

Walsall Health Protection

Annual Report 2023/24



Walsall Council



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Foreword

Welcome to my first Health Protection Annual Report as Interim Director of Public Health for Walsall. The report will summarise the great work done by Walsall colleagues in the wide-ranging area of Health Protection. I hope that you find it an engaging and reassuring read.

Health Protection services in Walsall aim to prevent and reduce the harm or impact on the health of the local population caused by infectious diseases or environmental hazards, major incidents and other threats, alongside reducing health inequalities.

In Walsall, Health Protection services continue to respond, and make improvements to the health needs of our residents. These services co-ordinate their actions through local and regional networks, the Walsall Health Protection Forum and associated working and steering groups to ensure that the function is delivered as efficiently as possible.

A big thank you to all who have contributed to this report and to those who work tirelessly to protect the health of the people of Walsall.



Dr Nadia Inglis
Interim Director of Public Health

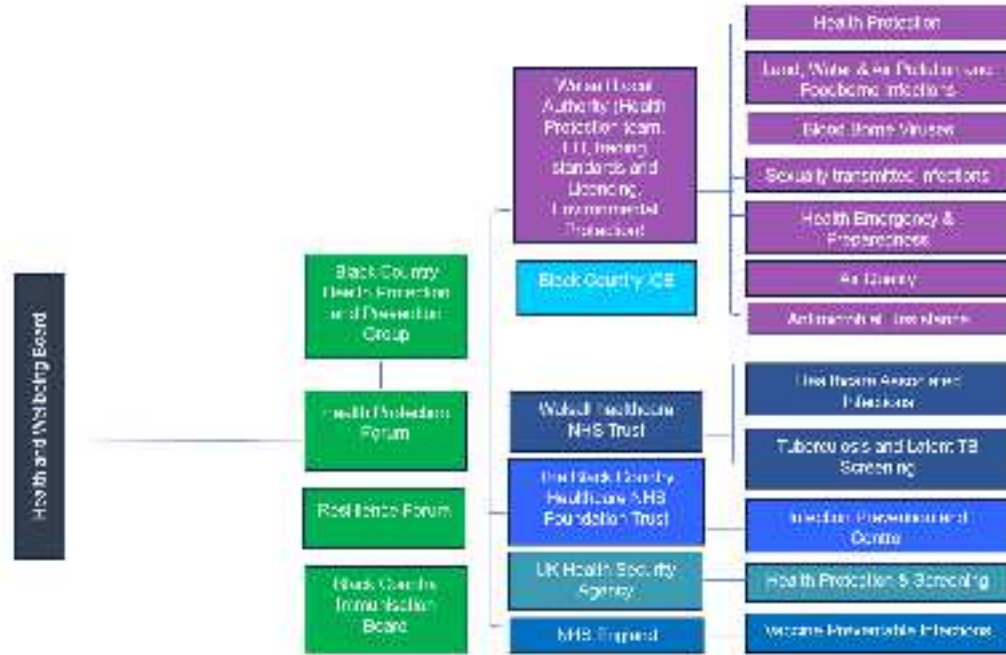


Background

- This annual report details the functions and activities of Walsall's Health Protection Forum and wider support system.
- It aims to provide assurance to the Health and Wellbeing Board that the health of Walsall residents is being protected. The report presents the current situation and analysis of health protection issues in Walsall during 2023/24, and identifies future actions.
- The report provides an overview of the Health Protection priorities focusing on protecting the residents of Walsall including infectious diseases, environmental hazards, and other threats to health.
- The purpose of this document is to:
 - provide a clear overview of the current health protection situation within Walsall,
 - celebrate the successes and achievements of the past year,
 - identify on-going challenges or issues, so that remedial solutions can be actioned,
 - ensure that all the agencies that support and deliver health protection across Walsall are engaged in a process of continuous improvement,
 - provide assurance that there are robust civil contingency mechanisms in place to protect Walsall's residents and ensure business continuity and
 - allow the Director of Public Health to provide assurances to the Health and Wellbeing Board, elected members and the public that the health of Walsall residents is being protected in a proactive and effective way.

Governance Structure for Health Protection in Walsall

The scope of Health Protection is broad and there is a range of partners involved in protecting the health of the population of Walsall. The Health Protection Forum has oversight of health protection in Walsall and is chaired by the Director of Public health or Consultant in Health Protection lead. It is accountable to the Health and Wellbeing board.



