

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023

10 years in Local Authority - Looking back to plan ahead



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Amanda Healy

Foreword

Welcome to my annual report. It is my role as Director of Public Health to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of people in County Durham.

As always, my annual report provides insight into the health and wellbeing of our residents and shows the contribution of wider factors that have an effect on health and wellbeing and ultimately life expectancy.

Last year's report focused on tobacco and the need to concentrate our efforts on making smoking history in County Durham. The latest smoking prevalence in 2022 shows a small reduction between 2020 (16.5%) and 2022 (15.4%), however, we still need around 44,000 fewer smokers in order to achieve a 5% prevalence target by 2030.

In this year's annual report, the focus is 10 years of public health in the local authority. The public health move came at a time of change and reorganisation for local government in County Durham. Durham County Council is a progressive local authority and had recently moved from a two-tier council structure covering the seven districts and boroughs of the county to one unitary authority. The ongoing organisational changes meant an early opportunity for public health to be embedded into unitary authority structures.

The Health and Wellbeing Board was also created 10 years ago and has overseen progress in the integration of health and social care. The Health and Wellbeing Board have four current key health priority areas for County Durham – making smoking history, enabling healthy weight for all, improving mental health resilience and wellbeing, and reducing alcohol harms. With smoking being one of the four selected, this will ensure that the tobacco control agenda remains high profile within County Durham.

Our integration in the local authority from corporate management level through to front line services, has increased and refined the organisational understanding of what affects our health and what we can do about it. Health and wellbeing strategies, interventions, projects, services, engagement, research, and development are now not seen as two disciplines coming together, but one coherent response as part of local authority planning and action.

In the year ahead we will continue to work closely with our partners and communities to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of the people in County Durham.

I hope you find this report informative.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda". Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Amanda Healy

Director of Public Health

Health of our People

Good quality data and intelligence underpins effective working across multiple local organisations. Data is used to carry out health needs assessments, health equity audits, commissioning and delivery of services, public health surveillance and identifying inequalities in the way people access services.

This means we use health data, health intelligence and wider partner data to inform and underpin our understanding of our local communities to help us plan and work with communities to improve health.

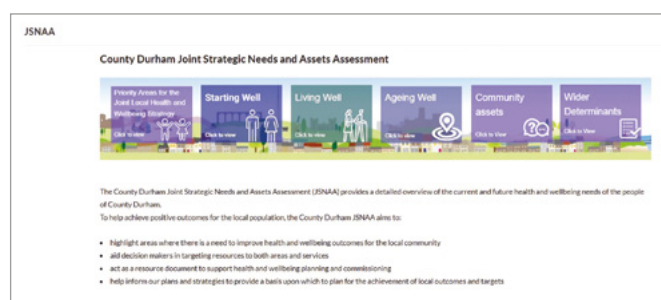
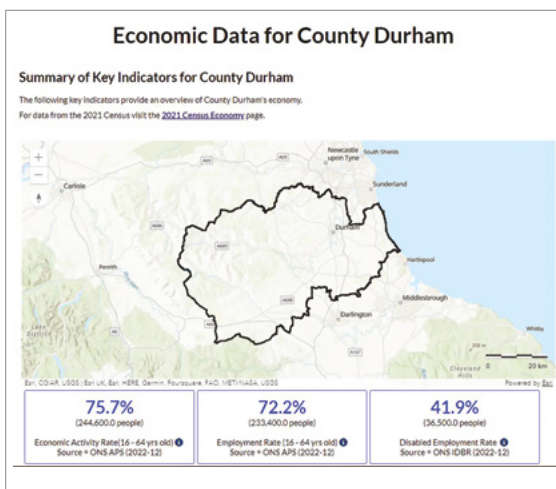
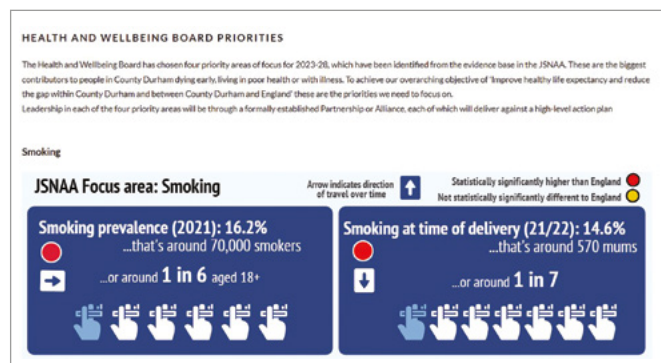
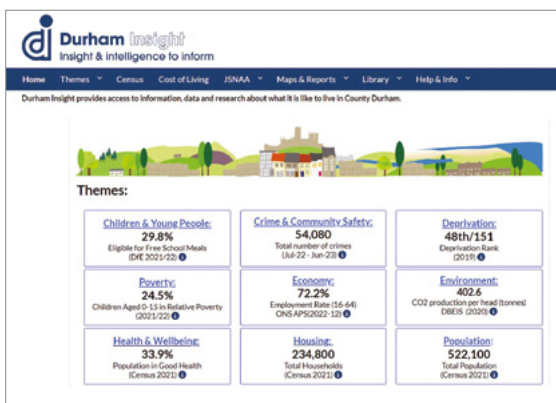
The Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) provides a detailed overview of the current and future health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham. It highlights areas where there is a need to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for local communities and aids decision-makers in targeting resources to both areas and services.

This information is also used by partners and communities to assist in strategic planning across the council and partnerships, which helps inform the development and improvement of local services.

Where possible we share this information publicly through Durham Insight (www.durhaminsight.info)



Please see images below from Durham Insight



We have provided an update below of work undertaken within the last year via the JSNAA strategic group:

Veterans' Health Needs Assessment (HNA)

The estimated population of the ex-armed forces in County Durham, according to the 2021 Census is 22,615, 5.2% of the population of County Durham. This is above the North-East (5.0%) and England averages (3.8%).

Veterans can experience a variety of physical health, mental health and social issues which affect their overall sense of wellbeing. There is extensive support available for veterans, mainly through military based charities and community interest companies, however, some veterans are unaware of any support, with most people only looking for and accessing support when they are in crisis.

The HNA identified some unmet needs of veterans in County Durham. There were 22 recommendations to bridge the gaps in the future covering six themes:

- Poor data
- Health issues
- Access to health care
- Support for individuals
- Support for the armed forces community
- Emerging themes



The recommendations were developed in conjunction with members of the County Durham Armed Forces Forum. An action plan has also been developed, via the Armed Forces Forum, to implement the recommendations from the HNA.

A link to the full report is available on Durham Insight www.durhaminsight.info/veterans/

Ageing Well Health Needs Assessment (HNA)

The aim of the Ageing Well HNA was to identify the health needs of people aged over 50 living in County Durham. The HNA focussed on prevention and the concept of considering age as a continuum, supporting all residents of County Durham to age well as they approach older age. The HNA concentrated on the wider determinants of health such as social, behavioural, environmental, and economic determinants alongside the impact of the physical environment.

The HNA included a pragmatic literature review, quantitative and qualitative findings, via stakeholder feedback, which led to the emergence of key themes. and recommendations. These key themes and recommendations were used to populate the Ageing Well Action Plan which is now being implemented.

The recommendations of the HNA were:

- Implement an Ageing Well Strategic Group representing all system partners alongside an affiliated action plan.
- The Ageing Well Action Plan should work to reduce ageism and stigmatisation towards older people.
- Recognise areas highlighted, but not specifically targeted, within this HNA that may require further bespoke work.
- Increase availability of data at the 50 plus age-group level.
- Develop public health guidance on key points to consider under the age section on any equality impact assessments.

A link is available on Durham Insight www.durhaminsight.info/ageing-well/

Strengths and assets in County Durham

County Durham has many assets that can support and protect the health of our 522,000 residents. Assets are used as a support structure on which to build and improve local services and benefit local people. Communities work together and alongside us to both strengthen existing assets and develop new ones. Some of these are set out below:

Our Services:

- 223 early years and primary schools.
- 31 secondary schools.
- 4 colleges.
- 9 enhanced mainstream schools and 11 special schools.
- 1 university.
- 15 council-owned leisure centres.
- 61 GP practices.
- 124 pharmacies.

Our Communities:

- Over 522,000 people live in County Durham. 21.5% of our population are over 65 and 19% are under 17.
- 40 CREEs with 987 active members.
- 14 Area Action Partnerships.
- 55,000 carers.



Where we live:

- 14,725 businesses.
- 12 green flag parks and open spaces.
- 2 in 5 residents living in rural areas.
- 12 miles of coastline.
- 150 miles of former railway paths (with a further 12 miles to be added by the end of 2024).
- 1 world heritage site.
- Home to the Durham Argus Butterfly (native to County Durham).
- North Pennines Area of Outstanding natural beauty.
- 44,500 hectares of European designated sites, known as the National Site Network.

Drawing our assets to improve physical activity

Our stunning countryside and landscapes, hills, dales, rivers, waterfalls and coastlines, all make County Durham a great place to be active. Our public rights of way span around 3,500km, we have three country parks, 25 nature reserves, 150 miles of accessible railway paths, and 285 miles of accessible green spaces.

Physical Activity



- 15 council owned leisure centres including 10 swimming pools.
- 340 fixed play areas.
- 120 hectares of outdoor sports pitches
- 441 hectares of allotments.
- 32 hectares of play space (children and young people).

Assets and green space

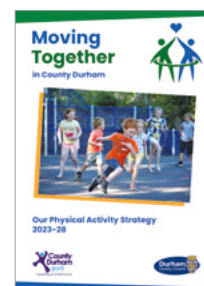


- 312 local wildlife sites.
- Over 400 miles of recreational routes for walking and cycling.
- Almost 120,000 hectares of Accessible Natural Green Space.
- Over 1,200 hectares of Limited Access Natural Green Space.
- Community engagement, volunteering and outdoor education provided by the Countryside Service.
- Community countryside programmes to promote the importance of conservation and biodiversity.
- In 2022/23, our Countryside Service benefitted from 128 active volunteers and 85 corporate volunteers.

