



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Public Health
DATE:	Thursday, 11 January 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Public Health Prevention and Wellbeing
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Blackburn with Darwen Sexual Health Strategy 2023 - 2028

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new sexual health strategy aims to promote accessible and equitable sexual health services for all individuals in Blackburn with Darwen regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic status.

Our integrated sexual health offer is promoted across the life course and includes access to education, prevention, testing, and treatment. We will work collaboratively with local healthcare providers, community organisations, and stakeholders to ensure that sexual health services are tailored to meet the specific needs of our diverse populations.

Through proactive education, we will empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health. By partnering with schools and community organisations, we will promote open dialogue, challenge stigma, and encourage positive relationships, health and sex education.

Our aim is that Blackburn with Darwen is a place where sexual health and safe healthy relationships can be openly discussed and embraced, creating an environment that encourages prevention and promotes a culture of care and respect. To achieve our vision, we are dedicated to expanding access to testing and treatment services. We will reach out further to engage with vulnerable and diverse communities, ensuring that testing services are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and non-judgmental.

We will remove barriers and increase awareness about sexual health, we aspire to increase sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing rates, leading to early diagnosis, prompt treatment, and prevention to stop the spread of infections.

We are committed to tackling the onward transmission of HIV through innovative prevention strategies and early intervention. By partnering with key stakeholders, community organisations, and individuals living with HIV, we will work collaboratively to increase awareness of prevention methods such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and promote regular testing for early diagnosis.

We will improve sexual health and reduce unintended pregnancies through the promotion of Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) uptake in General Practitioners (GPs) and Sexual Health services (SHS). By working collaboratively to remove barriers to access, we aim to empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Commits to the sexual health priorities and objectives contained within this strategy.
- Approves the sexual health strategy

3. BACKGROUND

The previous sexual health strategy expired in 2020 and due to the Covid 19 pandemic the development of this new strategy was delayed. In the absence of a new national sexual health framework, this strategy has been based on local data, national reports, and guidance relevant to sexual health

This new strategy communicates how we will meet the sexual health related needs of our residents and how we work in partnership to improve and promote good sexual health across Blackburn with Darwen.

Based on the analysis of public health data and insights captured through the strategy consultation process, the following areas have been identified as core priorities for this sexual health strategy:

- **Control and prevent the transmission of STIs**
 - The proportion of 15-24 year old's tested for chlamydia is significantly worse than the national rate and has been for many years.
 - The STI testing rate of those under 25 in the borough has been significantly worse than the national average.
 - Since 2018, there have been between 200-300 diagnoses of chlamydia among 15 to 24 year olds per year within sexual health services (SHS), with the current rate of detection amongst the lowest amongst authorities in the North West.
- **Combat HIV through early detection, prevention, treatment & care, & reducing stigma**
 - In 2021, 112 people in the borough were living with a HIV diagnosis, with 93 people aged from 15 to 59.
 - In 2021, 582 people (33.1% of those eligible) took a HIV test in 2021 in SHS settings.
 - Testing coverage amongst men (60.2%) is similar to the national figure (62.8%). Rates are significantly lower amongst women with only 20.8% eligible testing compared to 36.6% nationally.
- **Improve reproductive health and reduce unintended pregnancies**
 - There were 42 pregnancies amongst under 18's, (with 4 amongst under 16's specifically) a rate of 12.6 per 1,000 in 2021, not dis-similar from the national figure (13.1 per 1,000).
 - There were 21 births registered to women under 18. This means that in 2021/22, 1.1% of births in the borough were to teenage mothers, higher than the national figure of 0.6%.
 - In 2021, there were 630 abortions of those aged 15-44 living in the borough, meaning the rate of abortion was above the national average.
- **Promote healthy, safe relationships**

- The 2021 BWD School Health Needs Assessment (SHNA) surveyed 463 young people in year 9, 24% of young people did not know where to go for advice and information about relationships and sexual health.
- Hospital admissions for violence (including sexual violence) are in the lowest percentile in England with 83.8 per 100,000.
- In terms of the rate of sexual offences - the borough's rate (3.4 per 1,000) is slightly higher than England (3.2 per 1,000) in the 2021/22 period.

