



# COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

## *Public Health:*

*Protecting and improving health in county areas*



# About COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

At the County Councils Network (CCN) one of our core objectives as a national representative body is to share the innovative work our councils are doing on a daily basis to provide vital frontline services, support local economies, and create thriving communities.

This new, regular, publication seeks to shine the spotlight on the most recent best practice and innovative solutions being put forward by our member councils across a range of different policy areas. Alongside this, it provides an update on the national policy landscape and commentary from our lead members and strategic partners.

**To find out more about future themes, or to recommend a case study, please contact [ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk](mailto:ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk).**

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# THE VIEW FROM CCN

The last two years of a global pandemic has ushered in some of the most difficult circumstances faced by local authorities and their communities in England in modern memory.

Whilst exceptionally challenging for CCN's members, the past 24 months has also shown those councils at their very best: leading their communities through the pandemic, protecting their residents, and playing a prime role in the national effort to suppress the virus and then supporting the roll out of the largest vaccination programme that the country has ever seen. In all of these efforts, public health was at the heart of them.

The decision to transfer public health functions from the NHS to local authorities in 2013 has been vindicated by councils' track record over the last decade - improving key public health outcomes on life expectancy, smoking cessation, and healthy habits. When the pandemic struck, local government was well equipped to tackle the innumerable challenges head-on and at a local level, helping to protect residents, setting up localised testing and tracing systems, and communicating effectively with the public. Their role changed as the pandemic wore on, with counties stepping up to assist the national effort in rolling out the vaccine and encouraging people to get their jabs.

As this *County Spotlight* shows, CCN member councils have not only led the way in protecting their communities during the pandemic, but they are also getting back to focusing on improving health outcomes in the future. This has meant beginning to roll out services for mental health as well as for physical health, working closely with key partners. The case studies in this document illustrate how counties are building on their excellent practice during the pandemic, and are embedding the lessons learned across their service areas.

As we look ahead, CCN will continue to argue that public health functions are best delivered by local authorities, and for these vital services to be fairly and adequately funded in county areas. More widely, with new national oversight bodies for public health, and the statutory formation of Integrated Care Systems, public health services must adapt to a new local and national landscape while ensuring that public health has a key voice in new arrangements.

Almost a decade on from the transfer of public health, and in the aftermath of a national public health emergency, there is much that has been achieved to date, but much more to do to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities.

**Clr Martin Tett**

*CCN Health & Social Care Spokesperson*



# THE LATEST POLICY LANDSCAPE

It is now close to a decade since public health responsibilities were transferred to upper-tier local authorities in 2013. The rationale for this change was to enable “...local authorities to use their new responsibilities and resources to put health and wellbeing at the heart of everything they do, thereby helping people to lead healthier lives, both mentally and physically”.

Much of the case for the transfer of public health back to its historic home of local government was based on the greater prioritisation that could be given to prevention and tackling the ‘wider determinants’ on health. Tackling the conditions determining people’s health outcomes were believed to require action, across the course of people’s lives, well beyond the influence of the NHS and traditional public health services such as smoking cessation and sexual health. Local government’s role in promoting physical activity, environmental protection, planning, housing and economic development were seen as critical to the new system.

Building on this new, more holistic approach to public health, demonstrable improvements in health outcomes in county areas were achieved since the transfer took place, despite council funding for services being reduced by £0.7bn in real terms between 2015–2020.

For instance, in county areas more people eligible for NHS health checks were receiving them in 2020 than ever before; by 2020 both smoking prevalence and the rate of sexually transmitted diseases reduced 37% since 2012; moreover, life expectancy for males and females have both increased in county areas over the same period.

By these measures the reforms generated a demonstrable degree of success despite a substantial funding squeeze. In 2019 Shared Intelligence’s independent report *Learning the Lessons from the transfer of public health*, commissioned by CCN, provided further evidence on the impact of the transfer, concluding;

*"This research shows that councils in county areas are mobilising the wider determinants of health to deliver the preventative approach that underpins the [NHS] long term plan...government was right to be ambitious about the potential of local government to take the lead in improving health locally, working closely with local partners and exploiting the full breadth of its remit."*

At the time of the 2013 transfer, no one could have predicted that within less than a decade, these services would be the frontline response to the biggest public health emergency in several generations. The scale of both the health emergency and its response was unprecedented.

In county areas there have been over 8.1 million positive Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic – 45% of all cases in England – with 57.2 million vaccines administered, some 49% of all doses.