These natural assets are complemented by our community based assets and services that work together to improve our health and wellbeing. County Durham has 411 sports clubs, 15 council-owned leisure centres, around 115 active volunteer leaders in walking, running and cycling, over 3,000 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, as well as organisations such as County Durham Sport, our own Active Partnership that works with partners to improve physical activity by addressing inequality in health, wealth and access to services.

The evidence for daily activity, moving more, physical activity and sport is irrefutable; it can make us feel better and improve our quality of life in so many ways. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that physical activity (particularly outdoors) is important for our wellbeing, lowering the risk of ill health and support recovery from illness.

County Durham Sport, public health, wellbeing, sport and leisure teams, and the people, communities and organisations of County Durham worked together to develop 'Moving Together in County Durham' – a physical activity strategy. Co-production has been at the heart of this strategy's development, with hundreds of local people and organisations contributing from the outset.



Our collaborative approaches to moving more are firmly fixed in reducing inequalities and inequity of access, recognising that being physically active will be easier for some people than it is for others. Moving Together in County Durham will rely upon the benefits of developing a whole systems approach, to make being more active the easier choice for everyone.

Health of our residents

Public health seeks to improve the lives and health of communities through the prevention and treatment of disease and promotion of healthy behaviours such as eating well and being physically active. So how is County Durham doing?

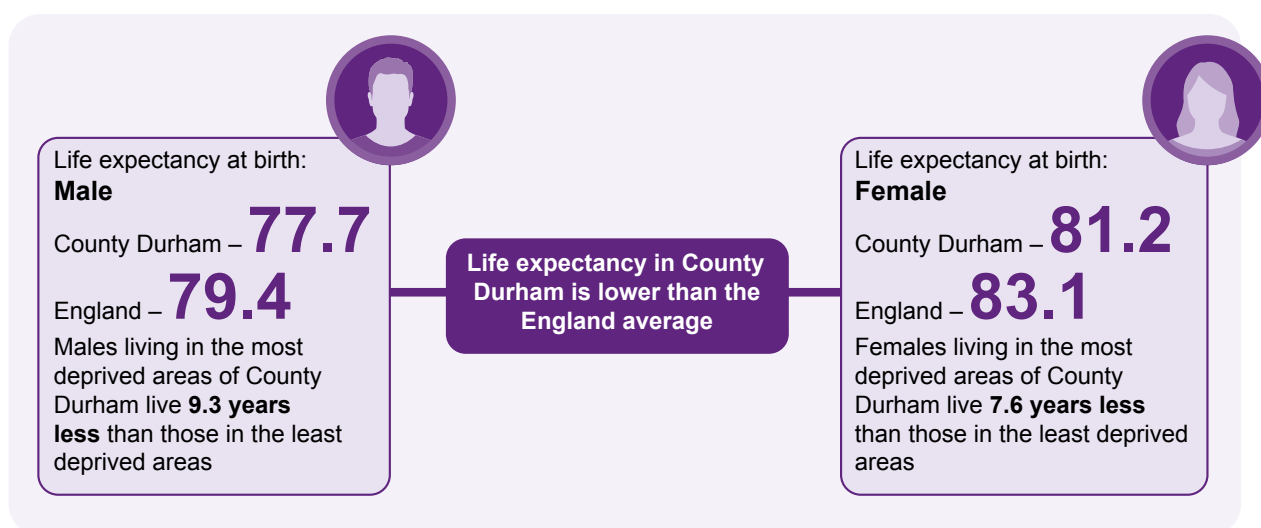
Overall, the health and wellbeing of people in County Durham has improved over recent years but is varied compared to the England average. Levels of deprivation remain relatively high and the number of children living in poverty continues to increase (as measured by those eligible for free school meals). Life expectancy for both men and women is statistically significantly lower than the England average, and many of our residents have poorer health outcomes than the national average.

Health inequalities remain high. Many measures of local health (such as life expectancy, smoking at time of delivery, breastfeeding, childhood obesity and premature mortality); are worse in our more deprived areas. In addition the health inequalities gap between County Durham and England is also high.



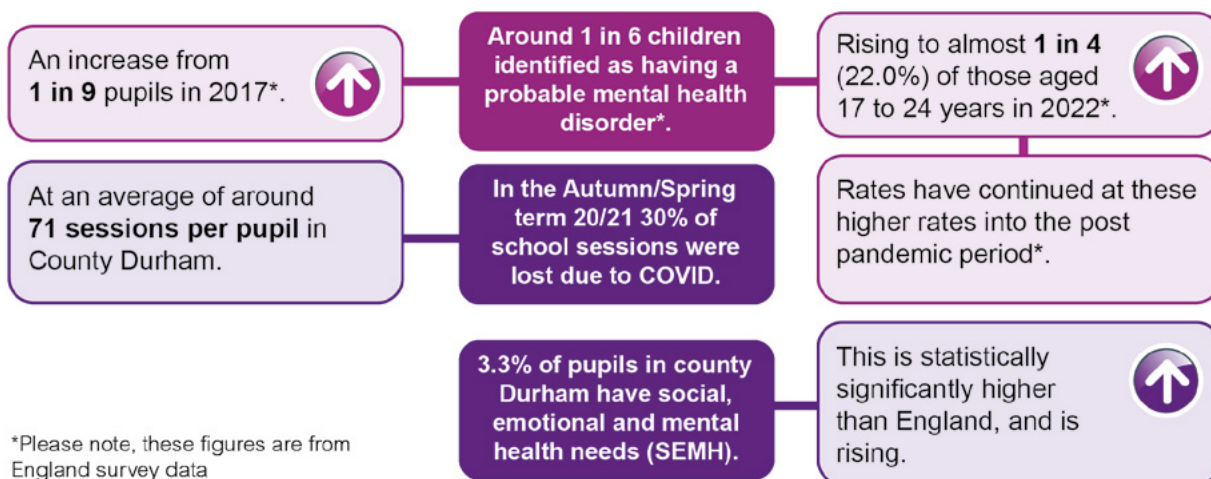
Life Expectancy

Life expectancy is an important measure of the overall health of our residents, and is an indicator of inequality both between and within areas. Life expectancy for both men and women is statistically significantly lower than the England average. There is also inequality in life expectancy within County Durham. It is 9.3 years lower for men and 7.6 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of County Durham than in the least deprived areas.



The COVID-19 pandemic and impact on children and young peoples' mental health

Children and young people were disproportionately impacted by social, educational and economic issues related to COVID-19. Disruption to schools, prolonged social isolation, health anxiety, and economic instability exposed children and young people to many known risk factors for poor mental health, potentially increasing inequality and inequity in outcomes. Local analysis projected increased referrals to children and young peoples' mental health services over the next 5 years.



We recognise the importance of good mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. This is a high priority and we are working as a system to bring partners together to deliver our vision. We also recognise there is still a long way to go to meet the increasing needs of our children and young people.

Case Study – South Hetton Primary School

South Hetton Primary School enrolled in the Durham Resilience Programme (DRP) in September 2022. The school recognised that post pandemic, concerns about social and emotional mental health had increased. The school felt that children lacked conflict resolution skills, the stamina to persist in the face of challenging tasks, and emotional resilience generally. They also noted that staff were themselves still suffering from the effects of lockdown.

Their bespoke DRP action plan included:

- Pupils developing increased independence skills to support resilience. To achieve this the DRP lead worked with all staff to develop 'Pupil Passports', to track children's developing independence skills.
- Pupils having increased opportunities to take pride in non-academic achievements, to support good self-esteem and mental health for all, introducing termly awards based on their core values.
- Staff wellbeing to be supported by development of a dedicated working space and supportive resources.



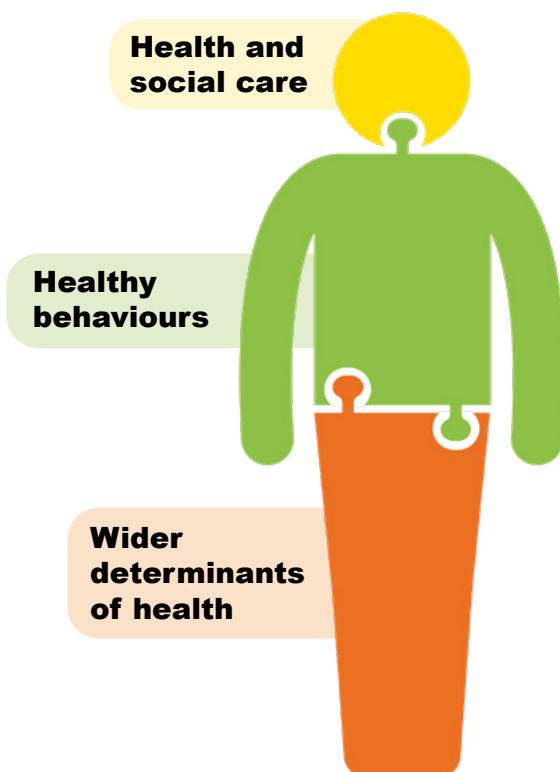
The school DRP lead said, *"the process was also a reminder that, sometimes, even the smallest act of kindness can make a real difference."*

The school completed an impact evaluation rating the impact of the DRP upon staff and pupil resilience as a 5/5 and 4/5 respectively.

