

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board

DATE: 9th July 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Overview of Public Health initiatives tackling the causes and effects of Health Inequalities in Halton.

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides a brief update of Public Health projects targeting health inequalities and highlights the various approaches being taken. This covers new policies that have been introduced, innovative approaches to connecting services and practical support for residents in need delivered alongside the community.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the board

- 1) Note the work taking place in Halton**
- 2) Note the importance of moving toward a proactive preventative approach across the system to connect available support to those in need.**
- 3) Note the future changes to the household support fund announced in the spending review.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Healthy Advertising Policy

In December last year the council adopted a Boroughwide Healthy Advertising Policy to ensure unhealthy food and drink products aren't advertised on local authority sites.

- 3.2 The policy uses the Nutrient Profiling Model to differentiate between food and non-alcoholic drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar and healthier alternatives. The model is a national standard created by the Food Standards Agency in 2004 for Ofcom to regulate against unhealthy food and drink advertising on children's TV programming, which at the time made up 80% of all advertising during these shows.

- 3.3 The policy was introduced to combat the impact exposure to unhealthy advertising has on residents and to tackle the rates of overweight and obesity in Halton, with rates consistently above national averages. By the time children reach reception age (4-5) in Halton, 14% are obese compared to 9.2% nationally. This rises to 26% by the time they finish primary school, again exceeding the national average of 22.7%.
- 3.4 This policy is part of our proactive approach to promoting health improvement in our communities. Halton is currently one of only 23 Boroughs nationally to have made such a commitment. This work was championed by the All Together Fairer group in Cheshire and Merseyside with 8 of the 9 Boroughs in the region adopting replicable policies. Halton is currently working with partners in each area to bring together a joint evaluation on the impact of the policy.

3.5 **Winter Cold Homes Initiative**

In April Halton's Public Health Team was successful in an application to the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Data and Access Governance Committee that will enable us to identify a cohort of patients through the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Combined Intelligence for Population Health Action (CIPHA) fuel poverty dashboard. This will allow Halton to run a preventative scheme this Winter. The dashboard assesses a patients health conditions alongside areas of deprivation to identify those most at risk of requiring hospital admission due to the effects of fuel poverty.

- 3.6 Currently to connect patients to support we rely on either referral from professionals or self-referral from the patient. Previously this has been supported by marketing campaigns, support on the councils cost of living web page and awareness raising at various teams meetings. However, with available support often short term and ever changing it can be difficult for professionals to keep up with what is available and where to refer patients. This means some vulnerable residents are not aware of where to turn for support and many referrals we receive are from patients at the point of crisis. This means their health condition has usually deteriorated and they require much more intense support. It is more effective to support patients before the Winter period to reduce the pressure they put on services.
- 3.7 The project is based on successful work conducted elsewhere in the UK known as 'warm home prescriptions'. This involves offering patients with severe respiratory conditions help with energy bills and accessing available home improvements as part of their care. This Winter we will work with a small cohort of around 120 patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) identified as having the highest risk from fuel poverty. Each patient will be offered

a home visit for a full assessment of their home conditions and if required support with energy payments.

- 3.8 Halton is the first Public Health Department in the North West to be granted access to this dashboard. We have worked closely with the committee, Primary Care Networks (PCN) and Local Medical Committees (LMC) to ensure they are aligned with the process we have put in place. Individual Practices will be kept informed along the way of their patients involvement. The principle and process we have established here will open up opportunities for us to change the way we approach serving those with health conditions in other services, hopefully moving our service where possible from intervention to prevention. We are working with environmental health and some of the available retrofit schemes to see how this principle can be applied to target those eligible for various services.

3.9 **Household Support Fund Schemes**

The household support fund is a pot of funding national government distributes to all Local Authorities in order to offer hardship support at a local level to residents. In Halton this is distributed through a wide range of schemes. Some of the larger programmes operated by the council include food voucher support during all school holidays to children eligible for free school meals and Winter payments to pensioners on council tax reduction.