Key Insights for 2023/24



Flu vaccination coverage in the over 65s in Walsall achieved the >75% target in 2023



Childhood immunisations have decreased in Walsall & are below target coverage rates, leading to local outbreaks of measles.



Screening coverage for breast and bowel cancer in Walsall is significantly lower than the national average. However, for cervical screening, coverage is similar to the national average.



Antenatal and newborn screening achieved all targets in 2023/24.



The rate of new STI diagnoses (excluding Chlamydia in under 25s) in Walsall is significantly lower than the national rate, however we also have a lower testing rate.



HIV Testing Coverage, in all target groups, is significantly higher (better) in Walsall than the national average. However, HIV late diagnosis is higher than target threshold at 54.5%



There were 35 cases of TB in Walsall in 2023. The incidence is significantly higher than the national rate.



Air Quality:

The concentration of particulate matter (PM2.5) has decreased in Walsall since 2019 but is still higher than regional and national averages.



Immunisations

Achievements in 2023/24

Walsall Public Health have:

- worked with the voluntary sector using peer support to increase the uptake of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine across Walsall and have now put out bids for a second round following the pilot's success.
- commissioned a creative art team to work in the ante-natal clinic at Walsall Healthcare Trust to promote Flu, COVID-19 and Pertussis vaccination. This has been very successful, with the team engaging with over 900 pregnant women. There are plans to replicate this across the Black Country.
- worked with the ICB to offer enhanced GP clinics to help increase the uptake of MMR vaccinations. Several pop-up vaccination clinics were also offered. There was a 4% rise in uptake of MMR from 81% having had 2 doses by age 5 in quarter 1 of 2023/24 to 85% in quarter 4 of 2023/24.
- had great engagement with the Walsall Cohesion team – we were able to plan targeted immunisations approach for ethnic minorities such as: Roma, Romanian, Gypsy, travellers, African and south Asian residents.

Risks and Challenges

- Walsall Public Health and partners were not able to offer as many MMR pop up clinics as we would have liked due to resource constraints.
- Childhood immunisation uptake rates remained low in 2023/2024, which led to an outbreak of measles and pertussis in Walsall and the wider West Midlands area.
- There is an ongoing issue of vaccination hesitancy in some communities, resulting in poor uptake of vaccines.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health will continue to work with partners to:

- increase the uptake of the Pertussis vaccine among pregnant women within Walsall
- increase the uptake of winter vaccines such as Flu and COVID-19 vaccines
- continue to increase the uptake of childhood immunisations (MMR) with the support of a newly created immunisation support officer role

Tuberculosis

Achievements in 2023/24

The Community TB service:

- had over a treatment completion rate of over 97% for 2023.
- have trained primary care professionals on TB.

Risks and Challenges

The Community TB service has been short staffed - Walsall Healthcare Trust (WHT) are in the process of recruiting more staff currently. This has meant that there has been:

- Reduced ability to raise awareness in the community and inability to carry out latent TB testing due to lack of capacity.
- Difficulty in following up complex cases of TB (homeless/substance misusing communities, asylum seekers and refugees etc.).

Priorities for 2024/25

- Walsall Healthcare Trust (WHT) is planning to increase the TB service staffing and team capacity.
- Walsall Public Health together with WHT will implement a campaign to raise awareness of signs and symptoms of TB to promote early diagnosis in the community.
- Walsall Public Health and WHT will continue to educate primary care professionals about TB.
- Walsall Public Health will work with WHT to plan the implementation of latent TB services in Walsall.

Infection Prevention and Control (Walsall Public Health Protection Team)

Achievements in 2023/24

Walsall Public Health:

- have conducted verified audits for all residential and nursing homes. Care homes were scored, and RAG rated with 25 homes being green, 34 homes amber, and 5 care homes red
- offered bespoke Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) training for homes of concern by Health Protection (HP) practitioners with good feedback
- delivered quarterly face to face infection prevention and control link worker sessions for care home staff with good feedback from staff and managers
- have worked collaboratively with environmental health colleagues, UK Health Security Agency, ICB and the Quality in Care Team (QiCT) to improve infection prevention and control in the community
- have undertaken audits to review oral and catheter care in all residential and nursing homes