The school's DRP Lead reflected that, *"one of the strongest messages we gained from working with DRP, is that resilience isn't necessarily a skill that we can simply teach but it is a quality that can only grow in the correct environment."*

Impacts on Health and Wellbeing

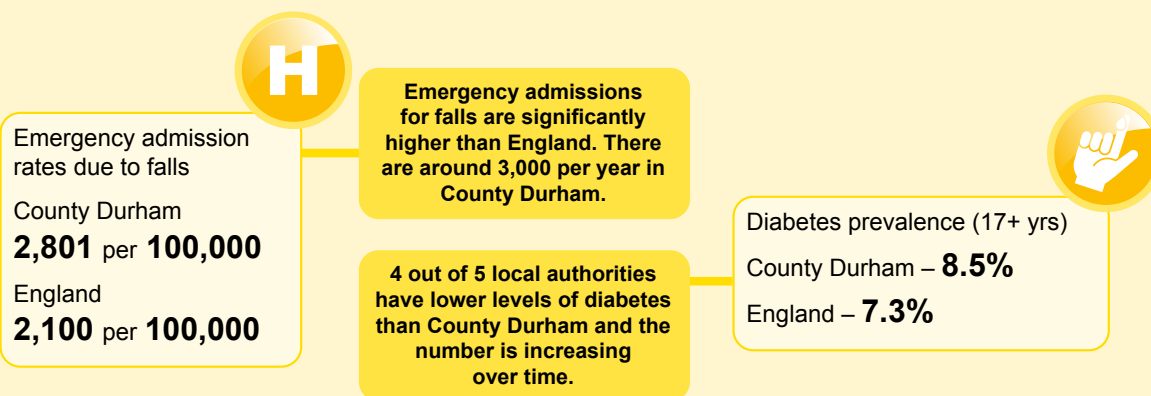
Our health and the health of our population is dependent on a complex relationship between our genes, and three broader factors:



In the following pages, data for County Durham is shown in relation to these influences on health and wellbeing compared to the England average.

Health and social care

Access to, and the quality of health care is really important. Some services in County Durham experience higher demand than the England average.



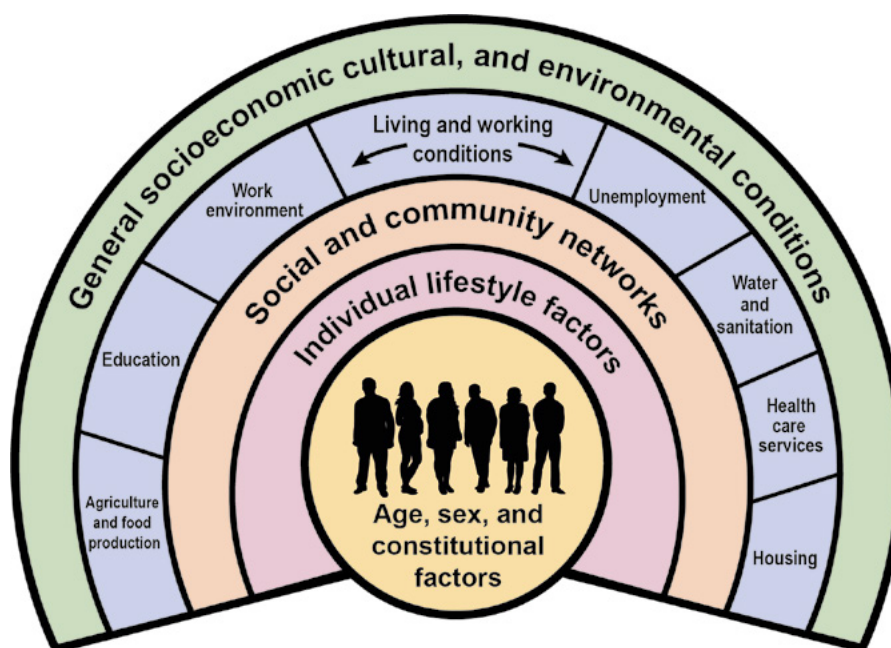
10 years of Public Health in the Local Authority

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 was a major reform of the healthcare system and public health policy in England. It moved the public health function and services, including the Director of Public Health's statutory responsibilities, from the NHS to local councils in April 2013, giving them responsibility to improve and protect the health of their residents.

Moving into the local authority provided the environment for public health to advocate, influence and work with others responsible for social influences on people's health. In addition, working with elected members ensured that public health was focussed more on communities.

What are the social determinants of health?

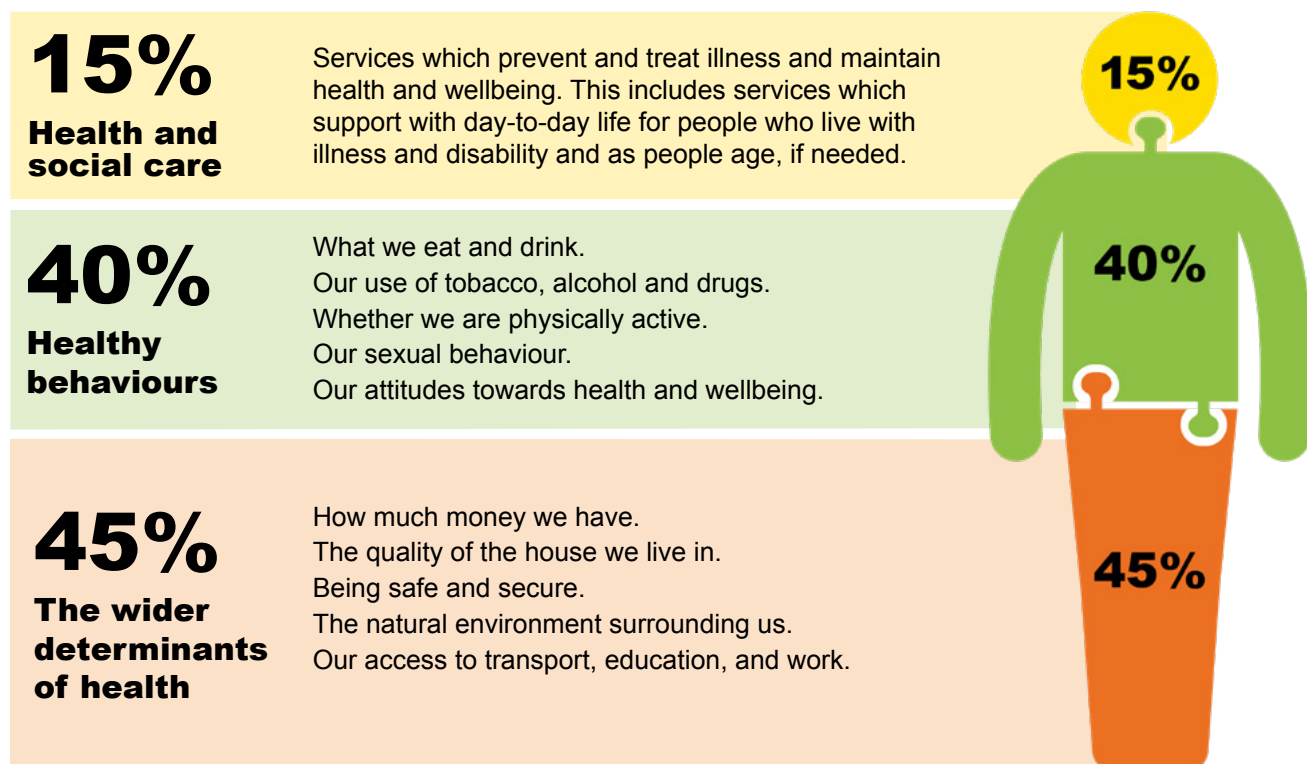
The social and environmental conditions in which we are born, grow up and live with do not give us all an equal chance. How much money we have, the quality of the house we live in, the natural environment surrounding us, our access to transport, education and work, all impact on our chances of living a long and healthy life. These are collectively known as social determinants of health. Local government has a key role in many of these factors and embedding public health within these over the past ten years has enabled long term ambition for health and wellbeing to be realised.



Social determinants of health, Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

In the image on page 13, we show an estimate of the contribution that these wider factors have on health and wellbeing and ultimately life expectancy and why having the public health function in local government has enabled better join up and influence.

What has the biggest influence on lives being cut short?



McGinnis, J.M., Williams-Russo, P. and Knickman, J.R. (2002) cited in The King's Fund (n.d.). Time to Think Differently. Broader determinants of health: future trends. Available at:

www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/time-think-differently/trends-broader-determinants-health

(Accessed: 9 March 2023).

The understanding, experience and perspectives the local authority brings to these issues has been vital in the development of protective factors such as family support, community and peer networks, welfare assistance, employment training, learning and education opportunities, housing solutions and service improvement.

However, the move of public health also coincided with austerity where local government funding was not prioritised and received real terms cuts over many years. This made it a very challenging time while also taking on new areas of work and responsibilities. Many of these, such as Sexual Health Services, Drug Treatment Services, Health Protection and Health Visitors were not seen as traditional council services 10 years ago. It took time to integrate these services, while also maintaining good links with Clinical Commissioning Groups and other parts of the public health system including Public Health England.

The last ten years has of course also seen everyone face a global pandemic. The response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has touched every element of local authority and public health delivery. Across the county, health, social care council staff, and wider partners showed extraordinary examples of partnership working that continue to this day.

This commitment has increased our collaborative work, providing opportunities for innovation and service provision, with an emphasis on strengthening communities and individual resilience to reduce vulnerabilities.

It also stood us in good stead for working with others as the Cost-of-Living Crisis took hold at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising costs of fuel, food and other essentials, coupled with existing disadvantages put vulnerable families at risk of greater hardship and reduced wellbeing. Public health supports and works with others leading on this agenda, seeking to mitigate the impacts and raise local families out of poverty.

10 years of Director of Public Health Annual Reports

Over the last ten years we have seen how local government is ideally placed to embed and enhance actions to improve population health through collaboration with partners and informed by public health. In doing so, the council and partners are delivering an extensive and comprehensive range of health and wellbeing measures to meet local priorities.

