

5 Greenwich – health is everybody’s business

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Greenwich Council has long recognised the importance of the local authority’s role in improving health and tackling health inequalities. This is reflected by a decision to create a senior officer post of head of healthier communities and a healthier communities strategy which keeps health issues at the heart of core council services. The council has also fostered a close and effective partnership with the local PCT, NHS Greenwich. This approach resulted in Greenwich Council achieving Beacon status for reducing health inequalities in 2008/9.

The head of healthier communities takes the strategic lead for all council health improvement initiatives and ensuring that all council services are more effectively using their resources to tackle health issues. This is encapsulated in the healthier communities strategy which aims to improve health issues across all policy areas, so that the council further develops its role as an agent of health improvement. This dovetails with NHS Greenwich’s health improvement plan. Also, a five year borough wide strategy ‘Health: Everyone’s Business - a health improvement strategy for Greenwich’ had its content agreed at the health and well-being board (HWB) in October 2009.

Greenwich has developed a partnership structure that centres on the HWB and the improving health cutting inequalities group (IHCI). The HWB is a sub group of the LSP and is responsible for agreeing key priorities and monitoring progress against the health and well-being LAA targets. It is made up of lead councillors, non-executive directors of NHS Greenwich and senior managers from the council and PCT including the Head of Healthier Communities and Director of Public Health. The IHCI, which is made up of officers from the council and health partners, provides the operational support to HWB by coordinating all the cross-organisational actions.

An important element of the Healthier Communities Strategy is the development of a course for staff: Health: Everyone’s Business (HEB). The thinking behind it is that decision-making staff in every council department are ideally placed to ensure that maximum positive impacts on health are considered in every policy decision.

The HEB is an introductory health improvement course that provides participants with the knowledge, skills and

language to promote health within their council roles. HEB graduates then become a core group of ‘health improvement champions’ working in decision-making roles across council functions.

HEB is deliberately targeted at officers from all departments within the council rather than only those working in obviously health- or social care-related areas. For example participants have included officers from housing, transport, planning, chief executive’s department, environmental health and regeneration. It runs for one day a month over six months, thus involves a considerable commitment in terms of resources and participants’ time. The course covers public health theory and involves interactive sessions and project work, and has a strong focus on practical application. Each participant undertakes a project that explores and demonstrates the positive health impacts within the context of their role. The course covers subjects such as the wider factors which impact on health, health needs assessment, mental health and health promotion, and the role of the local authority. It benefits from input from the council’s lead member for health and partners such as NHS Greenwich, the voluntary sector, Royal Mail (Workplace health), IDeA, the Faculty of Public Health, and the University of West London.

The HEB is continually evolving and each successive course is shaped by continued learning from participant’s feedback. Participants and contributors are asked to give their views on what they learned, what worked well and what could be done differently. There is a final evaluation at the end of each course and an examination of the longer term impacts following the second course with another such exercise planned shortly.

So far feedback has included the need to extend the course to participants from partner organisations; that interactive sessions work best; and that adequate time has to be built in to facilitate the project work, which can be intensive.

Greenwich Council continues to develop its role as an agent of health improvement to help tackle the poor health outcomes many of its local population still experience. Ongoing challenges include: maintaining the change of culture within the organisation so that health continues to be embedded within core services; and developing greater

awareness of the implications for health amongst all council officers.

Each HEB course has built on the success of the previous one and the model is being shared, most recently via a 'taster' session with the North East Healthy Learning Network which covers all 25 local authorities in the North East. Other dissemination events have included a Beacon showcase day that focused on what has been learned from HEB and presentations at the UK Public Health Association conference and seminars for the Health Service Journal and King's Fund. There are also plans to adapt the course so that it will include participants from NHS Greenwich and other partners.

Key steps to successful delivery

- Identify a senior officer to take on lead responsibility for health within the council
- Develop a joint health improvement strategy with PCT and other health and well-being stakeholders
- Develop a strategic mechanism for monitoring progress on LAA targets covering health and well-being
- If developing a 'HEB type' course:
 - establish and maintain senior management 'sign up' to the course
 - engage and consult with local health partners to ensure their involvement in the course
 - extend eligibility to both NHS and Voluntary sector partners
 - develop a course outline with learning outcomes and core subjects to be covered to be delivered as part of the council's corporate training function.

Greenwich – practical applications from Health: Everyone's Business course

In addition to attending the sessions that make up the Health: Everyone's Business course in Greenwich, participants undertake a project to demonstrate health impacts of their own roles. These projects have resulted in positive action being taken in departments across the council to change common practice. Some examples are outlined below.

Better steps to health – Participation in the course resulted in a pilot health promotion intervention for school crossing patrols including pedometer use and a health promotion event which has become a regular feature in training these staff members.

Young homeless people – As a result of the course,

the participant reviewed and amended assessment forms to change the way young people are asked about their smoking habits and whether they are registered with a GP, and to ensure the information is used proactively.

Community meals service – A course participant mapped client addresses against deprivation in order to highlight likely health inequalities, and concluded that drivers would be ideally placed to train as Community Health Promoters in addition to their existing role, which included using a screening tool to identify those with malnutrition.

Community services – By evaluating the services currently being offered within the council's 25 community centres, and mapping their locations against health inequalities, the participants identified gaps in service provision that represent opportunities to tailor health promotion to communities.

Mental health in the workplace – Course participants audited Greenwich Council's support for employees' mental health by assessing provision against the '12 steps to better mental health' model, and making recommendations on future provision.

Trading Standards (underage sale enforcement priorities) – The participant explored mortality rates relating to the range of proscribed products (alcohol, knives, tobacco, solvents and fireworks) and made recommendations about future resource allocation which took account of health impact.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) – The course inspired the participant to develop an analytical tool which will help managers consider the possible health impacts from the six EIA equality strands in Greenwich, thereby enabling future strategies to consider health impacts in an integrated way.

Transit (young driver and rider education project) – As part of an initiative to encourage young people to consider the consequences of their motor vehicle use, the participant was inspired by the course to make adjustments to training to emphasise issues of inclusion, self-esteem, respect and mental health generally.

Handyperson service – The participant explored the health impact of this service which is aimed at low income older and disabled people, providing a handyperson to perform 'odd jobs' in the home. The course helped highlight health inequalities across the geographical areas with the Borough and enabled the participant to better target those communities most in need.