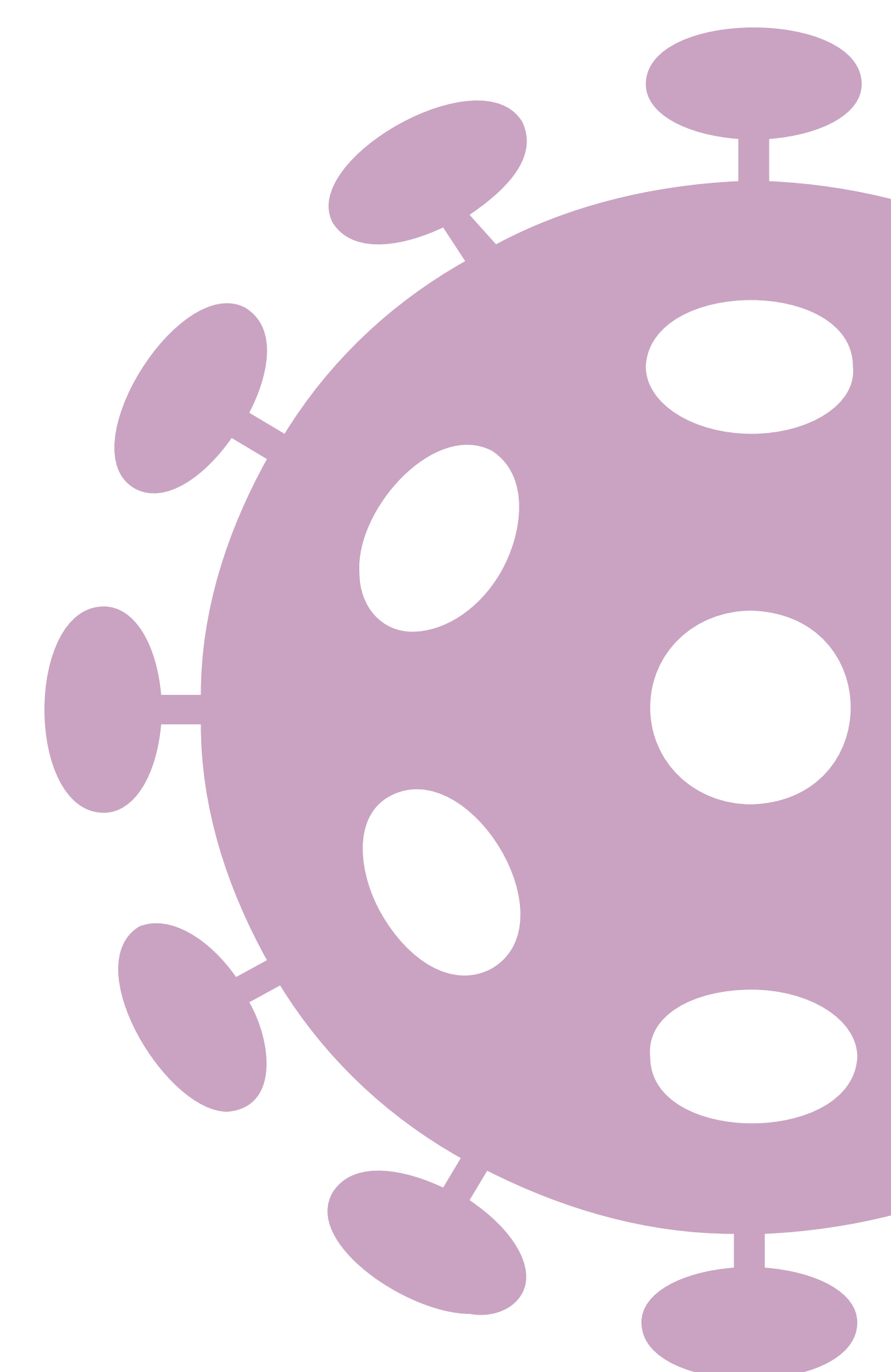
During the unparalleled circumstances of national lockdowns, the role of local public health services has never been more in the national spotlight, nor has it ever been so central to every aspect of our economic and social lives.

As demonstrated through this document, the experience of the pandemic has only served to emphasise the importance of locating this vital service within councils, acting in the process to vindicate the rationale for the transfer of this responsibility to upper-tier councils back in 2013. Whether it be local authorities' ability to use their local knowledge and wider public health activity to enable them to move quickly identify and respond to Coronavirus outbreaks; working with businesses to make high-streets and local businesses Covid-secure to get local economies back to their feet; or coordinating with social services and care providers to protect the most vulnerable in our care homes.

Yet as we emerge from the pandemic and are faced with increased health inequalities in its aftermath, the debate over the success or otherwise of the 2013 transfer continues to generate differences of opinion. Shared Intelligence's 2019 report highlighted this debate amongst those in the health community, and some NHS leaders have recently reiterated calls to take responsibility for public health back into the NHS and away from democratically elected, community-based councils. CCN have consistently argued this would be a retrograde step, citing both pre and post-pandemic successes as the rationale for better integration and partnership working, rather than unnecessary structural change. The government are rightly continuing to put faith in the local delivery of public health services through councils: however, we are still entering an important period of reform.