Below are some of the Director of Public Health Annual Reports over the last ten years that have driven and shaped this work and provide a focus for more action.

All the lonely people: social isolation and loneliness in County Durham. Identified that individuals who are socially isolated are between two and five times more likely to die prematurely. Recognising the value and role of community assets and led to developing our 'Wellbeing for Life' and 'Approaches to Wellbeing' work.



Obesity An issue too big to ignore... or too big to mention? Was a call to action to prevent the continuing rise in overweight and obesity, and to understand the barriers our residents face. It was a forerunner to the Healthy Weight Alliance, and the work on healthy weight for all featured in this year's annual report.



Work and You spoke directly to employers recognising their responsibility to support, maintain and improve staff health and wellbeing. Challenging businesses to create healthy environments in which people can thrive in their workplace. This led to the development of the Better Health At Work Award.



The 2018 – 2021 reports introduce new priorities over a three year strategic plan period:

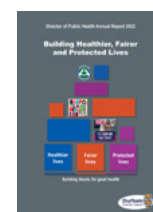
- Good jobs and places to live, learn and play.
- Every child to have the best start in life.
- Mental health for everyone.
- Promoting positive healthy behaviours.
- High quality drug and alcohol services.
- Healthy workforce.
- Better quality of life through integrated health and care services.



It introduced a family approach 'The Taylor Family', a fictional family, used to highlight the issues some of our local families face. It also addressed the challenges and response to the global pandemic.



Building Healthier, Fairer and Protected Lives talked about the 'building blocks' of good health focusing on prevention, early intervention, living safely with COVID-19 and addressing the wider determinants of health to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the population.



The work of these reports has informed a range of services to address local health needs which we describe on page 15. Some of the locally identified health needs over the last 10 years, such as smoking and alcohol, have impacted whole communities and remain a challenge now and into the future.

Local Government Public Health Responsibilities

Public health's role in improving health and reducing health inequalities requires focussed systems and processes to identify health needs. These needs are addressed through strategic plans and evidence-led service provision as well as conversations with local people.

To identify and understand those needs we use data and information from a wide variety of sources. This process is captured and communicated through our Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA).

The JSNAA is the joint responsibility of the NHS and the local authority. It provides a wealth of information and professional assessment from a range of specialists, to enable us to identify health priorities, confidently commission services and deliver interventions to address health needs.

There are some mandated services that all Public Health Teams deliver across the country. These are:

- Sexual Health Services.
- NHS Health Checks.
- Public Health Advice to NHS Commissioners.
- Health Protection.
- National Child Measurement Programme.
- Health Visitors for all 0 to 2 year olds.

Public health also has the flexibility to commission services to address local health needs. Here are some examples of services delivered over the last 10 years while public health has been in local government:

- Tobacco control and stop smoking services.
- Alcohol and drug misuse services.
- Services for children 5-19 including school nursing.
- Obesity and weight management.
- Local nutrition and physical activity programmes.
- Mental health and wellbeing services.
- Dental health services.
- Accident prevention.
- Local initiatives on workplace health.
- Support and challenge on NHS Services (immunisation and screening).
- Seasonal mortality initiatives.
- Aspects of community safety.
- Public health aspects of initiatives to tackle social exclusion.

Locally our JSNAA has helped us to prioritise our work based on local needs and assets.

10 years of the Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 created a new statutory board known as the Health and Wellbeing Board within local partnership arrangements to:

- Oversee the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment, which provide an overview of the current and future health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham.
- Develop local Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies based on evidence in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Produce a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment to consider provision, gaps, and improvements in pharmaceutical service delivery.
- Promote and encourage integrated working among local commissioners of health services, public health, and social care services to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in its area.
- Encourage those who provide services related to the social determinants of health to work closely with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Health and Wellbeing Board has overseen enormous progress and integration of health and social care over the last 10 years. This has included the formation of Clinical Commissioning Groups in April 2013, ongoing oversight of the Better Care Fund to prevent gaps in health and social care provision, Sustainability and Transformation Plans including care hubs, joint commissioning and staff pooling, and the establishment of an Integrated Care Board in July 2022.

The board has led developments across the wider partnership focussed on Wellbeing for Life, No Health Without Mental Health, Long Term Conditions, Healthy Child Programme, Isolation and Loneliness, Warm and Healthy Homes, Vulnerable Parent Pathway, to name a few.

The board works closely with Area Action Partnerships and VCS colleagues supporting the Approach to Wellbeing as shown. It wants to make it easier for people to know what is happening in their communities and how they can get involved.

The board will make sure community views help shape decisions. It will ensure leaders in partner organisations do what they promise and invest in projects that have a positive impact on priority areas.

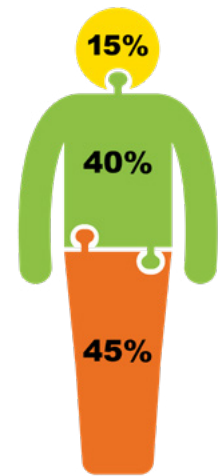


You can find out more about the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board through the following link www.countydurhampartnership.co.uk/health-wellbeing-board

Role of Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board will maintain a focus across the life course, from starting well through living well to ageing well in our four priority areas:

1. Making smoking history
2. Enabling healthy weight for all
3. Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing
4. Reducing alcohol harms

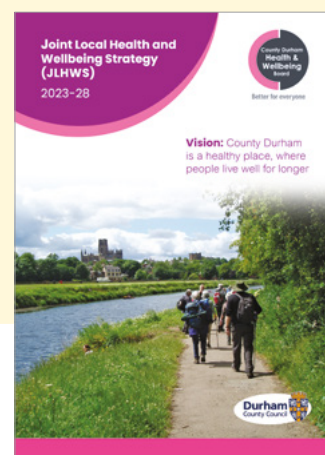


It will do this by:

- Receiving updates and assurance from the governance groups around the four priorities so the Health and Wellbeing Board can ensure collective actions are having an impact on the priorities across County Durham.
- Providing added value by holding others to account and supporting partners across the wider system with their agendas, and gaining assurance, for example, relating to health service commissioning and delivery, economic, environment, housing and planning impacts on health across the life course.
- Strengthening the relationship with partners who will support the wider influences on health.
- Having a health advocacy role by speaking up for our communities in relation to their health and wellbeing, and championing policy change.

The Health and Wellbeing Board will also ensure their statutory role of governance around key pieces of work is fulfilled. Areas include:

- Health Protection Assurance.
- Better Care Fund.
- Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment.
- Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.
- Transforming Care.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.



Health and Wellbeing Board current priorities

Making smoking history

Smoking is the most important cause of preventable ill health and premature mortality in the UK and is a major risk factor for many diseases, including lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and heart disease.

It is also the biggest cause of health inequalities in the UK, accounting for half the difference in life expectancy between the most and least deprived in society. The burden of smoking is higher in County Durham than England and around 900 people die locally per year from smoking related illnesses.



Our target is to reduce smoking to 5% by 2030.

We have covered Smoking in County Durham in the 2018 and 2022 Annual Reports. Find these reports here www.durhaminsight.info/director-of-public-health-reports

From 2013 to 2023, there have been key tobacco control policies and strategies introduced to reduce smoking rates and improve public health:

- Introduction of standardised packaging, including graphic health warnings, no branding and increased tobacco taxation.
- Banning the display of tobacco products at the point of sale to reduce the visibility and appeal of tobacco products, particularly to young people.
- Durham County Council signed the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control.
- Tobacco advertising restrictions, includes bans on tobacco advertising in print, radio, television and sponsorships.
- Smoke-free legislation banning smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces.
- Public health campaigns include Stoptober and Smokefree NHS to encourage behaviour change and raise awareness about the health risks of smoking.
- Free Stop Smoking Services, offering support, counselling, and medication.

These measures have contributed to a significant decline in the number of people who smoke in County Durham.

In the past year we have endorsed the recommendations from the Khan Review* and added these into our local County Durham Tobacco Control Alliance action plan.

The Alliance reviews new and emerging evidence around tobacco control and vaping. There is ongoing development of plans to embed vapes into the Stop Smoking Service for those who wish to use e-cigarettes to stop smoking.

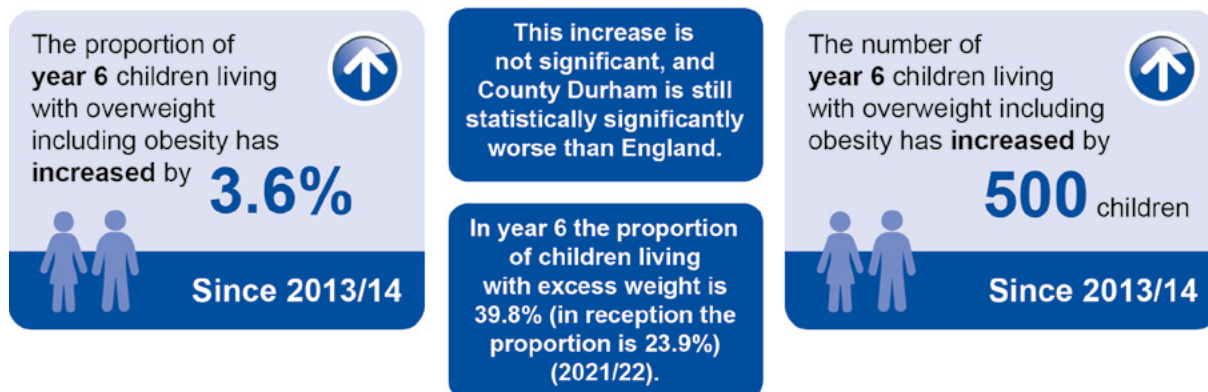
*www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-khan-review-making-smoking-obsolete

Our message remains:

“If you smoke, vaping is much safer. If you don't smoke, don't vape. Vaping is not for children.”

