

Health and Wellbeing Board

September 2023

Health Protection Annual Report

For Assurance

1. Purpose

To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with oversight of the work to protect the health of the population from infectious diseases, screening for cancers, monitoring vaccination programmes, and responding to health emergencies.

This annual report details the situation with respect to key health protection issues, and the work being done to address them. This report covers the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Health and Wellbeing Board note the annual report for health protection for 2022/23.
- 2.2 That the Board take any opportunities for collaboration on joint issues.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 The health protection work programme aims to ensure that every person, irrespective of their circumstances, is protected from infectious and non-infectious environmental health hazards and, where such hazards occur, to minimise their continued impact on the public's health.
- 3.2 This is done by preventing exposure to such hazards, taking timely actions to respond to threats and acting collectively to ensure the best use of human and financial resources.
- 3.3 The annual health protection assurance report April 22 – March 23 provides an overview of the status of health protection priorities. It presents key achievements of 2022/23 in the following areas:
 - Infection prevention and control
 - Immunisation
 - Tuberculosis
 - Emergency planning and response
 - Sexually transmitted infections
 - Population screening programmes
 - Environmental health
 - Antimicrobial resistance

3.4 The management of the transition to living with COVID-19 and implementing the 'Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19' national policy was a key priority area in 2022/23. The changes in national guidance made available more capacity to focus on health protection priority areas that were deprioritised during the pandemic.

3.5 Some of the key health protection challenges during 202/23 are as follows:

- Childhood immunisation uptake rates have not recovered over 2022/23, following the pandemic.
- Sexually transmitted infections: the rate of new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnosed among residents of Walsall in 2021 was 442 per 100,000 residents, lower than the rate of 551 per 100,000 in England, and similar to the average of 446 per 100,000 among regional local authorities. We know that testing rates have reduced which may account for this, but also unfortunately we are seeing syphilis rates rise.
- Tuberculosis (TB): There was a slight increase in the 3-year incidence rate in the latest period (2019-21) (new cases per 100,000 population). Walsall has higher rates of TB than the national average but lower than the regional average.

3.6 These are the health protection priorities that will be addressed in the coming year in our work plan:

- Redesign of Integrated Sexual Health services, implementation of the findings of the independent review of service provision. Undertaking work to reduce sexually transmitted infections.
- Immunisations – improve the uptake of all immunisations, particularly MMR, and reduce inequalities in the uptake of immunisations
- Tackling Tuberculosis (TB) by improving awareness to increase screening and treatment, specifically to reduce inequalities in under-served populations.
- Emergency preparedness response and resilience by developing and testing plans for public health emergencies and incidents and ensuring these are in line with local NHS and partner plans.
- Air pollution and health – develop an Air Quality Strategy and Alliance.

3.7 Other areas of work will also be taken forward in 2023/24:

- Ensure a cohesive, proactive, and responsive infection prevention and control system that can respond to incidents and outbreaks in the borough.
- Tackling Antibiotic Resistance by leading partnership action to improve the appropriate use of antibiotics.
- Addressing inequalities in the uptake of cancer screening in Walsall, and work to catch-up with the programme delayed by the pandemic
- Realign inspections with the Food Law Code of Practice (the Code) and to 'catch up' on backlogs of lower risk premises created by the pandemic

4. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:

- 4.1 To address health protection challenges across Walsall, it is vital to work as part of a wider strategic system, which considers the social and other determinants of health and wellbeing.
- 4.2 The Health Protection Forum provides strategic leadership and is accountable to the HWBB for delivering the Health Protection Strategy and work plan.
- 4.3 The key partner organisations responsible for delivering health protection are the UKHSA, NHS England, the Black Country ICS, Walsall Healthcare Trust, and Walsall Council Public Health.
- 4.4 A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed to define roles and responsibilities of these key organisations in the event of a health protection incident or outbreak.

5. Health and Wellbeing Priorities:

- 5.1 The work programme for Health Protection supports the following Council priority “people are supported to maintain and improve their health, wellbeing and quality of life”.
- 5.2 The work programme for Health Protection supports the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, specifically in relation to children and young people and contributes to the reduction of health inequalities, particularly in the uptake of immunisation and screening. In addition, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections are more likely to impact vulnerable communities more severely.
- 5.3 Safeguarding: There are no adverse implications on safeguarding but will rather improve the safeguarding of vulnerable residents of care settings through infection prevention and control audits.

Background papers

The overview detailed above relates to the Health Protection Annual Report for 2022/23 which is attached.

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