Risks and Challenges

- Fall in IPC standards as evidenced by a reduction in the number of green rated homes – 29 in 2022/2023 vs 25 in 2023/2024
- Link worker training sessions have not been as well attended as expected
- Reduced laboratory capacity for receiving swabs, resulting in some delays in identifying outbreaks
- Reduced capacity in the Walsall Health Protection Team which impacts on capacity to offer bespoke IPC training and audits

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health will:

- carry out IPC audits across care homes in Walsall (71 care homes) in collaboration with the ICB and Quality in Care team.
- offer quarterly link worker sessions with IPC link workers from care homes, as well as bespoke training where appropriate
- improve catheter care and oral care in care homes in Walsall

Antimicrobial Resistance

Achievements in 2023/24

Walsall Public Health have:

- reviewed and audited catheter use in all care homes in Walsall. As a result, we have improved training, catheter management in care homes, and strengthened the contract for catheter management.
- worked collaboratively with the ICB's FREED (Frailty, Recognising End of life and Escalating Deterioration) team for education of health & social care staff.
- The Black Country NHS Foundation Trust have implemented quality improvement projects on oral health and catheter care to reduce inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics.

Risks and Challenges

- Catheter associated urinary tract infections (UTIs) and acute respiratory infections (ARIs) requiring antibiotics remain high in some care homes.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health:

- aim to identify care homes with an increased incidence of acute respiratory infections (ARI)/catheter associated urinary tract infections (CAUTI) or C. difficile infections and complete targeted education on basic care to reduce health care associated infections (HCAI). This will be done in collaboration with the Quality in Care team/ICB.
- plan to offer workshops for school nurses/ health visitors using the TARGET resource on infection prevention control and bacterial vs viral infections.
- plan to review the use of prophylactic antibiotics in urinary tract infections and create a pathway for reviewing prophylactic antibiotics.
- plan to collaborate with NHS partners to evaluate initiatives on catheter care and oral healthcare.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Achievements in 2023/24

Walsall Public Health have:

- redesigned the Primary Care Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) delivery model both in General Practice and Pharmacy to ensure increased access, choice and proximity for women.
- developed and opened a new Town centre Sexual and Reproductive Health Clinic in Hatherton Street.
- recruited two senior Sexual Reproductive Health nurses to deliver both a town centre and community outreach service.
- developed a draft Walsall Sex Worker strategy, to be ratified in December 2024.
- procured an incident reporting system as a quality improvement tool, called 'Datix'.
- completed a number of audits linked to: long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) provision by GPs, the syphilis care pathway, and PrEP provision.

Risks and Challenges

- Resource constraints in primary care may have a negative impact on the delivery of the sexual health offer through primary care.
- Resource constraints across health and care partners may have a negative impact on the implementation of the Sex Worker Strategy.
- A recent audit of PrEP has shown that some high-risk groups in Walsall have low awareness of, and are not accessing PrEP.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health will:

- develop and implement an outreach programme for sexual health in Walsall.
- work with providers to ensure that a robust Syphilis care pathway is implemented.
- audit HIV late diagnosis in Walsall, and monitor and maintain equitable access to PrEP for high-risk groups, implementing audit recommendations.
- work together with partners to reduce sexual health inequalities across Walsall.

Blood borne viruses (BBV)

Achievements in 2023/24

- Walsall Public Health have improved Hepatitis B vaccination rates within the Alcohol and Drug service, with increased access, promotion and a review of practices.
- Case files have been reviewed and ensured all service users have been offered screening.
- Change Grow Live (CGL), our alcohol & drug service provider have started recruitment for a BBV nurse to enhance capacity.

Risks and Challenges

- Failure to hire the BBV nurse will impact ability to deliver services to the drug and alcohol community.
- Failure to meet micro elimination target for Hep C could negatively impact the Alcohol and Drug funding due to grant conditions.
- Work to reduce BBV is focused on service users in alcohol and drug services, but does not consider the wider need for BBV screening and management in Walsall.

Priorities for 2024/25

- Walsall Public Health will work towards micro-elimination of Hep C among the alcohol and drug service users.
- Walsall Public Health will introduce additional sites to engage those not otherwise engaged in Alcohol and Drug treatment services within the BBV testing offer.

Air Quality

Achievements in 2023/24

- Walsall Public Health established the Air Quality Alliance in 2023 in partnership with Environmental Protection, West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Transport, Planning and Licencing.
- Environmental Protection published the Air Quality Status Report for Walsall for 2023 in January 2024.