Enabling healthy weight for all

Around 24% of young children are currently living with excess weight, whilst the figure for older children is currently around 40%. Approximately 75% of adults are living with overweight or obesity, and this has significantly increased from 68% in 2015/16. Rates remain higher in more deprived areas of the county. The absolute gap between deprived areas of County Durham and non-deprived has been increasing year on year.



The food we eat can profoundly affect our health. This is a complex area to understand and unravel, with food poverty, availability of good food, nutritional awareness and access and motivation for physical activity all contributing factors.

We have covered Healthy Weight in the 2015 Annual Report. Find this report here www.durhaminsight.info/director-of-public-health-reports

Over the past 10 years, we have taken a collaborative, partnership approach by delivering initiatives linked to key national and local policies:

- Childhood Obesity Plan: Introducing targets for reducing sugar content.
- Improving food labelling and encouraging physical activity in schools.
- Soft Drinks Industry Levy: Commonly known as the 'sugar tax' aims to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks.
- Healthy Eating Campaigns: Aimed to promote the importance of balanced diets, reducing portion sizes, and making healthier food choices.
- Active Travel Strategy: To increase walking, cycling and other physical activity.
- Physical Activity Guidelines: Updated in 2019, recommending at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week for adults, along with muscle-strengthening exercises on two or more days a week.

The Childhood Healthy Weight Pathway was introduced in County Durham in 2019 and Healthy Weight Strategic Framework in 2022. Working with partners to promote healthier eating habits and making healthier food choices such as the Healthy Options Takeaway programme is described on page 28.

Our 'Healthy Start' programme provides help to buy healthy food and milk, with uptake at 75%. Our 'Fun and Food' programme runs through all holiday periods for school age children in County Durham.

We continue to take an active part in developing a countywide food strategy to deliver a viable, affordable, healthy, and local food system that supports communities.

Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing

Conversations and attitudes about mental health, resilience and wellbeing have shifted so much in 10 years. Our professional (and the public's) understanding of the impact of mental health on our quality of life is becoming more recognised.

Good mental health and resilience is the foundation for personal wellbeing. It impacts on how individuals think, feel, communicate, and is fundamental to physical health, relationships, education, and work. It enables us to manage our lives successfully.



We have covered improving mental health in the 2019 Annual Report. Find this report here www.durhaminsight.info/director-of-public-health-reports

Over the past 10 years we have seen the introduction of joint initiatives with local, regional, and national partners:

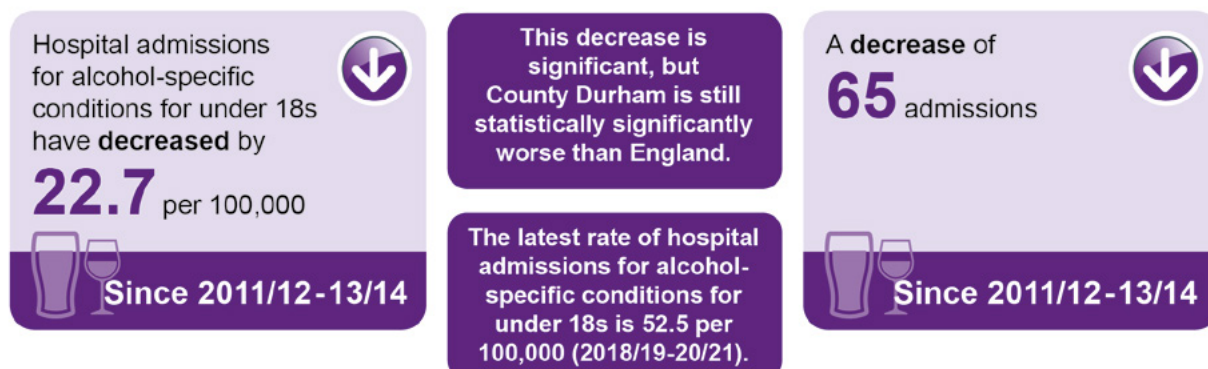
- Increased funding for mental health services to expand access to psychological therapies, improving crisis care, and community-based support.
- Support for children's mental health including school-based mental health support and resilience initiatives.
- Working with Business Durham and the Federation of Small Businesses on our approaches to improve mental health in the workplace.
- Signing of the Time to Change Employer Pledge – a commitment to changing the way we all think and act about mental health in the workplace.
- County Durham was part of a national prevention programme with a focus on mental health, prevention of suicide, and tackling stigma and discrimination.
- Suicide prevention, including the development of a suicide prevention strategy and the provision of training for frontline professionals.
- Focus on specific populations such as veterans, and individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Public health campaigns such as 'Time to Change', 'Every Mind Matters' and 'Now You're Talking' to encourage open conversations and provide mental health information and resources.

The County Durham Mental Health Strategic Partnership Board (MHSPB) provides leadership for the mental health agenda delivering projects such as the Cree Network described on page 30.

Recent work to promote mental health, wellbeing and resilience in the Bishop Auckland area has used an asset based approach. Working with our local population on the strengths and resources in the community to increase resilience and social capital and develop better ways of delivering health outcomes.

Reducing alcohol harms

Harmful drinking has wide-ranging impacts not only on the individuals affected but also their families and communities. Harmful drinking is a pattern of alcohol consumption that causes health problems, including psychological problems such as depression, alcohol-related accidents or physical illness leading to alcohol-related hospital admissions and shortened lives.



The County Durham Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service offers ways for local people with drug and alcohol problems to become free from their dependence. The service also works to reduce the problems that substance misuse causes to families, friendships, workplaces and communities in County Durham.

We have covered alcohol harms in the 2021 Annual Report. Find this report here www.durhaminsight.info/director-of-public-health-reports

From 2013 to 2023, there have been a range of alcohol harm reduction initiatives to promote behaviour change and improve health:

- Increased funding for treatment, prevention, recovery, and harm reduction projects.
- Durham County Council signed the Local Government Declaration on Alcohol.
- Public health campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of harmful drinking and promoting responsible drinking habits. For example, *Dry January and the local Alcohol Can Cause Cancer campaign*.
- Alcohol licensing laws to address alcohol-related harm and irresponsible selling practices.
- The NHS Long Term Plan committed to expanding and improving alcohol treatment services, focusing on early intervention and support.
- Increased focus on mental health and substance misuse to ensure that both mental health and substance use disorders are addressed together.

Public health continue to work with the public protection team to utilise innovative approaches to licensing, which promote public health objectives including the vision of an 'Alcohol Free Childhood' promoting the 'What's the Harm' campaign resources.

The Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service performed well both during and after the pandemic, maintaining most clients in treatment and recovery support, whilst improving the rates of people becoming alcohol free to above national levels.

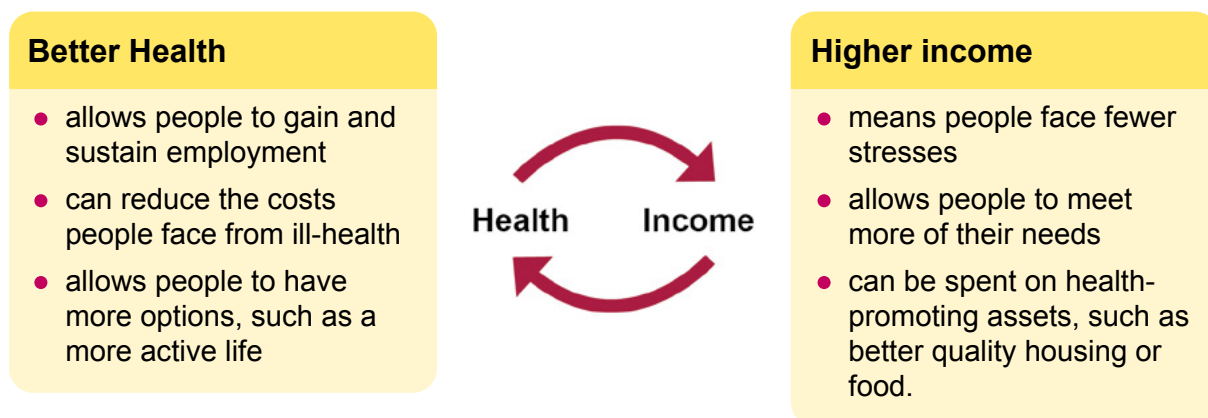
Although there is still lots to do, improving treatment, learning from, and improving alcohol recovery services and providing the right information to change behaviour and make informed choices have all contributed to the positive improvements we have seen since joining the local authority.

Please note, change over time reported as percentage point change.

Health and Wellbeing board links to social determinants of health

Health, wealth, work and economic development

The economy is a key determinant of good health, and the link between public health and economic development has gained much prominence through its association with improved life expectancy. As good population health is a determining factor of economic prosperity, the relationship is reciprocal. We know that good health is a key determinant of improved productivity.



Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact upon people’s health and wellbeing, it also caused much disruption to local, regional, national and global economies. This was quickly followed by sharp rises in inflation, which was one of main causes of the cost of living crises that began in 2022. These issues put matters relating to health and wealth in the spotlight.

‘People’ are a key source of economic growth and productivity, and health considerations are front and centre of driving economies and growth. This is particularly relevant when we consider drivers of poor health (and reduced productivity) identified earlier in this report, including alcohol use, smoking, poor mental health and excess weight.

Over the past 10 years there have been a range of initiatives and programmes of work in County Durham to promote a positive, interdependent relationship between health and wealth, including:

The County Durham Better Health at Work Award (BHAWA) and workplace health programme

This is a well-established offer to all local organisations and businesses. The County Durham BHAWA (as part of the North East BHAWA collaboration) comprises effective workplace prevention approaches at work to help avoid some of the immediate and substantial costs of absenteeism and presenteeism associated with poor health. It reaches around 105 local businesses and organisations, including recent expansion into primary health care organisations.



