Reducing the harm from Tobacco in Hertfordshire: A policy statement

The Harm from Tobacco in Hertfordshire

Tobacco is an extremely harmful product; it is the only consumer product with no safe level of use. As few as 10 cigarettes lead to a lifetime addiction.

Smoking tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in Hertfordshire. Despite our success in reducing the number of smokers each year, (an estimated 19.4% of the population of Hertfordshire smoke compared with 20% of the population of England) we estimate that around 168,000 people still smoke, with new smokers, especially young people, starting every day. Most new smokers in Hertfordshire are under the age of 18. The percentage of people smoking and smoking more heavily increases with disadvantage. Smoking is highest in Stevenage at 27.6% of the population.

While much has been done by Government and recent legislation, there is clear evidence that action, such as the smoking ban, has led to a range of health benefits including:

- reduced heart attack admissions to hospital
- reduced childhood asthma admissions to hospital
- fewer premature births.

Tobacco use still remains one of Hertfordshire’s most significant public health challenges.

Smoking is associated with a range of illnesses and is the primary preventable cause of ill health and premature death, killing more than the next 6 most causes of death combined.

Each year Hertfordshire spends £298m on tobacco products, contributing £227m per annum to the Exchequer; but smoking costs Hertfordshire £278.1m per year in health costs, lost productivity, litter and other costs including fires.

This means Hertfordshire spends more on dealing with the costs of tobacco than it contributes in revenue to the exchequer. This cost falls most heavily on the public sector (£122m) and on business. Smokers from more deprived communities spend 5 times as much of their income on smoking than more affluent smokers which impacts on family poverty.

1,700 people die in Hertfordshire every year due to a smoking-related illness, dying earlier than non-smokers and for the most part having had more years of disability than non-smokers.

The causes of premature deaths per year in Hertfordshire that are related to smoking include:

- Approximately 24 deaths from heart disease per 100,000 population linked to smoking.
- Approximately 31 deaths from lung cancer per 100,000 population linked to smoking.
- Approximately 21 deaths from respiratory disease (COPD) per 100,000 population linked to smoking.
- Approximately 7.5 deaths from stroke per 100,000 population linked to smoking.

In terms of all deaths for all ages, nearly two in three (61%) are caused by smoking-related illnesses.

Smoking can also impact on health right at the beginning of life. Smoking during pregnancy leads to a range of health risks for both mother and baby, including a higher rate of miscarriage, premature birth and infant death. Smoking in pregnancy increases neonatal death by 40% and is linked to health problems and behavioural difficulties in children and long term ill health right into adulthood. At least 1,300 pregnant women in Hertfordshire smoked throughout their pregnancy last year.

The avoidable death and illness burden of smoking typically affects our least affluent populations most heavily, particularly routine and manual workers and people with mental health conditions.

Controlling the harm from tobacco

We can reduce the significant burdens that tobacco use inflicts on Hertfordshire communities. Comprehensive tobacco control efforts can impact on health inequalities, reduce the economic burden on society and reduce the death, disease and disability that people throughout the county suffer because of smoking.

Effective tobacco control is important in realising our ambitions to be a County of Opportunity and central to our ambition to ensure everyone in Hertfordshire has the opportunity to be healthy and to make a contribution.

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The harm from tobacco is an unacceptable cost to Hertfordshire. The Health and Wellbeing Board recognised the important of this when it included in its strategy a priority to reduce the harm from tobacco.

Smoking use is not just a health issue – it is an economic issue and should be everyone’s priority because of the burden of avoidable cost, death and disease that smoking causes. Focused, sustained and coordinated action on a number of fronts by a wide range of agencies, organisations and individuals is vital if the significant achievements of recent years in reducing the harm to Hertfordshire from tobacco are to be sustained and furthered.

1 Source: Public Health England
2 Source: Action on Smoking and Health, local cost of smoking spreadsheet 2013 update.
Given this, and in light of the County Council assuming Public Health responsibilities the County Council expresses its intentions to work towards making Hertfordshire as free as possible from the harms caused by tobacco. In order to do this the County Council intends to:

- Continue to reduce smoking prevalence and the health inequalities associated with it and to raise the profile of the harm caused by smoking to our communities.
- Develop plans with our partners and local communities to address the causes and impacts of tobacco use, and secure the greatest benefit for our communities.
- Monitor the progress of our plans against our commitments and publish the results.
- Participate in appropriate local and regional networks in furtherance of these intentions; including benchmarking of Hertfordshire against other areas.
- Support the government in taking action at national level to help local authorities reduce smoking prevalence and health inequalities in our communities.

Ask our pension fund trustees to consider how, while remaining faithful to their legal duties and not adding cost to the public purse, they can align their portfolio of investment with the principles and intentions in this statement.

A tobacco control strategy

We will implement our policy intentions through our tobacco control partnership.

To reduce smoking prevalence and the health inequalities associated with it and to raise the profile of the harm caused by smoking to our communities, we will:

- Mandate our tobacco control partnership to produce a strategy which works across
  - prevention of people taking up smoking,
  - control and enforcement, and
  - reducing the prevalence of people who smoke.
- Continue to support people to give up smoking through a Hertfordshire wide stop smoking service.
- Target areas of highest smoking for action where every health and care professional becomes an advocate to reduce smoking prevalence.
- Work to prevent young people taking up smoking and commend this work to our schools.
- Make the County Council a Smokefree organisation and help others to achieve this through policy support, advice and training.

To address the causes and impacts of tobacco use, and secure the greatest benefit for our communities, we will:

- Be accredited to the national CLeaR®3 standards for local government tobacco control by 2014.
- Seek to protect people from the harmful effects of second hand smoke including promoting Smokefree parks, public places, homes and vehicles.
- Work with partners to enforce the law on tobacco.
- Take action with partners to disrupt and prevent illegal tobacco supply and revenue evasion.

To monitor the progress of our plans against our commitments and publish the results, we will:

- Produce regular reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Public Health and Localism Cabinet Panel.
- Ensure our progress is published annually in the report of the Director of Public Health.

In order to ensure that our work is free from conflict of interest, our existing policies and this policy mean, we will decline any partnerships, payments, gifts or services whether in money or in kind, offered by the tobacco industry to elected members or employees.

The outcomes of a reduction in smoking prevalence

A reduction in smoking prevalence year on year across Hertfordshire would have significant benefits to the local economy by:

- Improving people’s health and their quality of life particularly in least affluent wards.
- Reducing the costs to the NHS and social care of smoking related disease and disability and enabling resources to be directed to meeting other health and care needs.
- Reducing costs to employers from smoking breaks, smoking related illness, litter, cleaning and lost productivity.
- Increasing household income and quality of life when smokers quit.
- Improving the life chances of young children by reducing their exposure to second hand smoke.
- Reducing congenital disease and disability in children due to smoking in pregnancy.
- Reducing the costs of dealing with smoking-related fires.
- Reducing costs related to clearing up cigarette litter.
- Reducing organised crime linked to the sale of illicit tobacco.
- Reducing revenue evasion.
- Reducing avoidable burden on the taxpayer.

Hertfordshire County Council
November 2013

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