Risks and Challenges

- Although there were no exceedances in Walsall in 2023 against national guidelines, we do not meet the WHO guidelines for air quality.
- Behaviour change is challenging as various factors deter individuals from adopting new, healthier behaviours with regard to active travel.
- A lack of awareness and common misconceptions about the economic impact of measures to improve Air Quality could have a negative impact on our ability to implement change.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health will:

- work with partners, including UK Health Security Agency, Transport & planning, EP, and WMCA to develop a local Air Quality Strategy and workplan.
- collaborate with WMCA to undertake a Behaviour change pilot project on improving air quality in the construction industry.
- implement training for councillors and senior management about Air Quality.
- raise public awareness of the health impact of air pollution, and encourage them to take action to reduce air pollution.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards

Achievements in 2023/24

Environmental Health:

- responded to 160 complaints about unfit food and to 106 complaints about the hygiene of food premises
- registered 135 new food businesses, and inspected 252 food businesses, including rated and unrated businesses.
- responded to 329 Infectious Disease notifications (Notifiable diseases statutorily notified to the EH team by UK-Health Security Agency)
- undertook targeted health and safety interventions at 11 businesses using national intelligence and 96 businesses using local intelligence
- registered 78 businesses and persons carrying out specialist treatments (tattooing, ear and cosmetic piercing, semi-permanent skin colouring, electrolysis and acupuncture).
- Environmental Health also initiated local health and safety projects, and these are ongoing with the following objectives: increasing men's engagement in health and wellbeing support, raising workplace mental wellbeing awareness., enhancing local intelligence on healthy options at takeaway outlets, leading key actions in the Tobacco (and Vaping) Control Strategy, addressing non-compliance with age-restricted sales through targeted programmes, suppressing communicable infections and preventing violence and aggressive behaviour, with a focus on mental health.

Risks and Challenges

- Scrutiny and escalation of action by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) due to a backlog of overdue food safety inspections and increasing number new registrations of food businesses leading to a potential failure to meet inspection frequencies designated in the Food Law Code of Practice (England) 2023.
- Complex and prolonged ongoing health and safety case concerning Lead in Blood Level Exposures of workers and their contacts at a firing range, will continue during 2024/2025 diverting resources from other health and safety matters.

Priorities for 2024/25

- Environmental Health will enhance team resilience and capacity through recruitment of 3 Environmental Health Officers (EHOs).
- Environmental Health will inspect all food premises in accordance with the frequencies set out in the Food Law Code of Practice, using a flexible approach to tackle backlog of outstanding inspections.
- Environmental Health will aim to increase men's engagement in health and wellbeing support as well as raising workplace mental wellbeing awareness.

Health Emergency Planning

Achievements in 2023/24

- Walsall Resilience Unit created an Adverse Weather and Health Plan to support the organisation to prepare, build, and respond to adverse weather events to protect lives and promote health and wellbeing. The plan brings together and builds on the previous Heatwave Plan for England, and the Cold Weather Plan for England and is underpinned by new impact-based Weather Health Alerts.
- Walsall Resilience Unit updated Walsall's Health Protection and Outbreak Management Plan for managing a community outbreak or significant public health incident. The Plan provides a co-ordinated framework to enable a healthy economy wide response to ensure swift and efficient management of an incident or outbreak and is underpinned by the Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the agreed contribution to Emergency Preparedness and Service Delivery.
- Walsall Resilience Unit undertook a Winter Preparedness Exercise to explore the ability of the LA, NHS, ICB and other partners to respond to severe winter pressures in the event of a prolonged severe weather episode.

Risks and Challenges

- A pandemic will inevitably involve some level of national coordination but there is a delay in central government issuing guidance or legislation that will inform the response arrangements being put in place at a local level, therefore guidance and legislation may be issued with very short lead times before they come into effect. In addition, some measures may be open to different interpretation in different situations.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Resilience Unit will:

- produce a Walsall Local Pandemic Plan and create an exercise to test it.
- review and update the Adverse Weather and Health Plan (AWHP) based on the recommendations of the AWHP 2023 to 2024 midterm report.
- review and update the local Health Protection and Outbreak Management Plan

Oral Health and Fluoridation

Achievements in 2023/24

- Walsall Public Health have started the planning and delivery of evidence-based oral health improvement programmes in Walsall in partnership with the Local Authority Public Health team, Community dental teams and The Black Country ICB and Oral Health Improvement Network. This includes evidence-based programmes to increase fluoride availability to children residing in the most deprived areas of Walsall.
- Walsall residents continue to benefit from community water fluoridation in the borough.