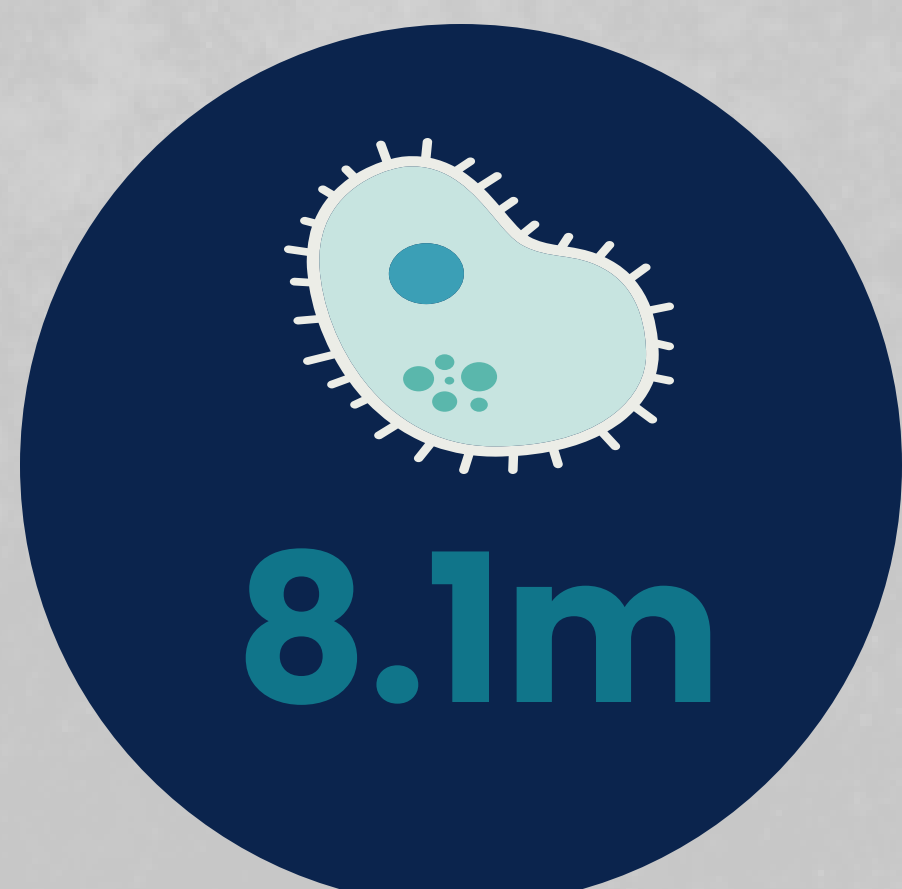
In 2021 it was announced that Public Health England would be merged with two new national agencies - the UK Health Security Agency and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities - both of whose roles and relationships with public health teams are still evolving. Equally important will be the move to place Integrated Care Systems (ICS) on a statutory footing and the associated intent to better integrate the delivery of health and social care at local level. Public health needs to be at the forefront in the important negotiations presently being conducted up and down the country between councils and the NHS to ensure the success of the ICS model in years to come.

**As we enter a new period of reform and post-pandemic recovery, it is essential that county and unitary authorities are able to properly articulate and demonstrate their success in public health. This document is designed to support this and help galvanise the important role counties play in this area, seeking to utilise the enhanced profile of public health in the national public policy debate to deliver a lasting legacy of health improvement and reduced inequalities.**



