Tobacco Control: Key Issues for Health and Wellbeing Board

Smoking is the primary cause of premature death and preventable illness in the UK, causing over 81,000 deaths in 2009. In England during 2008/09 it was estimated that over 460,000 hospital admissions were attributable to smoking. The estimated costs to the NHS for smoking are estimated to be between £2 billion and £5 billion.

Smoking in Sefton
Sefton has challenging targets to reduce smoking prevalence to 10% or less by 2014, currently it is estimated that our smoking prevalence is approximately 15%, a reduction of 8% since 2003. There has been a greater decrease in prevalence amongst residents based within our deprived wards (8%) compared to the more affluent areas (2%). Although there has been a more marked reduction on smoking prevalence in deprived areas of the borough, stark health inequalities still exist with smoking prevalence estimated to be 23% within our most deprived wards.

Smoking prevalence in the borough is not reduced by effective stop smoking services alone, but by successfully addressing the uptake of smoking by young people. Their initiation of smoking replaces the successful quitters within the borough. Data indicates that experimentation with cigarettes is high amongst young people. The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, collected data on 11 to 15 year olds, and found 29% of boys and 30% of girls surveyed had tried smoking at least once in their lives, with the likelihood of smoking increasing with age. The pattern of smoking among young people in Sefton is very similar to rates nationally, with 25% of pupils aged 11-15 years having tried cigarettes. Girls nationally and in Sefton are significantly more likely than boys to be regular smokers, while older pupils are significantly more likely to smoke regularly than their younger peers.

This data is not surprising when you consider that children become aware of cigarettes at an early age. Three out of four children are aware of cigarettes before they reach the age of five whether or not their parents smoke. Numerous studies have shown that most young smokers are also influenced by their friends' and older siblings' smoking habits.

Children are more likely to smoke if one or both of their parents smoke, and parents’ approval or disapproval of the habit is also a critical factor. The latest ONS survey found that children who live with other smokers are more than twice as likely to smoke regularly compared with those living in non-smoking households.

In Sefton we have successfully undertaken activity to reduce smoking amongst young people since 2007 the percentage of 14-17 year olds who smoke has declined by 8% to an estimated 13% in 2011, below the North West average of 18%. Across the North West Sefton has seen one of the largest declines in the percentage of young people who smoke since 2009. The biggest decreases have been amongst 14 and 15 year olds and reflect the work we have undertaken targeting this age group, including mass media campaigns, youth advocacy work and drama productions. However increases in

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1 Healthy Lives, Healthy Nation a Tobacco Control plan for England, Department of Health 2011
2 Sefton Lifestyle Survey 2010, Sefton Public Health Intelligence Unit
3 Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England Survey, National Centre for Social Research, 2010
4 TellUs Survey, 2009
cigarette experimentation and smoking have been found amongst 10 and 13 year olds as such we need to tackle smoking amongst younger audiences.

Two ways to influence initiation of smoking by children and young people is through de-normalisation of tobacco and by making smoking less attractive dissuading young people from experimenting with smoking. Three interventions that support these strategies that the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Council can endorse are detailed below.

**Plain Packaging of Tobacco Products**

Plain packaging of tobacco products is one intervention which can make tobacco products less attractive to young people. Plain packaging, also known as standardised packaging refers to packaging that has had all of the promotional aspects of tobacco product packaging removed, and the appearance of all tobacco packs is standardised including the colour of the pack.

In 2003, the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act came into effect, which prohibited virtually all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion. Consequently tobacco packaging remains the most prevalent form of tobacco advertising; smokers display and endorse the branding every time they take out the pack to smoke.

The influence of the packaging of tobacco can be seen with the increased investment tobacco companies have put into pack design. Since the Act was implemented the number of different brand variants for cigarettes has risen by over a third since 1998 from 68 to 114\(^7\). This growth in brand variants has occurred despite the fact that many smokers cannot detect differences between brands. As a British American Tobacco document reveals ‘…for most smokers and the decisive group of new, young smokers, the consumers choice is dictated more by psychological, image factors than by relatively minor differences in smoking characteristics\(^8\).’

This focus by the tobacco industry on pack design seem to be having the desired effect, the proportion of young people aware of new tobacco pack designs has increased from 11% in 2002 (before the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2003) to 18% in 2006 despite restrictions on advertising of tobacco being implemented during this time\(^9\).

Another important benefit of plain packaging is that branding of tobacco products can give a misleading impression that some cigarettes are safer than others. The EU Tobacco Product Directive, implemented in 2003, prevents the Tobacco Industry from using descriptors such as ‘light’ or ‘mild’ which could mislead consumers. However the advertising that supported these previous descriptors has resulted in certain colours such as gold or white being associated with ‘lighter’ products. Research commissioned by Action on Smoking and Health\(^10\) found that both adults and young people are significantly more likely to rate packages with are ‘gold’ or ‘silver’ as lower tar, lower health risk, and easier to quit compared to “regular” varieties of the same brands.

There are arguments supported by the Tobacco Industry that plain packaging will negatively affect small retailers, by causing retailers confusion and additional cost. However there should be no

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\(^7\) Action on Smoking and Health. Plain Packs briefing. 2011


additional cost to retailers to stock standardised tobacco products compared to branded products, research measuring over 5,000 transactions found that plain packs reduced transaction times and selection errors\textsuperscript{11}.

It has also been argued that plain or standardised packs could lead to an increase in tobacco smuggling, thereby reducing the number of legal sales. However there is no evidence that this will occur, tobacco packs are currently counterfeited, which has resulted in covert markings being placed on all tobacco packs. These markings will continue to be required on standardised packs, only the branding will be removed making these proposed plain packs no easier to counterfeit.

