

## **Briefing Note 0104**



### **Choosing Health Making healthy choices easier Public Health White Paper**

**Department of Health 16/11/2004**

**Summary of implications for local authorities**

## Choosing Health Making healthy choices easier': Public Health White Paper

### Briefing note

1. The purpose of this briefing note is to summarise the implications of **The White Paper 'Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier'** for local authorities. Published on Tuesday 16 November 2004 by the Department of Health, the White Paper **sets out the Government's strategy for improving the public's health** through a series of measures and interventions aimed at preventing illness and militating against causes of ill health.
2. Reducing health inequalities between poor and more affluent sections of society is outlined as the key driver behind the White Paper.
3. Three core principles underpin this new approach to public health as set out in the White Paper, namely to offer "informed choice"; "personalisation", and "partnership working".
4. **It is indicated that the performance of local authorities in reducing health inequalities will be measured as part of the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).** Councils will be assessed on how they promote health communities and narrow health inequalities.
5. The White Paper sets out action to maximise the positive impact of the local community to improving health. **Local authorities (working in partnership) are recognised as being integral to improving and promoting public health, given their community leadership role.**
6. A wide range of actions are outlined that are seen as necessary in order to tackle health issues. For local authorities issues for attention include:
  - **"Providers of local services" will be expected to provide access to detailed health information.** This will have resource implications for local authorities, given the comprehensive nature of the information needed. There is no explicit statement as to where this resource base will come from.
  - In 2005 the Government will produce a range of guidance outlining areas which councils are expected to address, **including the provision of free swimming and other sports initiatives, and whole town approaches to moving from car travel to 'greener' alternatives;**
  - The White Paper suggests that there will be new opportunities for individuals to become more active, with easier access to sports and leisure facilities. **Local authorities (working in partnership) are seen as well placed to increase opportunities for physical activity,** given their roles and functions in relation to leisure facilities, school sport, parks and open spaces, planning, transport and maintenance of public rights of way and footpaths;

- **Smoking is to be banned in most enclosed public spaces by 2008.** The Government will regulate and legislate to ensure a staged approach to the bans, with all enclosed public spaces and workplaces smoke free by the end of 2007 and licensed premises preparing food smoke free by 2008. At present just how such bans will be implemented and enforced 'on the ground' is unclear, with the White Paper suggesting that consultation with local authorities will be undertaken in this regard;
  - **Underage tobacco sales** will be targeted through the development of a communications programme aimed at enforcing such offences – legislation will follow if necessary to support this. **Enforcement will have implications for local authorities**, and the White Paper suggests that this initiative will be developed in consultation with councils;
  - **NHS bodies will be encouraged to work with local authorities** as they draw up accessibility plans to improve access to health services (by July 2005);
  - The need for local communities to have clear and timely information on local trends is observed in the White Paper. To this end reports will be produced at local authority level from 2006, based on a standard set of health information.
7. **Local Strategic Partnerships are viewed as having a key role** to play in this agenda. From April 2005, working with local government and other partners, 21 Local Area Agreements will be piloted to secure local delivery of national priorities.
  8. Three new initiatives are announced that will try to develop “**health as a way of life**”, these comprising a new cohort of health trainers; support for individuals in the development of personal health plans; and the commissioning of a new service to provide accessible and confidential information – Health Direct. The initiatives are discussed with a heavy focus on the NHS, however in promoting 'health as a way of life' these initiatives will impact on local authorities. The White Paper does not make clear what the role of local government will be in either development or implementation.
  9. The White Paper outlines plans to make the NHS a service for health improvement and illness prevention. **Local authorities are identified as key partners in delivering health improvement services** (e.g. using leisure centres as bases for tackling obesity), however the additional funding promised is mostly to be channelled through the NHS and PCTs. There appears to be an opportunity for more funding to be disseminated through local authorities, LSPs and other partnership mechanisms.
  10. In relation to work and health the White Paper sets out action that employers, employees and Government can take to extend healthy choice and employee health. In order to meet these objectives a range of actions are suggested, including establishing pilots to develop an evidence base for effective promotion of health and wellbeing across the workplace. It is envisaged that councils will be included as pilots.
  11. The White Paper addresses the practical considerations around implementing its proposals, with the aim of ensuring a joined up approach to delivery. Specific actions include:

- **“Health inequality proofing”**. The Government will ‘proof’ all initiatives to ensure that the outlined interventions do not in practice contribute to widening health inequalities. Health will also be built into all future legislation through including a health component in regulatory impact assessments;
  - **New Cabinet Sub Committee**. A new sub committee has been set up to oversee the development and implementation of the policies to improve public health;
  - **Commitment to new funding**. The Secretary of State for Health has committed to providing funding identified against specific proposals set out in the white paper, including new money for health campaigns, more school nurses, better obesity and sexual health services and the introduction of health trainers;
  - **Reimbursing local authorities**. It is recognised that fulfilling the promise of the White Paper will have implications for local authority funding. The Government has pledged to reimburse local authorities fully for any extra costs resultant of policies outlined in the White Paper through their commitment to the New Burdens Doctrine.
12. In its briefing on this White Paper the LGA identifies the need for greater recognition on the part of Government of the wider, more holistic role District Councils play in improving health through service delivery and community leadership roles. **Functions contributing to health improvement which are not explicitly considered include housing stock improvement;** the work of **Crime and Disorder Partnership** to reduce accidents and create safer communities; **facilitating independent living** (e.g. through home adaptations for those with disabled/special needs); **joint working with schools** in terms of community recreation and ‘out of school’ recreation opportunities for young people; and the **provision of parks, open spaces and countryside recreation** opportunities for free local exercise.
13. Finally it should be noted that regional workshops are being planned for first quarter 2005 with the aim of encouraging commitment to the action set out in the White Paper. An extended version of this briefing note is also available from the MSU.

### **Summary of potential impacts for local authorities**

- Local authorities, working in partnership, are recognised as being integral to improving and promoting public health, given their community leadership role, this will involve further **partnership working** across private, community and voluntary sectors;
- In particular The White Paper contends that the key to success will be effective **local partnerships led by local government** and the NHS working to a common purpose and reflecting local need;
- **“Providers of local services”** will be expected to provide detailed health information for their communities. Information councils should provide is both comprehensive and specialist, however there is no explicit statement as to where this resource base will come from.
- In 2005 the Government will produce a range of guidance outlining other areas which councils are expected to address including,
- the provision of **free swimming** and other sports initiatives;

- easier access to **sports and leisure facilities**;
- **whole town approaches** to moving from car travel to 'greener' alternatives;
- **Smoking is to be banned in most enclosed public spaces** by 2008. At present just how such bans will be implemented and enforced 'on the ground' is unclear, with the White Paper suggesting that consultation with local authorities will be undertaken;
- **Underage tobacco sales** will also be targeted through the development of a communications programme aimed at enforcing such offences Enforcement will have implications for local authorities, again the White Paper suggests that this **initiative will be developed in consultation with councils**;
- As part of the **2005 CPA local authorities will be assessed against how successfully they are contributing to this agenda**, in terms of reducing health inequalities and promoting healthy communities.