

## 5. Social and economic factors which influence health

The impact of social and economic factors on the health of individuals is well recognised and understood by the Health, Social Care & Well-Being Partnership, and is considered in the Needs Assessment. Most local authority services impact on health in some way and the first Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy recognised the role of services such as social care, housing, economic development, education, and transport. But there are many others such as street cleaning, refuse disposal, building regulations which can also affect people's health.

This strategy once again prioritises a number of key influential factors which impact health in a significant way.

### 5.1 Housing

One major impact on the health and well-being of people is where and how they live. Not only is the physical and social environment important, but the home is also the setting within which care is increasingly provided by both family and community based health and social care. Poor housing can affect people's health.

These links between housing and health in supporting the health and well-being of people in their homes are well documented and were highlighted recently in a Welsh Health Circular from the Welsh Assembly Government. They include:

- The need to tackle deprivation as well as improving health care services if health is to improve
- Investment in housing improvements does impact favourably on the mental health of residents
- Respiratory health may be improved through energy efficiency initiatives in the home
- Homeless people and other vulnerable groups are likely to suffer worse health but also have greater difficulty in accessing health services than the rest of the population

There are a number of housing initiatives and policies already contributing to the health, social care and well-being of people in Gwynedd such as:

- The Supporting People Organisational Plan
- The work of Care and Repair locally
- The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme *Here to Help/Yma i Helpu*

- Gwynedd Homelessness Forum
- The Gwynedd Telecare Service
- Proposed Extra Care Housing schemes
- Young People's Housing Strategy – Young People and Housing in Gwynedd Today
- Older People's Housing Strategy

But these policies and projects need to be integrated into Accommodation Strategies for Children and Young People and for Older People thus co-ordinating the prevention agenda and ensuring joint working locally to understand and address the impact of housing on health, social care and well-being.

### **What we aim to do**

#### **Target key housing issues which undermine health and well-being**

#### **5.2 Poverty**

Debt and poverty can not only impact on a person's physical health but also on mental health by causing stress, anxiety, depression as well as wider social consequences such as exclusion. As previously stated in the first strategy, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the main underlying factor that explains the differences in health status between individuals is social disadvantage and poverty.

The European Union defines 'poverty' and the 'poor' as "persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State to which they belong". Poverty, therefore, is viewed as both a symptom and cause of low income, poor access to services (such as health and education), facilities (such as leisure centres), work opportunities and good quality housing.

Although Gwynedd has a relatively small proportion of its population living in the most deprived circumstances in comparison to other areas of Wales, there are communities in which we know people will have higher levels of ill-health, greater exposure to risk factors for ill-health, and poorer access to services.

One new project is the **Gwynedd Child Poverty Pilot Project**. In February 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government published its strategy for tackling child poverty in Wales – 'A Fair Future for Our Children'. The aim of the strategy is to eradicate child poverty in Wales by 2020. As part of this project, Gwynedd is one of two Local Authority areas invited to run a project to help identify a range of positive actions to tackle poverty as local level. The project will be developed as

part of a wider effort to address and alleviate the causes and impacts of child poverty in Gwynedd.

There are a number of other projects working in Gwynedd to maximize the uptake of benefits in an attempt to alleviate poverty. The 'Here to Help' initiative targets deprived wards and offers a number of services one of which is a benefit check.

Gwynedd Council and the Department of Pensions have signed a Joint Working Agreement committing both organisations to work more closely together for the benefit of older people by making it easier for them to access a number of benefits. Voluntary organisations such as CAB also offer benefit and debt counselling services and the Gwynedd Advice and Information Partnership have developed an Active Signposting Form to facilitate joint working and to improve people's lives by promoting easier access to these services.

### **What we aim to do**

**Support those partnerships and initiatives working to eradicate poverty in Gwynedd**

## **5.3 Community Safety**

The Gwynedd Community Safety Partnership acknowledges that having a safe community within which to live can contribute towards a person's well-being therefore can be considered a significant influence on health. The main aims of the Community Safety Partnership are to reduce incidents of crime and disorder within the community and thereby making the county of Gwynedd a safe place to live. The Partnership also specifically contributes to tackling various aspects of crime and disorder that can have a detrimental affect on the individual. These include tackling domestic violence, youth offending, drug and alcohol misuse and fear of crime.

### **What we aim to do**

**Identify cross cutting themes where both Partnerships can work together to ensure progress**

## **5.4 Public Protection**

The Administration and Public Protection Service is responsible for several environmental services which can have a significant effect on public health. They include occupational health and safety, enforcement of food safety and private housing regulations, health protection and communicable disease control

and the control of pollution, including nuisances. Officers have also taken on the role of enforcing the smoking ban regulations which will have a significant impact on health.

The Public Protection Service also carries out educational and promotional work which contributes towards the preventative health agenda

### **What we aim to do**

#### **Work with the Public Protection Service to further improve its input into cross cutting health issues**

##### **5.5 Transport**

It is acknowledged that an efficient and sustainable transport system is a requirement for a modern, prosperous and inclusive society. However, transport, in particular road traffic, can also have negative impacts on human health and the environment. Road traffic speed is a major cause of accidents, whilst the severity of injuries is directly linked to higher speeds. Pedestrian road deaths are highest in children and young people in Gwynedd.