The Government is expected to launch a public consultation to establish if plain packaging of tobacco should be made a requirement as it will be in Australia from December this year. We would like to ask the Health and Wellbeing board and Sefton Council to support this proposal and respond to the consultation demonstrating their endorsement for plain packaging of tobacco products.

**Smokefree Play Areas**

Research in social psychology and behavioural economics highlights that influencing the adult world in which children grow up is pivotal to reducing their rates of smoking uptake\textsuperscript{12,13}.

The proposed implementation of Smokefree playgrounds reduces child exposure to smoking and denormalises tobacco use within the community. In the long term this will assist in decreasing uptake of smoking within the youth population. It will also reduce levels of unsightly cigarette litter such as cigarette butts, matches, empty packets and wrappers in play areas. Cigarette butts in particular are not biodegradable and the toxic chemicals they contain pose a risk to young children if ingested and also threaten the quality of aquatic ecosystems and wildlife\textsuperscript{13}.

Internationally, smoking in public housing play areas and parks is already banned in Spain, Hong Kong, Latvia, Singapore and in cities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and California, including San Francisco. A ban has also been implemented in all 1,700 New York City parks.

In the UK, Inverclyde Council in Scotland has made all of their open air play parks Smokefree after a survey showed 90% of residents backed the move and within the North West, Pendle Council in Lancashire banned smoking from their 57 outdoor play areas and skate parks in 2010. Halton and Wirral councils have both recently implemented voluntary Smokefree codes within play areas on council owned land. In Wales, Powys and Caerphilly have also introduced voluntary codes.

Public support for Smokefree play areas within England is high. A YouGov survey undertaken by ASH in March 2010 found that 73% of the general population backed a smoking ban in children’s play areas. Similarly, local research undertaken in Cheshire and Merseyside has found strong local support for voluntary codes. Halton council implemented a voluntary code after a survey of local residents and park users found 82% of respondents both smokers and non-smokers, either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement; “I would be in favour of a voluntary code of not smoking within the fenced play area”. Wirral residents also demonstrated strong support for the introduction of a voluntary code with more than 80% of respondents being in favour of such a restriction.

\textsuperscript{11} Carter, O et al. Measuring the effect of cigarette plain packaging on transaction times and selection errors in a simulation experiment. Tobacco Control 2011


\textsuperscript{13} ChaMPs Public Health Network. Top Tips for a Healthy Planned Environment. ChaMPs, July 2010
The Cheshire and Merseyside Tobacco Control Alliance in partnership with Heart of Mersey would like to implement a voluntary Smokefree code within playground areas on council owned land across the Sub-region.

Within Sefton, after gaining permission from the Consultation and Engagement Panel and the Park Wardens, we have conducted an opinion survey to assess the level of public support for a voluntary smokefree code within the play areas of parks. A total of 205 adult visitors were surveyed within Crosby Coastal Park, Derby Park, North Park and Southport Botanic Gardens. The majority of respondents had, or cared for children at home (82%), nearly two thirds of respondents (60%) used the park play areas on a regular basis, either weekly or monthly with 16% utilising them once a month.

A quarter of respondents smoked tobacco or shared their home with a smoker (25.9%). This is comparable with Sefton Lifestyle Survey data which found smoking prevalence ranges from 23% in our most deprived wards and 5% in our least deprived. Almost all of the participants felt that it was important not to smoke in front of children with 95.1% of respondents in favour of a voluntary code of not smoking within the immediate playground area. Support for this measure was equally high amongst smokers (92.5%) and non-smokers (94.7%).

This survey has found strong support for a voluntary code; We will therefore be asking Sefton Cabinet Members to support this programme of work and implement a voluntary Smokefree code within the play areas of council owned land across the borough. Cheshire and Merseyside Tobacco Alliance will support the introduction of this policy by providing:

- Smokefree and enforcement training for Park Wardens and neighbourhood staff
- Development of signage for the play areas and public information resources

Denunciation of Tobacco Industry Corporate Social Responsibility Funding

Due to the tobacco industry’s own documentation demonstrating that the majority of its corporate social responsibility programmes are designed to enable discussion with policy-makers and shape public health policy, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), includes the protection of public health tobacco control policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry. The guidelines to Article 5.3 state:

‘Parties should not allow acceptance by any branch of government or the public sector of political, social, financial, educational, community or other contributions from the tobacco industry or from those working to further its interests, except for compensations due to legal settlements or mandated by law or legally binding and enforceable agreements.’

The protection of the development of public health policy from the interest of the tobacco industry is also included within the national Tobacco Control Plan. The plan promotes that Local Authorities to take action in this area:

‘Local authorities are encouraged to follow the Government’s lead in this area, and to take necessary action to protect their tobacco control strategies from vested interests. While we recognise that there may be legitimate operational reasons for local authorities to deal with the tobacco industry, we would encourage transparency in all dealings.’

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In line with existing Local Authority corporate hospitality, gifts and sponsorship codes of practice, Cheshire and Merseyside Tobacco Alliance is advocating non-acceptance of payments, gifts or services, monetary or in-kind, from the tobacco industry by any official or employee of local government. A position statement outlining this policy could be included within current corporate policies and Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This could also be supported with the inclusion of a statement within the conflicts of interest declaration systems for officials and employees to sign.

\[1\] Individual briefing papers for Smokefree Play Areas and Corporate Social Responsibility Funding have been developed on behalf of the Cheshire and Merseyside Tobacco Alliance and are available. The information contained in this briefing paper has been adapted from these two documents.