Mental Health at Scale

The Mental Health at Scale programme was delivered between 2019 and 2022 and saw the launch of the *'Framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham businesses'*. Key strategic objectives of the framework include changing attitudes to mental health in the workplace by tackling stigma and discrimination, creating and communicating key messages to support the promotion of good workforce mental health, and providing fully funded training and support to small and medium sized businesses and VCS organisations.



Employment support

County Durham residents benefit from a range of good quality employment support offers which recognise and address the challenges of those looking to gain good jobs. Experienced job coaches offer a range of advice and guidance through the DurhamWorks programme (for those aged 15-24), DurhamEnable (for those with significant learning physical or mental difficulties and disabilities, neurodiversity or long-term health issues). Employability Durham (those aged over 25, including Durham Advance for those over 50 or with a health condition), and DurhamHelp (those in any of these programmes whose mental health is a barrier to employment).

The County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy and delivery plan

A central focus of the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy is to create more and better jobs. This strategy was informed by extensive consultation and engagement with County Durham residents, businesses and young people, where 81% of businesses who responded recognised that a healthy workforce was important or very important to the county's economy.



The strategy sets out the strategic framework to deliver this through the 5 Ps, of People, Productivity, Places, Promotion and Planet. The 'People' priority focusses on supporting County Durham residents into education, training, jobs and to excel in business and their careers. It recognises the crucial role of good health and wellbeing and supports the growth of an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to gain the education and skills they need to succeed.

Our future approaches to building health and wealth

Community Wealth Building

This approach to local economic development redirects wealth back into the local economy and recognises the positive impact that this will have upon local health and wellbeing. We are working with local partners to develop a 'County Durham Anchor Organisation Network' to improve access to good employment, particularly for those distant from the jobs market. Our well-established and award winning 'County Durham Pound' project is working hard to drive local economic development through progressive procurement of goods and services (local spend) and support local employment.

North East Devolution

The government and local councils of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland have agreed a devolution deal to create a North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA). This will provide powers and funding to enable the North East to unleash its full economic potential, raise living standards for its communities and make a full contribution to the UK economy. An election for a North East Mayor is scheduled for May 2024. There is a productivity gap between the North East and the rest of England, and we know that the health of North East populations is worse than other areas of the country. A 'health in all policies' approach will see health put in the heart of devolution here in County Durham.

Collaboration - working together to improve lives

Each year in the annual report we present some of the projects we have delivered. This year we have focused on those projects where we have worked with others to develop, improve and protect the health and wellbeing of the county to reduce health inequalities.

Offering children the best start in life and the national Family Hubs programme

As soon as a child is born, their experiences and the environment they grow up in have an impact on how their brains and bodies develop.

Research shows us that children from a disadvantaged or vulnerable background, do not thrive as well as they should when it comes to their development, including their social, emotional, and language development.

From 0-5 years old is a key time but even more important is the time from birth to turning 2. Sometimes the gaps that appear then are difficult and costly to close once open.

Local and national services have a vital role to play in making sure every child grows up well. However, disadvantaged and vulnerable families tell us it isn't easy to get the services they need. Often, they have to tell their story over and over again to different people in different services to get the help they want.

Staff in the organisations set up to help families are working to share information in a way that would be better for families. Family Hubs as described below will contribute to this joined up approach.

In 2021, the Government announced a three-year Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme to improve the lives of babies, children, young people, parents, and carers.



County Durham was chosen as one of 75 local authorities to develop this programme. County Durham was also chosen to be a Family Hub Trailblazer in three priority areas: breastfeeding, perinatal mental health / parent child relationships, and parenting support.

Our new Family Hubs offer support as soon as people know they are welcoming a child into the family. That support continues until they reach 19 years old (or 25 for young people with special educational needs or disabilities).

The Hubs bring together staff from NHS health visiting and midwifery, mental health support, and our own family support teams. As well as linking up with community groups offering things like support for young dads too.

Family Hubs have lots of courses and information on things like:

- Expecting a baby.
- Baby feeding and weaning.
- Helping children learn and develop well.
- Feeding a family including vouchers to help buy healthy food.
- Family relationships.
- Childcare.
- Help with money.

The Family Hubs also run fun activities where children can play, families can meet each other, and have a cuppa and chat with the friendly teams. Any family can go.

Staff in the Hubs are working with parents, children and young people to make sure what we offer is something people in our communities really want and need.

The way we work with families is changing with the times too. Lots of our courses and information are now available online as well as in our centres, so families can get more of what they need, at a time and place to suit them.

We hope that by bringing more services together into one place and offering our support in new ways, it will be quicker and easier for families to get the information and support they need, to help them live better, healthier and happier lives.



Case study

Catherine attended a routine appointment with her midwife at Bishop Auckland Family Hub and while waiting she saw a poster advertising holiday activities for children. As she already had a 4-year-old child, she decided to go along with her friends.

Her child has additional needs and often finds new surroundings overwhelming, but she said she felt welcomed into the Family Hub.

They did arts and crafts activities and spoke to staff who offered advice to help them at home, plus information on future events they could attend. Through positive communication and understanding her family's needs she now feels comfortable and confident to discuss any worries or ask for support when she needs it required.

Catherine has said that she and her family have always felt so included in the Family Hub and that they have a good relationship with staff. They were contacted to come and use the new sensory room as soon as it was available and now attend regular sessions and events.

You can find out more about of the family hub work through the following link

www.durham.gov.uk/helpforfamilies

Health Literacy

Health literacy refers to a person's ability to access, understand, and use health information and services to keep themselves and their families well.

Health literacy covers a range of skills and knowledge that help people to:

- make informed decisions about their health,
- find their way through the healthcare system,
- take appropriate actions to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing.

Health literacy is a critical factor in promoting better health outcomes and reducing gaps in healthcare.

Low health literacy can lead to harmful results, such as misunderstanding medical instructions, missing healthcare appointments, and making poor health-related decisions. It can also contribute to differences in health outcomes, as individuals with low health literacy may face barriers when accessing and using healthcare services.

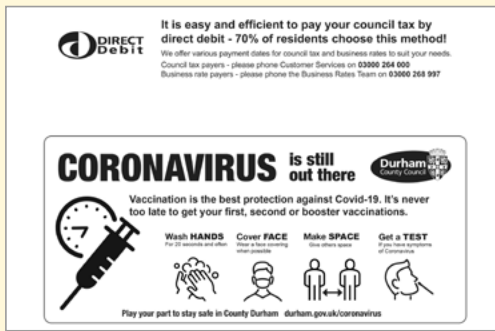
The average reading age in the North East is age 9. We know that, in County Durham, only 34% of 16- to 64-year-olds have the knowledge and skills to be fully health literate. This means that all health, social care, and public health organisations need to make sure that the information they provide to people is clear and understandable.

Improving health literacy is key to our approach to wellbeing. It is crucial for empowering individuals to take control of their health and wellbeing.

There are simple things we can all do to make sure information can be understood by everyone:

- Co-produce materials with the intended audience.
- Ask a small section of the intended audience to explain what they think the information is saying.
- Ask yourself whether someone who has no prior knowledge of the subject would understand it.
- Make sure it is written in plain English and without jargon.
- Make sure images match up with the text.
- Check that the colour scheme works across all formats – digital, written.
- Think about how it looks in print and online as digital materials may need to be printed off for those who do not have the ability to get online.
- Make sure all the text is legible. Think about the colours used and the font size.
- If there is a lot of information has it been “chunked up”, so only one topic is covered at a time.
- If it is a document, is it clearly set out with a content page and headings, so that the information is easy to find.

Here are a few examples where we have used health literacy to produce public information.



During the COVID-19 pandemic we used the back of the council tax envelope that goes to every household in County Durham to provide advice and information.



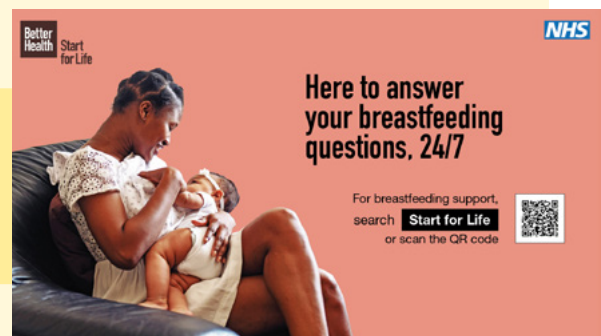
In shops and supermarkets we have provided information on alcohol guidelines.



We produced domestic abuse information in response to an increase of incidents during big football matches and tournaments.



At a breastfeeding event specialist staff shared top tips on breastfeeding.



Healthy Options Takeaway (HOT)

In County Durham nearly 40% of our children leave primary school overweight and 75% of adults are overweight. This is due to a number of things, but is partly due to not eating a good, balanced diet.

In the UK, a lot of people now eat fast food and takeaways on a regular basis, which are usually high in calories, fat, sugar and salt, and low in vitamins and minerals.

As part of our work to help people live at a healthy weight, we now offer training for food businesses so they can offer more healthy options on their menus. It is called the Healthy Options Takeaways (HOT) Masterclass.

We tested our training programme with five businesses. This included taste tests and information on how to offer more healthy options at low or no cost to the business, such as swapping mayonnaise for low fat yoghurt and taking away saltshakers from the counters.

The people taking part told us they were shocked by how many overweight people live in County Durham. They were also surprised to see how much sugar was in some of the drinks they sold.

The feedback for the training was very positive and the people taking part gave us 9.75/10. One of the businesses taking part, Shildon Alive, was so impressed with the training, they decided to use the sugar activity as a tool to use with children in local schools. Four out of the five businesses also promised to make healthy swaps on their menus.

