

22nd March 2023

Dear Dame Meg Hillier (Chair)

RE: Public Accounts Committee Oral evidence: Alcohol treatment services, HC 1001 Thursday 2 March 2023

I am writing in response to the committees request for written feedback on the work across the North East and North Cumbria to ensure staff have awareness and understanding of safer levels of drinking.

As set out in the appendix to this letter work on this has taken place at three levels: Local Authority Level, Sub-regional Level, and the Integrated Care Board Level across the North East and North Cumbria. This approach is in response to the evidence which shows the need for action at each level as well as the benefit of working at scale for specific programmes of work (e.g., mass media campaigns). Whilst each Local Authority (LA) has adopted slightly different approaches, for ease of reference, Gateshead has been used as the example for local work.

If you require any further feedback or additional detail please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours sincerely,



Alice Wiseman FFPH
DPH Gateshead
ADPH treasurer and lead for addiction

Response to the Public Accounts Committee held on March 2nd, 2023 – Alcohol Treatment Services

1. Local Authority (LA) Level – Gateshead

In Gateshead, as with many LA's in the country, there has been a considerable focus on implementing a Making Every Contact Count (MECC) approach to health improvement. This approach has aimed to ensure that front line staff, regardless of employer (e.g., LA, CVS and health) has been trained in having conversations around risk behaviours in every contact they have.

Included as a core element of this work was a program called 'Have a Word', which trained individuals in alcohol brief intervention skills, enabling them to identify people drinking alcohol at hazardous and harmful levels and to provide advice and information on reducing risk. By providing this training to the wide range of front-line staff, including CVS organisations, it was our hope that the increased awareness of the scale of alcohol related harm would win the hearts and minds of staff within our workplaces and, from this, reach our Gateshead residents.

In the North East we also support the Better Health at Work Award, as we recognise how a healthy workplace has considerable benefits for employers and employees. Organisations are encouraged to sign up to the award, and then progress through the 5 levels, by evidencing the health-related activity that they have embedded within the workplace within a portfolio based on the criteria for each level. Each level takes a year to complete. Alcohol awareness is one of the award criteria, and organisations are expected to undertake campaign work and information sharing about lower risk alcohol use. Examples that we have seen locally, have included linking up with the Recovery Community to help reduce the stigma for those who may be experiencing issues with alcohol.

2. Subregional level – Balance (seven LA's including Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham)

Fresh and Balance is a regional public health programme that is locally commissioned and funded by public health teams from the local authorities in Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, and County Durham. Fresh was launched in 2005 to reduce smoking rates, Balance in 2009 to reduce the harms caused by alcohol, and we have worked as one programme since 2013. All alcohol campaigns, PR etc. are delivered under the Balance brand and it remains England's only regional alcohol prevention programme.

Balance is an integral member of the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA) and works with many local, regional, national and international partners including Cancer Research UK, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Institute of Alcohol Studies, Royal College of Physicians, SPECTRUM, the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and many others. Membership of the AHA enables Balance to raise the profile of regional initiatives and to ensure that the North East has the strongest possible voice in relation to alcohol policy at a national level.

The programme works across seven key strands:

- 1) Local engagement and strategic support
- 2) Advocacy for evidence based policies
- 3) Year round media and communications
- 4) Challenging the alcohol industry and social norms
- 5) Alcohol regulation and licensing
- 6) Data, research and public opinion

7) Reducing exposure of children to alcohol

Balance works for a societal shift around alcohol use by creating a social environment and legal climate in which alcohol becomes less desirable, less acceptable, less affordable and less accessible. Evidence shows that a comprehensive social norm change approach combined with providing individual information and support is effective at reducing levels of alcohol consumption. We also believe that the alcohol industry's marketing and promotional practices must be exposed and countered.

Balance has almost 15 years' experience of running campaigns in the North East, aimed at raising awareness of alcohol harms and reducing consumption. Evaluation of these campaigns has shown that North East residents have higher awareness of the links between alcohol and cancer than those in other regions; and almost half of the people who saw the last Balance 'Alcohol causes cancer' campaign took steps to reduce their drinking.

3. Integrated Care System Level – North East and North Cumbria (13 LA's)

The North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS) have appointed a clinical lead and a programme manager.

An Alcohol Healthcare Needs Assessment (HCNA) was completed in 2022 in response to the increasing levels of alcohol-related harm in the region. The needs assessment was led by a group including public health, ICS and OHID colleagues.

This process aimed to quantify population needs for healthcare by mapping existing patterns of service utilisation to identify potential gaps. The HCNA included qualitative and quantitative analysis as well as audits of the key services and led to 20 overarching recommendations that have informed work taken forward by the NENC ICS Alcohol Programme.

In response to the findings of this HCNA the ICS workforce alcohol strategy has included a number of recommendations regarding workforce development to support the de-normalisation of alcohol and the reduction of alcohol harm in NENC, which come together to form the **NENC Workforce Alcohol Strategy**. This includes:

- Facilitating the NENC Alcohol Clinical Network as a mechanism to engage clinical leaders and other NHS clinicians in advocating for the normalisation of low-risk drinking and other key policy measures to reduce alcohol harm
- Development of a regional workforce alcohol training programme '**The NENC Programme for Alcohol Studies**'. Accessible to all staff from health, social care and third sector from May 2023
- Implementation of a communication and engagement campaign '**Alcohol Let's Talk**' to support a culture change among NHS staff and empower staff to have effective conversations about alcohol and respond appropriately when alcohol-related harm is identified: To launch in May 2023
- Development of comprehensive **Directory of community alcohol treatment services** across the NENC accessible via [Alcohol support services | North East and North Cumbria NHS \(northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk\)](https://alcohol.support.services.nhs.uk/northeastnorthcumbria)
- Access to a confidential **alcohol support service for health and social care staff** to improve understanding of the risks associated with drinking and providing 1:1 support for any staff drinking at increasing risk level or higher