Our vision for sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen is that;

'All our residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and that they can enjoy a life of good sexual health, free from prejudice or bias'

Our vision will be achieved through the six core objectives aligned to each sexual health priority:

- educate & inform
- increase access
- prevent & promote
- test and treat
- include and collaborate

Our commitment to the inclusivity of marginalised communities serves as the golden thread woven throughout the priorities identified in this strategy. We strive to ensure all residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and that they can enjoy a life of sexual health, free from prejudice or bias.

See the Joint Strategic Sexual Health Needs Assessment for a comprehensive overview of the sexual health issues for Blackburn with Darwen: <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/health/health-strategy-and-reports/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

4.KEY ISSUES & RISKS

This five year strategy is a forward thinking approach, it is one that strives for better sexual health for the residents of Blackburn with Darwen. To achieve this vision we must continue to commission sexual health services and to ensure we have resource, leadership and ambition to drive this agenda forwards.

5.POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Blackburn with Darwen sexual health strategy is a local response to the national Public Health Outcomes Framework and the Local Government Public Health Functions Regulations.

The Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and Entry to Premises by Local Health watch Representatives) Regulations 2013 require local authorities to arrange for the provision of certain services, including sexual health services¹

The Regulation set out local authorities' responsibilities to provide open access sexual health services including contraceptive services². This includes addressing long-term funding and capacity challenges across local authority commissioned sexual health services³.

National

- [Commissioning Sexual Health services and interventions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Making it work Annexes FINAL.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Breaking point: Securing the future of sexual health services | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/news/breaking-point-securing-the-future-of-sexual-health-services)

Local

- **Blackburn with Darwen Joint Strategy Sexual Health Needs Assessment**
<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/health/health-strategy-and-reports/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None relating directly to this strategy. The delivery of this strategy will utilise existing public health resources and officer time.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 transferred various public health duties/functions set out in the NHS Act 2006 from the NHS/Secretary of State to Local Government in 2013. Fuller details of local authorities' new legal duties were set out in additional legislation.

The Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and entry to Premises by Local Healthwatch Representatives) Regulations 2013 stipulate that local authorities shall provide or commission arrangements for the provision of open access sexual health services in their area and specify that certain services must be provided within those open access sexual health services.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council fulfils its statutory duties and responsibilities by:

- Commissioning Brook to deliver comprehensive open access sexual health services, including free STI testing and treatment, notification of sexual partners of infected persons, and advice on/free provision of contraception.
- Commissioning Brook to deliver integrated specialist services across the life course, such as young people's sexual health, advice on preventing unintended pregnancies, and access to contraception, teenage pregnancy services, outreach, HIV prevention including PEP/PrEP, sexual health promotion, services in schools, colleges, and pharmacies and outreach to vulnerable communities.
- Commissioning Brook to deliver sexual health aspects of psychosexual counselling and HIV social care.
- Collaborating with the ICS and NHS England to ensure seamless pathways of care for sexual and reproductive health services, such as abortion, sterilisation, vasectomy, HIV treatment and care, cervical screening and sexual assault referral centres.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Public Health team are co-ordinating all interventions.

A new sexual health alliance will be formed and will meet on an annual basis with the aim of updating stakeholders on progress, providing training and relevant updates and to explore the wider agenda of sexual health within in Blackburn with Darwen.

Alongside this, specific sexual health working groups meet quarterly to work collaboratively on the priorities contained within this strategy. The groups will include:

- Street sex worker forum (already in existence)
- PSHE network with an increased focus on RSE (already in existence)
- HIV (new group to be formed)

The implementation of the alliance and working groups will be resourced through existing resources in the public health team.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

In total over 150 people were involved throughout the consultation phase.

- Digital survey promoted across multiple and varied stakeholders (young people and adults)
- In person focus group with communities of lived experience (HIV specific)
- In person, consultation hosted via Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum
- In person consultation with young person SEND consultation held in Darwen
- Stakeholder engagement event attended by over 60 professionals and supported by Councillor Damian Talbot

Appendix 2 sets out responses from the digital survey relating to challenges/barriers in relation to sexual health.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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CONTACT OFFICER:	Natalie Dodd, Hayley Kilpatrick, Sam Riley
DATE:	28 th November 2023
BACKGROUND PAPER:	