Risks and Challenges

- The national dental recovery plan was recently published. Information relating to the oral health prevention aspects of the plan are still to be fully considered.
- For Walsall's population to benefit from the full effect of community water fluoridation, it is key for other methods of fluoridation to continue to be made available, especially to those most at risk of dental decay. This includes the use of targeted community fluoride varnish programmes which, due to awaiting a national consultation on medicines management and scope of practice for wider dental team members, are difficult to plan and initiate.
- There are challenges in the capacity and resources of the dental workforce across the dental system, which can create challenges in the expansion of community programmes. These challenges are felt across the region and nation.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health will:

- implement 'Brilliant Brushers' a supervised toothbrushing programme in Walsall Nursery schools.
- take part in the evaluation of supervised toothbrushing programmes by the National Institute for Health and Social Care Research. This will also gather lessons and feedback from key stakeholders, to suggest improvements for future programmes.
- develop the oral health workforce training offer and support resources.
- finalise the Walsall Oral Health Needs Assessment.

Cancer Prevention and Screening

Achievements in 2023/24

Walsall Public Health:

- collaborated with partners to organise five community cancer drop-in sessions in the borough from January 2024 – April 2024. Residents had the opportunity to meet and receive crucial information and support from clinical experts, local providers, and other topic specialists on cancer prevention, screening and treatment close to their home or workplace. Anecdotally, these sessions were well received by the community and resulted in the identification of cases of cancer.
- collaborated with the Black Country ICB to develop a six-month joint Cancer screening inequalities plan for Walsall. This document outlines the objectives, strategy and actions that will be taken by the local health system to improve cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for the population.

Risks and Challenges

- Under 75 mortality rates for all cancers in the borough are significantly higher than the England average.
- Due to funding implications, the ICB Cancer Manager and Facilitator roles for Walsall are due to finish on 30 September 2024. This will have a significant impact on the partnership and collaborative approach to reducing inequalities, improving screening prevalence and reducing mortality rates.

Priorities for 2024/25

Walsall Public Health and partners will:

- deliver the actions outlined in the six-month Walsall Place Cancer Screening Inequalities Plan – to be evaluated in October 2024.
- explore cervical screening inequalities in the borough for people with a learning disability, autism or both.
- work with the other Black Country Local Authorities, ICB and Breast Screening team to review screening data and locations of mobile breast screening units.
- prepare for Targeted Lung Health Checks (TLHC) in the borough.

Cancer Prevention and Screening



Case Study- Measles outbreak in Walsall

In the early months of 2024, Walsall saw the highest number of confirmed measles cases within the Black Country. There have been 68 cases in total in Walsall to date (56 confirmed), with outbreaks in educational settings. Cases were mainly in the under 5s, with the majority being amongst deprived communities in Walsall. Infants with measles were most likely to be hospitalised.

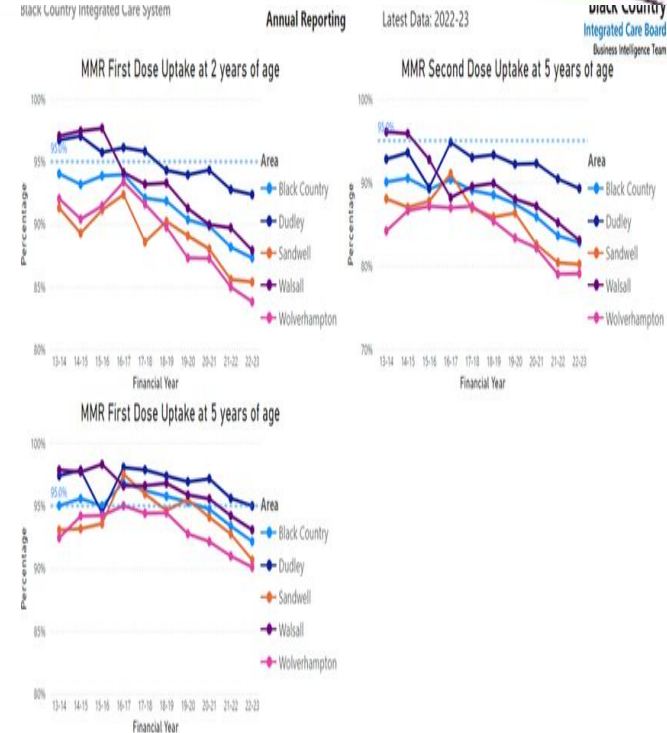
Outbreak response:

