

Subject:	The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Annual Public Health Report, 2017
Reason for the briefing note	This report has been prepared to provide the board with an overview of the Strategic Director of Public Health's Annual Report <i>"Creating the Right Environments for Health"</i>
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SUMMARY

The Annual Public Health Report 2017, ***"Creating the Right Environments for Health"*** provides information and evidence that can support place-based strategies to realise the potential of green and natural spaces for the health and wellbeing of local residents and communities and showcases local examples of how communities are already using the natural environment to stay healthy or improve their health and wellbeing.

Publishing an Annual Public Health Report is a requirement for all upper tier local authorities. The intention is to stimulate discussion and identify opportunities to improve the health of the public.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 It is a requirement for councils to publish an independent annual public health report from their Director of Public Health. The annual report is the DPH's view on the health and wellbeing of our local communities and the opportunities to improve the public's health.
- 1.2 Since public health moved back into local government in 2013, we have reconnected with many of our valued colleagues in planning, leisure and sports development, parks and recreation, housing and highways (amongst others) to create place-based strategies and deliver actions which bind together these wider determinants of health with our local priorities.

"Creating the Right Environments for Health"

http://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/publichealth/download/downloads/id/127/public_health_annual_report.pdf

- 1.3 aims to reconnect professions, communities and landowners and highlight opportunities for them to work together to support the public's health through creating and maintaining accessible high quality green spaces and natural environments. The report provides information and evidence that can support place-based strategies to realise the potential of green and natural spaces for the health and wellbeing of local residents and communities and showcases examples of how local communities are already using the natural environment to stay healthy or improve their health and wellbeing.

2. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The natural environment is a wider determinant of health and presents a real opportunity to improve our health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally. It is helpful to think of the natural environment as green and blue spaces. Examples of green spaces include open fields and forests, examples of blue spaces include the sky, rivers and lakes.
- 2.2 Both spaces can enable exercise, time in nature, leisure and relaxation. There is evidence that the natural environment has a positive influence on health in a variety of ways.
- 2.3 The ways in which the natural environment can improve health are complex and intertwined with many other factors. There are four broad themes that have appeared from the research in this field, namely,
- **Stress reduction**
It has been known for a long time that spending time in nature can have restorative effects, through relaxation.
 - **Improved environmental quality**
Green spaces are more likely to be biologically diverse, and contribute to improving air quality and reducing the effect of heat concentration in cities.
 - **Greater social cohesion**
Areas of natural environment are places that people can socialise and congregate, places of pride in the community and as a result improve the cohesion of neighbourhoods.
 - **Increased physical activity**
Green spaces are appealing to visit, and typically need to be walked, cycled or played in to appreciate them.

3. DETAILS

- 3.1 There are many factors, or determinants, that come together to affect our health. Of the modifiable factors, some are individual and personal choices such as taking up smoking or choosing to exercise. At a population level, there are the wider determinants of health: a diverse range of economic, environmental and social factors that affect people's health and influence their choices and lifestyles. Difficult to quantify, many of these determinants are shaped by national and local government policies, our environment and the distribution of wealth. They include:
- Income and social status
 - Educational attainment
 - Quality of housing

- Community and social networks
- Activity – the way we live

3.2 It is generally agreed that these wider determinants of health overall have a more significant impact on the health of individuals than direct interventions in health care. Estimates vary, but it is estimated that health care contributes less than 25% of our overall health, with these wider determinants contributing the majority.

3.3 Public health, as a responsibility of local authority, has the opportunity to influence these determinants for the improvement of the health and wellbeing of the population it serves. The benefits may not be quickly realised, but are potentially vast and wide reaching.

4. RISKS

4.1 None identified.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 The Board is asked to read and note the DPH Annual Report and its conclusions and to share widely within their respective organisations and local communities.

“Creating the Right Environments for Health” recommends that;

- Local authorities and other agencies should continue to encourage community initiatives that make the most of natural space available, with the aim of improving mental health, increasing physical activity and strengthening communities.
- Authorities consider how existing green space could be improved and how to include high quality green space in current developments. The use of professional design and arrangements to ensure the ongoing management of natural environments are important considerations if spaces are to add value for the long term and be sustainable.
- Opportunities to increase active transport should be considered when designing new green spaces and in the improvement of existing space.
- Planning guidance for new developments should specifically consider the use of green and blue space to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and others using the space.
- Local Authorities and their public health teams should foster new relationships with organisations with a view to improving the natural environment and its use.