- 3.10 Through Public Health allocations from this fund we have operated the following programmes:

- Working with social care to identify residents for financial support who were in receipt of a council care plan who also receive Council Tax Reduction or Pension Credit.
- Winter warm packs for those experiencing homelessness.
- Worked with Halton Housing to support vulnerable tenants with essentials.
- Food voucher support for pre-school children and service users utilising women's refuge.
- Fresh food offered to the community via the 5 social supermarkets while supporting local growing networks to bring in new produce
- Funding for emergency fuel payments and heating system fixes.

In addition to the above over the next 12 month period we will also support the following:

- Pre-paid prescription certificates for those on low income
- Support with the cost of essential appliances and white goods for those on low income
- Set of financial planning courses to help residents improve their financial wellbeing and budgeting skills

- Fuel/food vouchers for residents who must use electrical medical equipment.
- Support for energy payments as part of the above Winter cold homes initiative.

In the recent spending review the government announced the replacement of the household support fund with a new crisis and resilience fund. Full details haven't been announced, however, the fund will cover multiple years as opposed to short term renewals of the current fund. This will cement some of the initiatives we can offer and open up more chances for long term collaboration in other areas.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Healthy Advertising policy will apply to all current and future commercial sites the council operates.
- 4.2 Crisis and Resilience fund to encompass support previous offered by household support fund and discretionary housing scheme on a multi-year basis. Will be a need to review how previous support has been administered to ensure new fund is used effectively.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Holiday Activity Fund, that provides activities and food for children in school holidays, is currently scheduled to end in March 2026 with this Christmas the last holiday period currently covered. If this is not renewed then these sessions will need to be considered as an option for Crisis and Resilience funding.
- 5.2 The household support fund runs from April 2025 to the end of March 2026 with a requirement for all funding to be used during this period.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

The primary aim of the Winter cold homes project is to keep vulnerable residents from requiring medical intervention. In doing so residents are supported to live comfortable and independently in their own homes and communities.

- 6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Many of our household support fund initiatives involve supporting local residents with the cost of food and fuel with financial support that can be spent in the local community.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Child obesity in Halton shows a significant rise in overweight and obesity between the ages of 5-11. Childhood obesity is associated with increased morbidity and premature death with those obese as children more likely to be obese as adults compared to those who grow up a healthy weight. Ensuring we tackle obesity at a young age with a healthy advertising policy will help us improve life chances for children in Halton and reduce future costs to the system of tackling obesity related illness.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Move to a proactive prevention approach will be centred around identifying those most at need due to the effects of inequality on their lives. This will place people most in need at the heart of services we run.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

As part of the Winter cold homes initiative residents will be screened for eligibility of home improvement schemes that improve the energy efficiency of homes. Options include improvements to loft and wall insulation and boiler replacements to reduce the amount of energy required to heat the home to an adequate standard.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Public Health work with multiple voluntary groups such as social supermarkets and Trinity Safe Space to help distribute the household support fund. We also take referrals from local groups, recognising the role they play in helping us identify those in need locally.

6.7 Resilient and Reliable Organisation

We are the first area to be granted access to patient data to run a cold homes project as a Public Health team. We hope to lead by example in the region on a change in the way support is distributed.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Possible changes to the way the household support fund, discretionary housing payments and the holiday activity fund are ran happening in April 2026. This is after a number of years where these funds and the processes behind them have been established

in Halton. Its important going forward these changes are managed to ensure essential and well used local support is continued into the new funding cycle.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Health inequalities are a significant factor across Halton. Those suffering from poorer health are more likely to live in the more deprived areas of the borough and more likely to be living in poverty. Those living in the most deprived Wards in Halton have a life expectancy 13.7 years worse for men and 9.3 years for women compared to the least deprived wards.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 By using health data proactively we hope to identify residents who are eligible for home improvement schemes due to their health condition. These schemes centre around improvements to a homes energy efficiency so residents use less energy to heat the home to an adequate standard and therefore reduce the amount of CO2 this produces.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’

(Please do not insert ‘embedded’ documents in reports. Members cannot read them on their electronic devices)