

USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT Local Government & Public Health Services

Overview

The Government has set out its vision that certain local authorities will take on a key leadership role for public health locally. They will lead on improving their populations' health and wellbeing, co-ordinate local efforts to protect the public's health and ensure health services effectively promote population health. Building on their central role as democratically accountable bodies which are ideally placed to shape services to meet local needs they will be able to develop holistic solutions to health and wellbeing embracing the full range of local services (e.g. health, housing, leisure, planning, transport, employment and social care). Local authorities' new public health responsibilities will be supported by a ring-fenced budget. Directors of Public Health will lead this work, as the principal adviser on health to the local authority. These proposals are subject to the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, which contains the legislative provisions necessary to confer these new functions on local authorities.

The provisions include a new duty on county councils, London borough councils and unitary authorities, to take steps to improve the health of their local population. One way those local authorities may fulfil their new health improvement duty will be through commissioning public health services. They will also work with clinical commissioning groups and representatives of the NHS Commissioning Board to integrate services.

Commissioning

In 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Update and way forward' we published a provisional list of what should be funded from the public health budget, and who the principal commissioner for each activity should be. We have sought wherever possible to devolve responsibility and resources for public health services to local government. Although in a number of cases where a public health service is deeply intertwined with the delivery of clinical services, or where services are part of the primary care contractual arrangements, the Secretary of State for Health will ask the NHS Commissioning Board to commission services on his or her behalf (for example national screening and immunisation programmes).

The recently published 'Public Health in Local Government' fact sheets confirm the public health services that local authorities will be responsible for. It also identifies areas where further work is required.

Mandatory steps

The Health and Social Care Bill includes a power for the Secretary of State for Health to prescribe that local authorities take certain steps in the exercise of public health functions, including that certain services should be commissioned or provided. The purpose of this power is not to identify some services as more important than others. Rather the issue is that in some service areas (particularly

health protection) greater uniformity of provision is required. In others, the Secretary of State for Health is currently under a legal duty and needs to ensure that the obligation is effectively delivered when the function is delegated to local government (the provision of contraception is an example).

Finally, certain other steps are critical to the effective running of the new public health system at a local level, for example ensuring that the local authority provides public health advice to NHS commissioners.

The planned list of mandatory services is set out in the 'Public Health in Local Government fact sheets'. These fact sheets also cover further information on local authority public health advice to NHS commissioners.

Workforce

Primary care trusts and local authorities will be responsible for developing public health transition plans and consulting with their constituent trade unions and staff on these and the associated workforce plans. To support this, key guidance and support has been developed at national level and published by the Department of Health and the Local Government Association. This outlines the human resources processes and expectations on primary care trusts, councils, NHS and local government trade unions in managing this important change with elements on some remaining key issues being developed. The expected date for any transfer of staff that may occur is 1 April 2013, when subject to Parliament, the relevant parts of the Health and Social Care Bill come into effect and responsibilities transfer.

Organisational Design

Local Authorities will be working to develop their vision and the structure of their new public health function in dialogue with a range of partners and representatives over coming months.

Useful documents

'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Update and way forward' published July 2011.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_128120

A series of policy updates were published on 20 December 2011 to help partner organisations and staff involved to understand and implement these reforms. This includes a suite of factsheets on:

- The New Public Health System
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_131897.pdf
- Public Health in Local Government
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_131904.pdf

- PHE's Operating Model
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_131892.pdf

In January 2012, 'Public Health Transition Planning Support for Primary Care Trusts and Local Authorities' was published. This is to assist PCT clusters with their requirements to produce public health transition plans as part of their overarching plans for the transition year, as set out in the NHS Operating Framework and planning guidance for 2012/13 recently issued by the Department of Health.

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/01/transition-planning/>

In addition, 'Local government transition guidance on public health workforce issues' has been developed by the Local Government Association, supported by local government union colleagues and NHS Employers and union colleagues. This focuses on public health workforce issues and is primarily for HR specialists in local authorities who will be responsible for managing transfers working with PCTs, and is concerned with the key questions and options where staff are transferring from PCTs to Local Authorities.

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/01/public-health-workforce/>