

## report



meeting Health Select Committee

date 7<sup>th</sup> December 2004

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### Report of Councillor J T A Napier, Chair

## **CHOOSING HEALTH – MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES EASIER**

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform:

- Members of the publication of the Government's White Paper "**CHOOSING HEALTH – MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES EASIER**" on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2004
- Outline the key issues from the White Paper (Executive Summary attached) for health scrutiny.

### Background

The White Paper sets out the key principles for supporting public health and promoting wellbeing through aiming to provide information and practical support to get people motivated and improve emotional wellbeing and access to services so that healthy choices are easier to make. The White Paper follows extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders.

The Paper boasts a new approach to the health of the public which respects the freedom of individual choice, recognises the impact of consumerism and the fact that people have been ignored or left behind in the past. The three core principles of this new public health approach are: informed choice; personalisation and working together.

The overarching priorities are:

- Reducing the numbers of people who smoke
- Reducing obesity, improving diet and nutrition
- Increasing exercise
- Encouraging and supporting sensible drinking

- Improving sexual health
- Improving mental health

Action to address inequalities in health and tackle these priorities include helping providers of local services to tailor information and advice to meet people's needs, provide practical support for people to use health information, work with industry to promote positive messages about food, smoking and alcohol.

### **Key Issues**

The White Paper offers important opportunities for improving individual health and goes some way to acknowledging that improving health is not just an NHS priority but has to be one across all public services. Local authorities are identified as having a specific responsibility to provide community leadership in promoting wellbeing. As part of our powers [LG Act 2001] and responsibility for scrutinising the health arrangements for local communities, there is a clear recognition that local authorities are well placed to promote understanding of how good health and reducing health inequalities can have a positive effect on the local economy, social and environmental fabric.

At local level, the Government recognises that making communities healthy depends on PCTs working closely with local authorities and other partners through LSPs. The most successful approaches identified are through arrangements which:

- Bring together needs assessment, planning and commissioning processes across different sectors;
- Are based on common local targets and indicators of success;
- Use resources flexibly, ensuring that inequalities are targeted and tackled effectively;
- Support joint appointments such as a Joint Director of Public Health.

The Department of Health and the NHS will be working with regional government offices to help local authorities and partners to develop LAAs that improve health. 21 pilot areas have been identified, starting in April 2005, if successful this will be rolled out nationally.

From 2005, PCTs will be required to develop targets to meet the health needs of local people that are agreed with local partners and are designed to meet national targets and priorities set out by the White Paper. Targets will need to:

- Address local service gaps
- Deliver equity by targeting groups and areas with the worst health outcomes
- Be evidence-based
- Be developed in partnership with other NHS bodies and local authorities

- Offer value for money

The Government has also recognised that if action to improve health is to be effective, communities need clear, understandable and timely data about local needs and trends. A standard set of local health information that can be linked to other local data for publication will be developed. Additionally Public Health Observatories will produce reports designed for local communities at local authority level.

## **Conclusions**

The Government has expressed its intention to produce a delivery plan for implementing actions in the White Paper early in 2005. This will include regulation, resourcing delivery, joined up action, engaging partnerships. It is anticipated that the actions supported in the plan will include:

- A new performance framework for all health and social care organisations
- Reinforcing the importance of public service agreement targets
- Extra funding for local authorities for achieving more ambitious local targets
- Supporting transformational change across all agencies
- Supporting shared agendas through, for example, LAAs
- Revised Health and Neighbourhood guidance
- Joint approaches to performance systems for the Audit and Healthcare Commissions

The publication of the Public Health White Paper has missed an ideal opportunity to make public health the responsibility of the entire government. Organisations like the Local Government Association (LGA), the NHS Confederation and the UK Public Health Association (UKPHA) have expressed disappointment that the White Paper has not gone far enough. Also missed has been the chance to realign Primary Care Trust boundaries with those of local authorities, which would provide a much easier way for health agencies to work with local councils on projects most fitting to local needs.

Although the White Paper offers important opportunities for improving individual health the wider social, economic and environmental factors remain largely unacknowledged. Unlike the Public Health Acts of preceding centuries this White Paper places little emphasis on addressing the infrastructural and environmental factors which are the foundations of health and well being.

## **Recommendations**

That Members:

- note the report
- commission a further report on the delivery of the White Paper.

**COUNCILLOR J T A NAPIER**  
**CHAIR**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Choosing Health – Making Healthy Choices Easier. Department of Health**