see the deliberative approach they are experiencing through the Greener Together Citizens' Panel baked into the way decisions are made and implemented.
- **Education and communication:** panel members emphasised the importance of helping people understand what is happening and why - of 'taking people with you.' This was about making the case for change so that people bought into it, but also about making sure people didn't miss out on the support they needed to navigate the change or benefit from its results.