Six weeks after the training, we visited the businesses and were pleased they had stuck to their promises and had made further improvements. Shildon Alive had developed a 'HOT Champion' role and the Stapylton Arms updated the layout of their menu with separate pages for food intolerances and vegan/veggie options etc. It is now colour coded and very clear, making it easier to select the healthy option.

To recognise their efforts the businesses were granted the "HOT Award", which means they get a window sticker and a listing on the DCC Food Safety pages www.durham.gov.uk/FoodSafety

This also helps customers see that they offer healthy options too.

We are now looking at how we can improve and build on this trial. We will be creating an online training package for a "HOT Accreditation" scheme.

Businesses that already provide healthy options can complete a self-assessment checklist to get the HOT Award if they meet the criteria. Businesses that do not currently meet the criteria will be able to access the online training before we visit them to do an assessment in person.

www.durham.gov.uk/HealthyOptionsTakeaway



Case Study - Shildon Alive

Shildon Alive really got on board with what they learned in the HOT training, with Ben, their chef, becoming their 'HOT Champion'. Some of the things Ben changed included:

- Only stocking sugar free drinks.
- Making sure at least one dessert was fruit or fruit-based.
- Swapping to low calorie sauces.
- Swapping to low salt.
- Swapping to lower fat spreads for sandwiches.
- Offering a free fruit dessert with a main course when they have rescued fruit.
- Offering free fruit to children each time they visit.
- Having a "No Fry Day" every Monday where they turn off their fryers to both save energy and calories.

Ben said:

"Our customers have been really happy with the changes we've made and haven't even noticed the difference with things like swapping to low salt, which is brilliant.

"Because we rely on donations and rescued food to create our menus, sometimes it can be challenging to make sure the options are healthy. But we've worked hard to make it work. If we can increase the healthy options available on our menu, then anyone can!"

Ben is now looking at ways to continue offering even more healthy swaps: "I'm really proud of what we're doing here and I would love to do more training and get new ideas of other ways we can keep helping people make healthy choices."

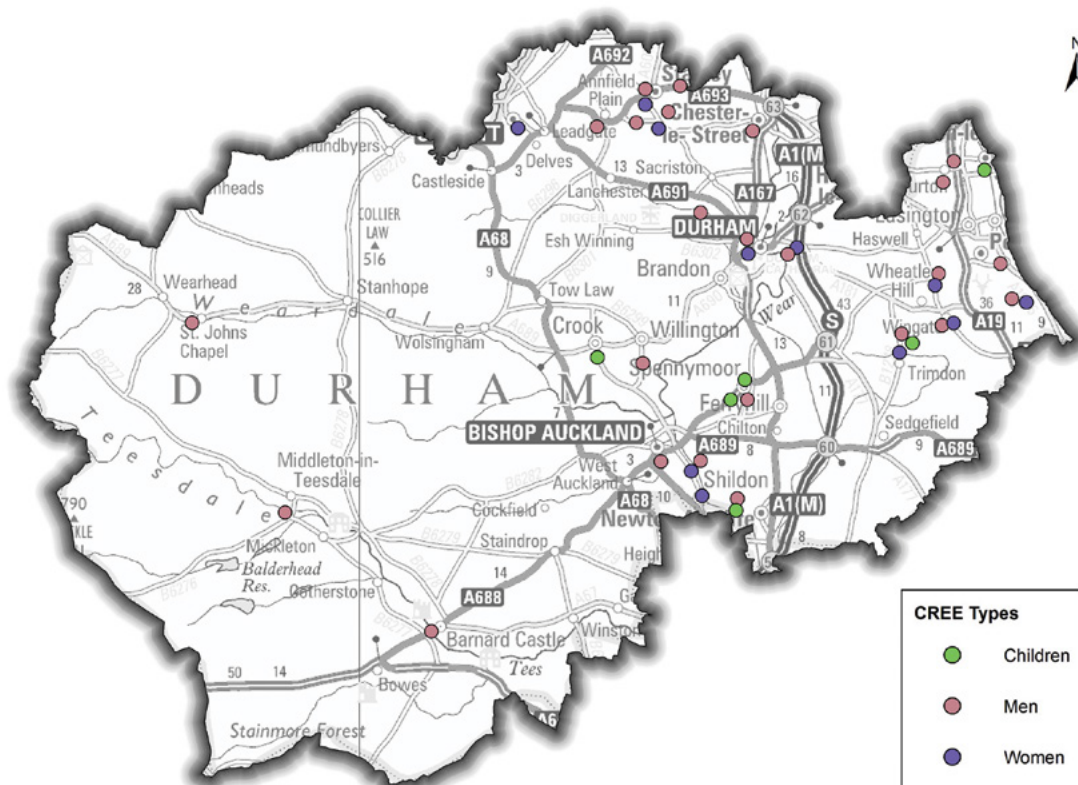


County Durham Cree Network

The Public Health County Durham Cree project launched in November 2011 and is based on the Australian Men's Shed movement. The name Cree was chosen because it is a local word for shed. Over the last 12 years, the project has grown and developed into the County Durham Cree Network with Crees all over the county.

Crees offer adults and young people a safe and supportive place to meet people and try new things. Staff can also point them in the direction of more help if they need it. They are particularly important for people who may have poor mental health, people who are socially isolated, anyone at risk of self-harm or suicide, and people who worry about their general health and wellbeing.

A map showing the locations of our Cree groups.



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There are now **40 Crees** across County Durham and nearly 1000 people go to the weekly meetings (64% are men, 32% women, and 4% young people).

Cree members recently did an annual health and wellbeing survey. The results showed:

- **50%** reporting they have increased their physical activity levels
- **36%** had taken up volunteering opportunities in their local area
- **38%** reported having reduced feelings and thoughts of suicide
- **28%** reported having reduced repeat visits to their GP

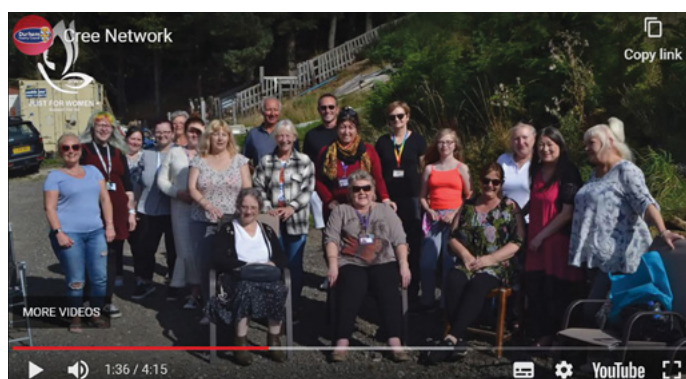
The survey also asked members how going to the Crees had helped them. They said:

- It's given me life changing support.
- It's provided me with longer term support.
- It's the highlight of my week.
- The sessions give me hope and understanding.
- Since coming to the Cree, my feeling of wellbeing has increased massively.

Earlier this year the Cree Network worked with local charity If U Care Share to offer training to the staff and volunteers. It covered emotional wellbeing, mental health, suicide prevention, support after suicide, and looking at how trauma can affect people. This is an area of work the staff and volunteers wanted particular support with and so our public health team arranged the training.

A short film was developed in April 2022 to show what the Cree Network does with examples of their best work from across County Durham. You can watch it at:

youtu.be/9rBPT1tab7I



Cree Case Study – Cultivate 4 Life

“Cultivate 4 Life is a brilliant example of a Cree Project in County Durham that runs an allotment-based men’s group. The men work together and eat together and much of the produce is donated back to community groups in the area. This has a really positive impact on wellbeing and the Cree’s longevity and consistent approach is particularly helpful to those with lasting and enduring mental health needs. People report feeling better being supported by people they know. Durham Community Action has worked with this group for many years now and are constantly impressed by the emotional and practical help on offer.”



Susan Tron MBE, Community Development Officer
Durham Community Action

Supporting people with drug related problems

Drug and alcohol treatment services have been a responsibility of Durham County Council for the last ten years. During that time there has been significant consolidation of services and the introduction of a wide range of support for local residents who experience drug and alcohol problems.

These include very close working with other council services such as social care, housing, estates, community development as well as established links with the NHS, police, and probation to ensure that our local services are based on needs and are joined up provision. This includes building capacity in criminal justice system pathways to increase engagement with prisoners transferring to community support and improving opportunities for joint working with mental health services.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about several challenges for our drug and alcohol treatment services, especially given the face-to-face support required. However, the service adapted extremely well and moved way of working where possible online and flexibility in access to medication. The service maintained the majority of clients in treatment and recovery support and improved the rates of people becoming drug and alcohol free to above national levels.

The service has also shown significant innovation over time including access to naloxone, a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses, more widely available locally. There has also been the development and introduction of a dedicated Women's Recovery Centre and service Ambassadors who have lived experience of drug and alcohol use helping to develop and guide the service and support others in recovery.

The Dame Carol Black report: From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives, was published in 2022/23 and set out how the government wanted to combat illegal drug use, reduce crime, save lives and challenge 'recreational drug use', reducing the impacts of drug use and supply on local communities. This national policy has given fresh impetus as well as funding to address the health, wellbeing and wider community impact of drug issues.

Locally new Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership working across County Durham and Darlington has been established to coordinate the work of the police, local authority, NHS, probation, social care and the community and voluntary sector to deliver a local plan for action.

We have benefitted locally from successful funding bids against the new strategy including:

- A Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant to help reduce crime in local communities and promote recovery.
- Leading the sub-regional consortia of Local Authorities to commission inpatient detoxification services.
- A homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and substance misuse service delivered in partnership with Housing Solutions.
- An Individual Placement Support Grant enabling a dedicated team of staff to support individuals back into the workplace.
- A Housing Support Grant for those individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless or are living in supported accommodation providers with no support.