Clean air is an essential ingredient of a good quality of life. Transport emissions contribute significantly to climate change and poor local air quality. The strongest evidence for the effects of environmental noise on health relates to annoyance, sleep disturbance, heart disease and performance by school children. There are three types of air pollution released by vehicles: directly poisonous emissions such as benzene, a known carcinogen; greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, which promote global warming and lastly small particulates, which can cause photochemical smog (which exacerbates asthma). There is a need to meet air quality standards and reduce water pollution.

Whilst one of the principles of the Partnership is to provide services as locally as possible, it is recognised that there will always be varying levels of need for transport to access social care, health care services and other public services, employment, education, leisure and social activities and a healthy diet [all of which impact on health and well-being].

Gwynedd Council is a statutory transport authority and as such has a legal duty to take the strategic lead in the delivery of a range of transport services within its geographical area. However a lack of transport options amongst some sections in the community and in some parts of the County has long been acknowledged as a problem.

Community transport is a response to the transport needs of individuals and groups which are not met by other defined conventional modes of transport. A

draft Gwynedd Community Transport Strategy is currently being consulted upon with the Council and has undergone a Health Impact Assessment as part of that process.

The Transport and Planning Service is currently leading a review to identify all the transport arrangements within the Authority and to recognise those structural and operational steps to be considered for taking forward the option of establishing an Integrated Transport Unit.

This integrated approach of considering all the transport needs of users is likely not only to be more cost effective and make better use of resources but will better serve the diverse needs of the people of Gwynedd.

### **What we aim to do**

#### **Target transport issues which impact on health and are a barrier to accessing health and care services**

#### **5.6 Rurality**

Gwynedd is second only to Powys in terms of land area in Wales and after Ceredigion and Powys, is one of the most sparsely populated areas in Wales. Much of Gwynedd falls into the Rural classification developed by the Office of National Statistics and only the Bangor and Caernarfon areas fall into the Urban classification.

There are close links between the environment and people's health. A high quality environment enables people to live longer in good health. The Snowdonia National Park Authority works to safeguard the natural environment and promotes opportunities for leisure which promote both mental and physical health. But environmental problems such as pollution and flooding can pose significant risks to our health if not properly assessed and managed.

A report by the Wales Centre for Health "*A profile of rural health in Wales*" (2007) noted that rural health is influenced by many determinants, and the assumption that rural environments are "healthier" is open to challenge. The report found that health status in rural Wales is not uniform, but analysis is complicated by the different indicators which are used to measure quality of life. One factor determining health and well-being in rural areas is access to health services and concerns were raised during the consultation process especially in South Gwynedd about access issues and lack of choice.

More recently, the Welsh Assembly Government announced plans to set up a group to advise on the development of rural health issues. The One Wales

document commits the Assembly Government to devise a Rural Health Plan and the HSCWB Partnership welcomes this initiative.

The Partnership will work with the group and implement subsequent recommendations.

### **What we aim to do**

**Ensure that rural health issues are considered when reviewing, planning and delivering services**

## **5.7 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage**

There are a number of areas in Gwynedd which have been identified officially as areas of deprivation. These areas are often served by Communities First Partnerships, In the past, these areas have been targeted by a number of agencies and partnerships and have received significant investment both in terms of finance and staffing. Individual initiatives have been evaluated but little work has been undertaken to evaluate the cumulative health impact on the communities. It is recognised that health, social care and well-being problems remain a challenge in these areas and research needs to be carried out to establish how successful past initiatives have been.

### **What we aim to do?**

**Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of regeneration initiatives on health for real step change in overcoming disadvantage.**

## **5.8 Misuse of alcohol**

The consumption of alcohol in Wales has almost doubled since the 1960's. During the same period, the price of alcohol, relative to the national income, has more than halved. The consumption of alcohol amongst 11 to 15 year olds has consistently increased during this period, and currently , heavy drinking amongst teenagers in Wales is amongst the worst in Europe.

Alcohol related deaths in Wales have also risen markedly in the last twenty years, and those who are dying, are dying younger than a decade ago. The misuse of alcohol for the individual can lead to a number of associated health problems, including

- Cardiovascular disease
- Gastro-intestinal disease
- Psychiatric disease
- Cancers

Alcohol can also be seen as a contributory factor in unwanted pregnancy and can also cause further health problems for the unborn child, if the drinking continues whilst pregnant.

Alcohol is responsible for a number of accidental deaths in Wales each year, and is a contributing factor in at least half of all violent offences recorded. Each year in Wales, approximately 30,000 bed days (secondary care) are related to alcohol misuse, with 15% of all admissions being due to alcoholic intoxication.