• Short term

- Walsall Public Health supported Incident Management Team meetings organised by UKHSA to manage the outbreak.
- MMR pop-up clinics were offered in various community locations; extended hours clinics were also offered by general practices.
- Walsall Public Health undertook extensive communications and engagement to promote the MMR vaccine.
- Walsall Public Health organised MMR training webinars for schools and MMR coffee mornings at schools.
- We have seen a 4% rise in uptake of MMR in Walsall from 81% having had 2 doses by age 5 in quarter 1 of 2023/24 to 85% of the relevant cohort in quarter 4 of 2023/24.

• Long term

- Walsall Public Health will continue to liaise with partners to work collaboratively to promote MMR uptake in the Black Country.



Key Themes Emerging in this Report

Key areas of success

- Increased communications campaigns on immunisations and immunisation offers - pop-up clinics, GP extended hours clinics.
- Multi-agency working with partners has strengthened particularly in the area of immunisations, screening and infection prevention and control (IPC).
- The standards of catheter care in care homes has improved significantly following training for the care sector on the prevention and management of catheter associated urinary tract infections.

Key risks and challenges

- The continued decline in routine immunisation uptake in children over the past 10 years has led to the emergence of outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases. In particular, the decline in the uptake of the MMR vaccine has led to a local outbreak of measles in Walsall.
- Reduced staffing and resources has had a major impact on the delivery of key services such as the Community TB Service and Environmental Health.
- Infection prevention and control (IPC) standards have reduced in the care home sector over the last year due to a combination of reasons, such as reduced staffing capacity and high staff turn-over.

Action Plan for 2024/25

Immunisation and Vaccination

- Walsall Public Health will continue to work on improving the uptake of both childhood and seasonal immunisations.

Air Quality

- Walsall Public Health will develop a Walsall Air Quality Strategy and workplan.

Tuberculosis

- Walsall Public Health will work with NHS partners to support the introduction of latent TB Screening and awareness raising in the community on signs and symptoms of TB.

Healthcare Acquired Infections and Antimicrobial resistance

- Walsall Public Health will complete targeted education on the management of urinary tract & respiratory infections to reduce Healthcare Associated Infections in collaboration with NHS partners.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Walsall Public Health will reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections including syphilis in Walsall through the implementation of the Syphilis Action Plan and reduce the rate of late diagnosis of HIV through enhanced outreach work.

Pandemic Preparedness

- Walsall Public Health will refresh a Walsall Local Pandemic Plan and create an exercise to test it.

Glossary

ARI	Acute respiratory infection
AWHP	Adverse Weather and Health Plan
BBV	Blood borne viruses
CAUTI	Catheter associated urinary tract infection
C diff	Clostridium difficile
COVID or COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (COVID19)
DHSC	Department of health and Social Care
DPH	Director of Public Health
EHO	Environmental health officer
EP	Environmental Protection
FREED	Frailty, Recognising End of life and Escalating Deterioration
HCAI	Health Care Acquired Infections or Health Care Associated Infections
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPF	Health Protection Forum
HPV	Human papillomavirus
ICB/ICS	Integrated Care System and Integrated Care Board.
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
LA	Local Authority
LARC	Long-acting reversible contraceptive
MMR	measles, mumps and rubella vaccine
Mpox	Previously known as Monkey Pox
MRSA	Methicillinresistant Staphylococcus aureus
MSM	Men who have sex with men
OHID	Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
PHOF	Public Health Outcomes Framework
PrEP	Pre exposure prophylaxis
SAIS	School Aged Immunisation service.
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
TARGET	Treat Antibiotics Responsibly, Guidance, Education and Tools
TB	Tuberculosis
UKHSA	UK Health Security Agency.
UTI	Urinary tract infection
WMCA	West Midlands Combined Authority

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