The additional funding, aligned to our existing commitment and extensive service provision, ensures that our work remains a key priority within County Durham.

Paul's story

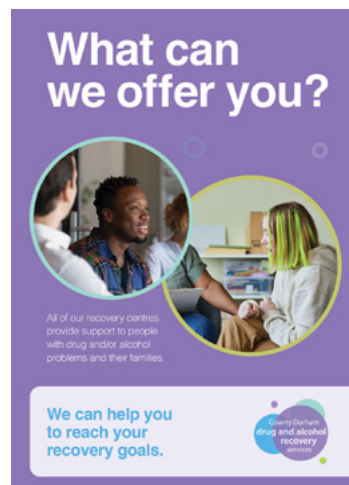
Paul had previously been in treatment with the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service (DARS) but, through living a chaotic lifestyle, had fallen out of treatment. Paul had no fixed abode and was 'sofa surfing' or rough sleeping at times. Through links with Integrated Offender Management (IOM) officers, it was arranged that Paul would be brought to the DARS' outreach vehicle. Paul was provided with a rapid pathway back into treatment by completing triage immediately and allocated a worker.

While at the outreach vehicle, Paul was given food and a drink, harm reduction advice, and completed a blood borne virus (BBV) test. The instant BBV test showed positive for Hepatitis C, which triggered a dried blood spot (DBS) test that was sent for screening the same day.

Discussions with Paul, the IOM officer and the manager of a housing provider led to Paul being assessed and entered into their programme (which offers supported accommodation the same day). An assessment was completed the next day with the DARS and Paul entered clinical treatment.

Following support from the DARS worker, he was able to successfully exit treatment and finished a Methadone prescription whilst maintaining successful tenancy.

Following closure, Paul's test result came back with a current infection for Hepatitis C, which meant that treatment was required. Paul attended a planned appointment with the nurse at a recovery centre where he was provided with harm reduction advice, information about the medication, and the treatment.



If you need help with drugs or alcohol, you might be offered what's called a detox programme. The detox will be part of a bigger recovery plan, and you will get support throughout your journey from your drug and alcohol worker.

Is a detox right for me?
 Detox isn't right for everyone and you need to decide if it is right for you.
 You will be given a personal drug and alcohol worker, who will sit down with you, face to face, to chat about the options and help you decide if detox is right for you.

What are the options?
Community Detox – You can do your detox at home, with support from us and your friends and family around you, or you may do this in a centre in your local area. You are sometimes offered medication to help you do this.
In-Patient Detox – This is where you go to stay in one of our centres, to get more intensive help. It is usually a short stay of between one week and one month.

Getting started
 Our staff will help get you ready to take part in your detox, so that you have the best chance of success.
 They will chat about who you have around you to help support you.
 They will help you decide which treatment you have.
 They will see if it can be done near where you live, or somewhere outside of the area where you would stay over.

Doing your detox at home
 This option works best if you have friends and family around you, who can support you through your treatment.
 Your support worker might also suggest things like going to a support group or taking part in activities that will help distract you from wanting to drink or take drugs.
 You might be offered medication to help you quit drinking or stop taking drugs.

The medication also helps with the side-effects while you cut down.
 You will need a prescription and our staff will make sure you are on the right type of medication at the right strength for you.
 We will only suggest reducing or stopping your medication if you are ready and it is safe to do so.

Staying in one of our centres to detox
 If you decide the best thing for you is a more intensive treatment, then we will help you get booked into one of our detox centres – this is called In-Patient Detox.
 There are five centres, which are spread around the country, so you might not be somewhere close to your home.
 Most people stay for between one week and one month, while they do their detox.

What happens at a detox centre
 Just like detox at home, you will be offered support, medication, activities and therapy – all in a more intense way than if you were doing it at home.
 At our centres there are staff around 24/7 to keep you safe, well and comfortable.
 You will get support when you are ready to leave as well, to help you stay off drugs and alcohol when you get back home.

What happens next?
 Detox is just the start of your journey on the road to recovery. We will help support you after your detox too.
 You will have a key worker, who will show you what support is available after your detox.
 This will include things like "Peer Support" which is where people who are going through the same thing, or have done it in the past, can help you and you can help them.
 You might also choose to have one-to-one meetings, counselling, or join a support group to help you in your new way of life.

Protecting health

One of the main responsibilities for public health is protecting the public from the impact of infectious diseases.

Over the last two and a half years most of this work has been about managing and controlling COVID-19. During that time, social distancing also helped reduce the number of people getting coughs, colds, and other similar infections.

Now that we have learned to live safely with Covid, we have seen a return of common infections like coughs, colds, flu, norovirus, sickness and diarrhoea, as well as less common infections including Meningitis, Mpox, Cryptosporidium, and Measles.

In most cases the numbers of these infections are now similar to what we saw before the Covid pandemic, but in some cases we saw a sudden and severe increase in infection rates that needed national and local action.

Strep A response

During winter 2022/23 there were more cases of Scarlet Fever and Strep A (Group A Streptococcal) infections than normal. Although it is usually a mild infection, the huge number of cases across the country led to a greater number of severe infections, and sadly a small number of children died.

In County Durham, we used the processes we had developed during the pandemic to share public health advice, support and control measures with parents, schools and children's services.

The number of Strep A infections in County Durham was higher than normal and some children needed hospital treatment. By acting quickly we kept the number of infections as low as possible and offered support and reassurance to people who were worried.



UK Health Security Agency #GroupAStrep

Group A Strep (GAS)

Parents should trust their judgement when their child is poorly. Speak to your GP or call 111 if your child is poorly and getting worse.

Always call 999 or go to A&E if your child:

- ▶ Is having difficulty breathing - such as grunting noises or their tummy sucking under their ribs
- ▶ there are pauses when your child breathes
- ▶ child's skin, tongue or lips are blue
- ▶ is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake.

Testimonial

Helen Nixon, Lead Officer Early Years and Childcare

'Public Health have become a key partner over the last three years providing advice, guidance and support to the early years and education sector. The team are now a regular attendee of the termly Leaders Briefing, providing clear explanatory information on infection prevention and control to protect children.'

'Public health provided timely bulletins, email responses and telephone advice to stem the panic surrounding Strep A that was beginning to set in with families, fuelled by national press reports. Their calming and reassuring approach with sound practical advice equipped our settings to support families, confidently.'



Avian flu response

In the last 18 months, the number of bird flu (avian influenza) cases has gone up both in County Durham and across the country. Pet birds, wild birds and water birds in our parks and reservoirs have been affected.

The current strain of bird flu (H5N1) can spread very quickly between birds but the risk of it spreading to humans is very low.

When a report of bird flu is made, the local public health team and the local authority work together to respond. The group looks at ways to share messages with the public about how to limit the spread of infection, any controls that need to be brought in, which might include areas that need increased protection and monitoring.

We also work closely with a range of agencies such as:

- The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).
- The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).
- The Food Standards Agency (FSA).
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).
- The Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the North East and North Cumbria.

Given the rise in bird flu cases locally and the range of agencies involved, the County Durham Avian Influenza Framework was developed in 2022. This helps make sure that everyone from the different organisations involved has the same information available to them and is clear on who does what from each organisation.

As part of the updated communications to support the framework, new materials like the picture above were developed to be used in affected areas to alert the public and explain how they can stay safe and report any concerns.



Testimonial

Dr Joanne Darke, Consultant in Health Protection, UK Health Security Agency North East.

'County Durham has always been proactive in the protection of health and the Avian Influenza Framework has provided the structure for partners to activate a planned and coordinated response, it connects me to the right services and people to develop an effective response.'



Conclusion

The title of this year's annual report 'Looking Back to Plan Ahead' was chosen as I wanted to reflect and celebrate our transition to the local authority which was 10 years ago. It has also served as an opportunity to look ahead at the health and wellbeing challenges our residents still face and how we address these collectively.

I am proud to see how we have embedded public health across the Council which has enabled greater input and influence on a range of factors that impact our residents lives: the economy, housing and education. The examples throughout the report demonstrate this clearly.

The health and wellbeing of residents has seen some change over the past 10 years, with reductions in smoking levels which is a fantastic achievement, though with more to do. However other issues have also emerged and increased such as the level of unhealthy weight, mental ill-health and alcohol harms. These have been the focus of previous Director of Public Health Annual Reports and must remain a priority to address.

We also see some differences in health between County Durham and England and within the county itself and looking ahead seeking to embed health inequalities in everything that we do is key. A recent example of this has been the Inclusive Economic Strategy, which has been developed with due regard to health inequalities and with health and wellbeing a key part of the developing delivery plan.

Over the last ten years, our residents have had to face significant challenges too, including austerity, a global pandemic and cost of living crisis which have impacted on health and wellbeing. The pandemic has been a key part of the last three reports. Underpinning this work with good engagement with our communities was paramount to the response locally.

This work was also led by the Health and Wellbeing Board which has been in place for 10 years too. Over that time it has sought to address, with key partners, the health and wellbeing challenges locally. It has also sought to use good data and local conversations from the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment and the Approach to Wellbeing to make decisions about priority actions. These are now reflected in the updated Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028.

Looking ahead I believe we are on a firm foundation to plan our next ten years. We have ambitions that will stretch us. Within the next ten years we are ambitious for improvements to health and wellbeing. This includes our aim to be a truly smokefree County Durham.

We want to continue to add years to life by reducing avoidable deaths; to add health to life by reducing disability and disease; and to add life to years by enhancing quality of life and to see our communities thrive.

This all depends on good partnership working and underpinning our approach with good evidence of 'what works to make a difference', utilising research to seek out answers to the challenges faced, a well-developed public health workforce and on-going commitment to bring about change with and on behalf of our communities.

I hope that in 2033 further improvements will have been made to health and wellbeing locally and that all partners and our communities play an active role in this.

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