

Council – 13 January 2014

Public Health and Protection

Report of Councillor Ali, Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Protection

In this statement I would like to headline some of our key achievements over the past year in protecting our residents from harm and promoting their health and wellbeing. I will also highlight some of the challenges we face, particularly in public health.

With the successful conclusion of the transition of public health responsibilities on 1 April 2013 the focus of attention and activity has switched to 'transformation', transforming the health and wellbeing experienced by the people of Walsall.

Life expectancy for men and women in Walsall continues to improve. The number of people dying prematurely, i.e. under the age of 75 from heart disease and cancer continues to fall. More people in Walsall are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. However, inequalities in health and wellbeing persist and they will be a real focus for us in 2014.

The health and wellbeing of children and adults in Walsall is affected by the social and economic circumstances in which they live. Effective partnership working across the Borough has led to an updated Walsall Plan which puts economic regeneration, getting local people into work at the heart of our partnership activity. This contributes to long-term solution to this persistent challenge: tackling the inequalities in educational attainment, skills and employment, to get adults and parents into work.

The Health and Wellbeing Board assumed its statutory responsibilities on 1 April 2013, providing the vital focal point for our partnership working on health improvement. The board has ensured the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Walsall, and approved a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This assessment shows:

- A changing community in Walsall with more people from ethnic minorities, a rising birth rate, and the projected increase in numbers of older people,
- Men in Walsall are living on average 4.6 years longer and women 4.4years longer than they were 20 Years ago.
- Deaths to people under the age of 75 years, from heart disease and cancer, continue to fall

- Walsall has one of the highest numbers of people living with diabetes and the highest infant mortality in England.
- Teenage pregnancy rates and childhood obesity figures remain high
- High levels of long-term unemployment and children living in poverty

Members of the Public Health team continue to work closely with NHS colleagues in the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide public health advice into the Commissioning of NHS Services to ensure these are aligned to the priorities identified in the JSNA. In addition a Walsall Council Health Protection Forum has been established to provide assurance to the Director of Public Health and myself as Portfolio Holder that other agencies, including Public Health England and NHS England who have responsibilities to commission or deliver services which protect the health of the people of Walsall e.g. Screening, immunisation, control and management of communicable disease, are fulfilling those duties.

In July 2013 Cabinet approved additional expenditure of £375,000 for new or expanded public health services. Of this sum, £160,000 was invested in health improvement for children and young people through the Healthy Child Programme delivered through the School Nursing Service, redressing some of the long-term underfunding of this service in the past.

As part of budget setting for 14/15 £1million of Public Health allocation has been earmarked to increase the impact that mainstream Council services have on improving health and wellbeing in Walsall. Actions with the potential to deliver improved outcomes and reduced costs to the Council in future years are being built into the Working Smarter Programme

Public health commissioning managers have continued to monitor and manage more than 50 contracts for public health services with a total value of £13.7million covering the full range of health improvement services. These including stop smoking, promoting healthy weight and physical activity at all ages, falls prevention, services for the treatment drug and alcohol misuse problems, sexual health. Organisations commissioned to provide services include Walsall Council, third sector providers such as The Terence Higgins Trust, Comex, Walsall GPs and pharmacists as well as local healthcare providers: Walsall Healthcare Trust and the Mental Health Trust.

The proportion of people in Walsall who are inactive remains a huge challenge and the health consequences wide reaching. In order to inspire and motivate more people to be more active, more often, public health in partnership with colleagues in the sports and leisure services, is planning a Walsall Triathlon, swimming, cycling and running, to take place on Sunday 6 July 2014. Adults will be able to participate as individuals or teams (more detail to be added when agreed). Events for children and young people are also being planned.

Turning to our regulatory services, last year saw the introduction of the Scrap Metal Dealer's Act. Under the new licensing regime, dealers and collectors, have to satisfy a 'fit and proper person' test that allows us, for the first time, to take into account previous conduct including criminal convictions before issuing a licence. Although hindered by delays in publishing regulations and guidance, we have set the fees and put processes in place to deal with applications. Enforcement of the Act is conducted jointly with the police and officers have taken part in high profile operations already resulting in the seizure of three loads of scrap metal.

Trading Standards Officers have recently seized large quantities of illicit tobacco. A specialist sniffer dog has been used to search shops to great success. Approximately 50,000 cigarettes and 10Kg of hand rolling tobacco have been found in locations such as hidden draws, false walls and under floors. Products of this kind have in the past been found to contain higher than normal levels of tar and material such as rodent droppings and plastic.

During the course of this year the Environmental Health Service has been developing a scheme called 'Health Switch'. This scheme is targeted at hot food takeaways and aims to educate food business owners in the principles of healthier food preparation and also encourage its sale. The first group of 30 small independently run businesses have been identified with equal representation from each of the 6 Area Partnership's and Walsall Town Centre.

Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is an evidence based initiative that encourages all staff to engage in conversations with service users about their health. Through the year Environmental Health Officers have trialled the use of MECC and worked closely with Public Health and the e-learning team to develop an implementation package for other Council services. The package encompasses a briefing for managers, an implementation guide, training for staff, and a system for monitoring and maintaining effective delivery.

Fly tipping is a criminal offence and a blight affecting the communities and green spaces of Walsall. There have been good successes over the year in terms of prosecuting those guilty of this anti social activity however we are always looking for new ways of tackling this and in the first half of 2014 a six month trial will take place where anyone providing evidence to the service leading to the successful conviction of a 'fly tipper' will receive a £100 reward.

Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities is a key priority for the Council and partner agencies. During 2012/13 total recorded crime fell by 15.4%. The Safer Walsall Partnership has the following six agreed priorities:

1. tackling violent crime, focusing specifically on domestic abuse, town centre violence and serious youth violence. The latest data shows an increase in the

most serious violent cases and domestic abuse but reductions in town centre violence and youth violence.

2. tackling anti-social behaviour. There has been a 15.7% reduction compared to the previous year.
3. addressing the harm caused by drugs and alcohol misuse. There has been a 6% increase in the number of drug users in structured treatment programmes.
4. addressing the risk of counter terrorism and damage to community cohesion.
5. tackling serious acquisitive crime, particularly domestic burglary. There has been a 1% reduction in serious acquisitive crime and a 0.9 increase in domestic burglary.
6. reduce re-offending – a cross cutting theme across all other priorities. The reoffending rate in Walsall is 7.4% one of the lowest rates nationally.

This year the partnership has supported five domestic homicide reviews whilst also preparing a new Community Cohesion and Resilience Action Plan.

The last 12 months has seen 3,609 incidents of anti social behaviour - a reduction of nearly 16%. But anti-social behaviour is a major concern for our residents and so we are starting pilot activity between the Council, registered social landlords and the police to promote a more co-ordinated approach. Residents, which ever agency they contact, should be entitled to receive the same level of service, whilst also ensuring their concerns are recorded in the same way, using the same definitions.

We have also strengthened governance arrangements to ensure we are more responsive to the needs of local people. We now have four meetings per year of the Walsall Local Policing and Crime Board which consists of the council and key agencies, with representation from the Police and Crime Commissioner but also includes representation from each of the Borough's six Area Partnerships and communities of interest, such as Victim Support.

The return of public health to local government responsibility is an important opportunity for us to make a real impact on the health and wellbeing of local people. This report marks the start of that process as well as recognising the continuing good work done in the fields of environmental health, community safety, licensing and trading standards. There is much more to be done – there always will be - but this report shows the many positive developments and improvements to protect the local population from harm and to promote their health and wellbeing.

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Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Protection