

HEALTH AND OUTDOOR ACCESS

BRIEFING FOR THE JLAF 4 MARCH 2011

The Context

Public health will be a new responsibility for local authorities from 2012/13. They will take on public health professionals, receive a ring fenced budget from the Department of Health and will manage a Health and Wellbeing Board which involves local partners to identify needs and agree spending priorities.

This is not a bolt on job. Local authorities will need to deliver health improvements through all of their activities, including how they manage access such as rights of way and green spaces.

The Opportunity

For LAFs to find new health-related allies who recognise the importance of rights of way and green space in sustaining and promoting people to be more active.

Key Health Issues

- Ageing population
- Upward trends in Obesity and associated conditions such as type 2 Diabetes
- Increased stress due to economic climate.

Health Benefits of Physical Activity

- Mental health – providing opportunities for people to socialise in friendly, informal situations and strengthen their support networks
- Health inequalities – ensuring we do something to reduce the gap between people with the best and the worst health
- Healthy eating – raising awareness of good eating habits is part of a rounded health message we want to communicate
- Ageing Population – keeping people agile reduces the risk of falls and how a first fall can often spiral into hospital admissions
- COPD – and the need to maintain steady breathing
- Strong communities – people contributing to their local community as good neighbours, looking out for others, taking part in things that enable a collection of individuals to have a sense of belonging
- The natural environment – people concerned and interested in the state of their green spaces, footpaths, water, trees, wildlife, promoting its use, enjoyment and conservation.
- Low carbon living – so we don't build up future health problems (20,000 deaths a year by 2050 in the UK from weather extremes according to the NHS Sustainable Development Unit).

Costs and Potential savings to the NHS

These are the estimated local costs attributable to lack of physical activity, from 5 main diseases, and borne each year by Primary Care Trusts¹:

- Bath and North East Somerset £2.77 million pa
- Bristol PCT £6.22 million pa
- North Somerset £3.39 million pa
- South Gloucestershire £3.55 million pa

How Right of Ways contribute to Health

These are some of the things that other LAF's are doing:

Think new customers:

- Understanding what would entice new users to rights of way think that 'could be for me'. Using customer profiles such as Sport England segments, Department of Health Family Clusters², Mosaic or Acorn analysis of people's characteristics, habits and preferences.

Improving Ease of Access:

- Replacing styles with gates;
- Wider paths and all weather surfaces.

Promotion aimed at new users:

- Information designed for people who cannot read maps;
- Focus on short walks near to where people live;
- Routes for ordinary shoes;
- Combining street walks with small stretches of rights of way;
- Events for specific groups (designed with them);
- Walking groups.

Publicity:

- Local health personalities endorsing any story or event;
- GP surgeries endorsing one mile routes.

Active Travel:

- Use rights of way as part of safe routes to school to encourage regular use, around villages and the urban fringe.

Peter Ashcroft, Department of Health – South West, Public Health Team
peter.ashcroft11@btinternet.com

¹ Be Active, Be Healthy – A plan to get the nation moving. Department of Health. February 2009

² See www.promotingactivity.com