Within Wales, the responsibility for the delivery of the Welsh assembly Governments, Substance Misuse Strategy (including alcohol) lies with the Community Safety Partnerships. The Community Safety Partnership in Gwynedd recognises the need to combat alcohol misuse on many fronts. The contribution alcohol makes to crime and disorder has to be tackled, but the harm to the individual is also important. The Partnership aims to commission appropriate and sufficient services for those who require treatment for alcohol misuse. It also aims to raise awareness of alcohol issues amongst all age groups, and provide early intervention to those who may be in danger of developing alcohol misuse problems.

### **What we aim to do**

**Support the development of a commissioning framework that re-addresses the differing resources between drug and alcohol services**

### **5.9 Arts in Health and Well-being**

The Arts have a valuable role to play in promoting health and well-being at all levels by encouraging people to participate in and enjoy arts activities both within their local communities and also in a variety of health and social care settings. The benefits are wide ranging, some of which includes the use of art within the built health/social care environment and the use of Arts Therapies to focus on psychological well-being.

The document ***Future of the Arts in Gwynedd*** supports the use of the arts to improve people's health and aims to work closely with the health sector to educate about health issues or to help people to come to terms with health problems.

The NWW NHS Trust has recently initiated its own 'Arts in Health and Wellbeing Programme' and a new residency will form an important strand contributing to the Trust's Strategic Aims and Action Plan, working in partnership with Gwynedd Council and other agencies. Further weight will also be given to the Trust's new Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) partnership, encouraging healthcare venues to open up further to its communities as hosts of events, workshops, exhibitions etc. It is considered that arts in health plays an important role within the PPI agenda and can make significant contributions to the organisations relationship/ interface with patients, visitors, volunteers and staff, through a variety of artistic projects and events.

A recent Artist Residency in Ysbyty Gwynedd 'Creative Contact – Arts interaction in Cancer Care' delivered creative workshops in mosaic and felt making, developed fiddle packs and comfort pockets for use in the waiting area of the Alaw Day Unit. The findings show that patients benefited from the workshop session in a number of ways by boosting self esteem, lessening anxiety and fear and by taking the participants away from the 'patient role'.

### **What we aim to do**

**Recognise and support the important role of the Arts activities in promoting health and well-being**

#### **5.10 Climate change**

Climate change is predicted to impact on all aspects of life. This is a global problem and has already been identified as a high priority, locally, nationally and beyond.

Climate change projections by the UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP), based on estimated future gas emissions predict substantial weather and seasonal changes in Britain. In Gwynedd we can expect higher average temperatures, warmer and drier summers, milder and wetter winters and an increase in extreme weather events such as violent storms and strong winds. These changes will in turn influence the quality of life's essentials such as air and water.

These and a number of other changes will have a direct impact on people's health including:

- An increase in deaths following extreme weather, higher temperatures and skin cancer
- An increase in illnesses, particularly insect- and water- borne diseases.

- More cases of food poisoning
- Changes in people's mental health and welfare

In 2007, the Assembly conducted a consultation on its draft action plan on climate change "Responding to our changing climate". Actions identified within this document will be included in the new Climate Change Strategy likely to be published during 2008. A number of actions were identified in the document such as issues relating to food standards, new diseases and guidelines on responding to hot weather. In addition, it was noted that organisations should be encouraged to assess the impact of climate change on the work environment and to make adjustments in order to ensure a healthy workforce.

Here in Gwynedd, climate change has been identified as one of the seven strategic priorities for Gwynedd as part of the work undertaken by Gwynedd Tomorrow and as a result increasing emphasis will be given on responding to the challenge. A scheme to co-operate in order to reduce the carbon footprint of public organisations in the county has already been developed and is being led by Gwynedd Council Environment Directorate and shadowed by the new Local Services Board. The Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership will support the project and ensure that health considerations receive appropriate attention.

**What we aim to do**

**To ensure that the impact on health of any changes in climate is identified and that health interventions are developed in response to this challenge.**

**Tackling the Social and economic factors which influence health**

| <b>Key areas for action</b>  | <b>What we aim to do</b>  |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>5.1 Housing</b>           | Target key housing issues which undermine health and well-being                                       |
| <b>5.2 Poverty</b>           | Support those partnerships and initiatives working to eradicate poverty in Gwynedd                    |
| <b>5.3 Community Safety</b>  | Identify cross cutting themes where both Partnerships can work together to ensure progress            |
| <b>5.4 Public Protection</b> | Work with the Public Protection Service to further improve its input into cross cutting health issues |
| <b>5.5 Transport</b>         | Target transport issues which impact on health and  |

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|   | are a barrier to accessing health and care services  |
| <b>5.6 Rurality</b>                           | Ensure that rural health issues are considered when reviewing, planning and delivering services  |
| <b>5.7 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage</b> | Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of regeneration initiatives on health for real step change in overcoming disadvantage.                       |
| <b>5.8 Misuse of alcohol</b>                  | Support the development of a commissioning framework that re-addresses the differing resources between drug and alcohol services                       |
| <b>5.9 Arts in Health and Well-being</b>      | Recognise and support the important role of Arts activities in promoting health and well-being   |
| <b>5.10 Climate Change</b>                    | To ensure that the impact on health of any changes in climate is identified and that health interventions are developed in response to this challenge. |