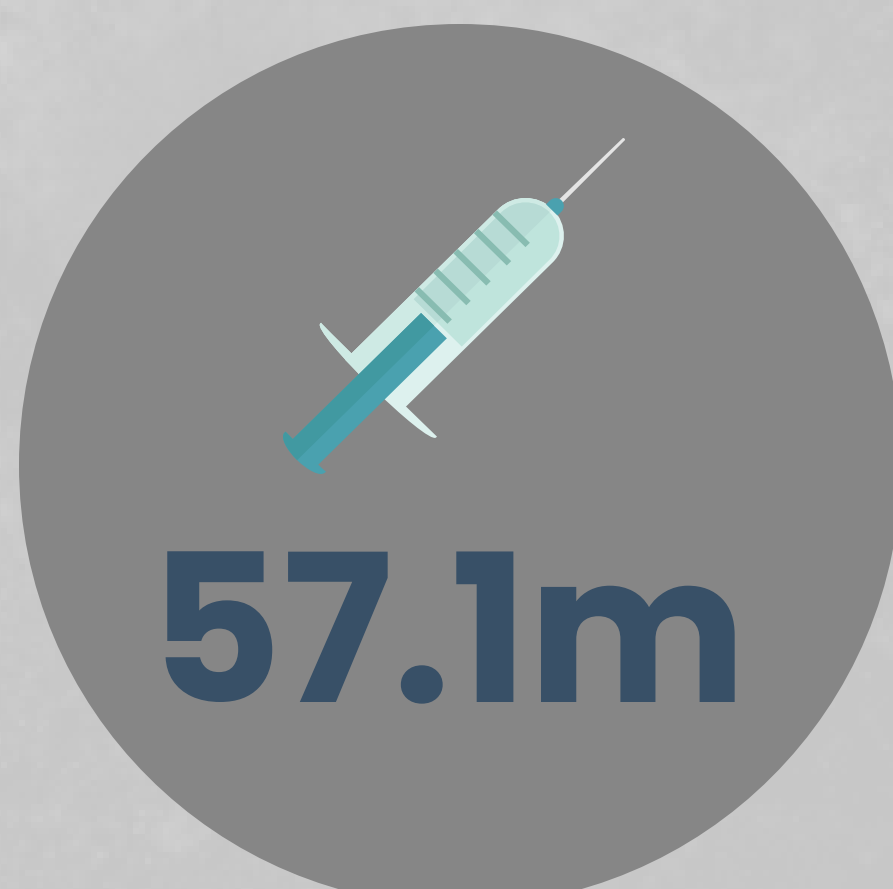
# THE COUNTY CONTEXT

Total Covid-19 Cases by April 2022



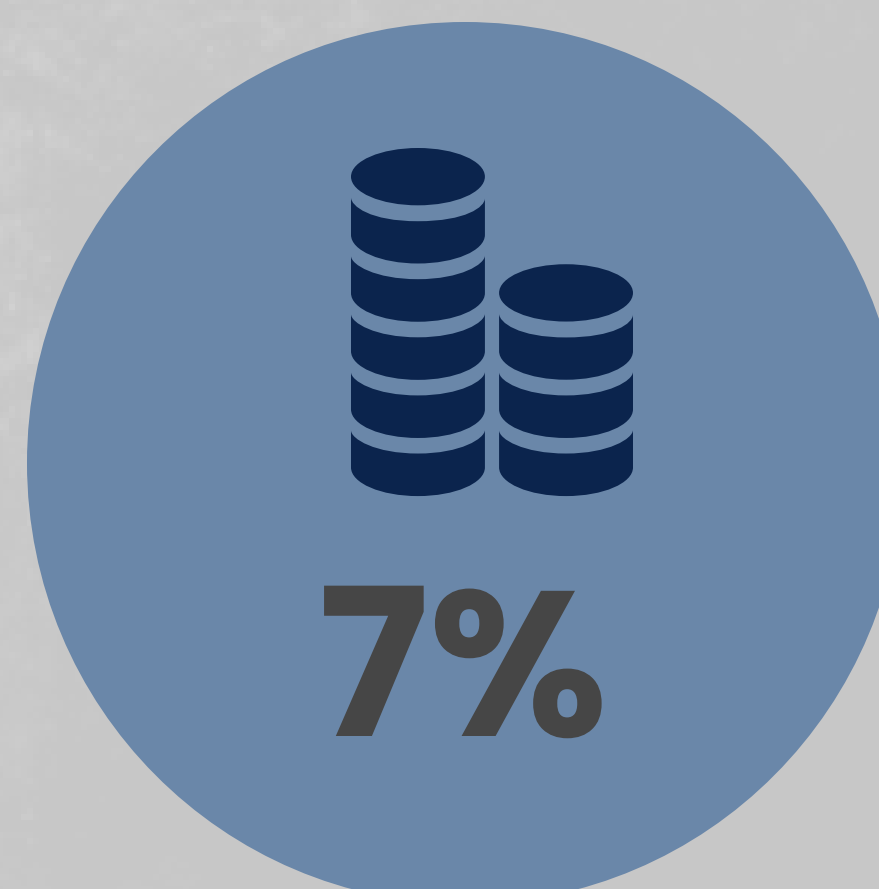
45% of all cases in England

Total Vaccines by April 2022



49% of all those in England

Public Health Expenditure



Of average county authority budget

Funding per head in county authorities



25% lower than national average (£57)

Smoking prevalence in adults - current smokers

2012

**18.3%**

< **VS** >

2020

**11.5%**

Eligible population aged 40-74 offered an NHS Health Check who received one

2012

**46%**

< **VS** >

2020

**48%**

New STI diagnosis rate per 100,000

2012

**570.1**

< **VS** >

2020

**359.5**

Life expectancy - male

2012

**79.8**

< **VS** >

2020

**80.1**

Life expectancy - female

2012

**83.6**

< **VS** >

2020

**83.8**

# PROTECTING LIVES: PUBLIC HEALTH IN A PANDEMIC

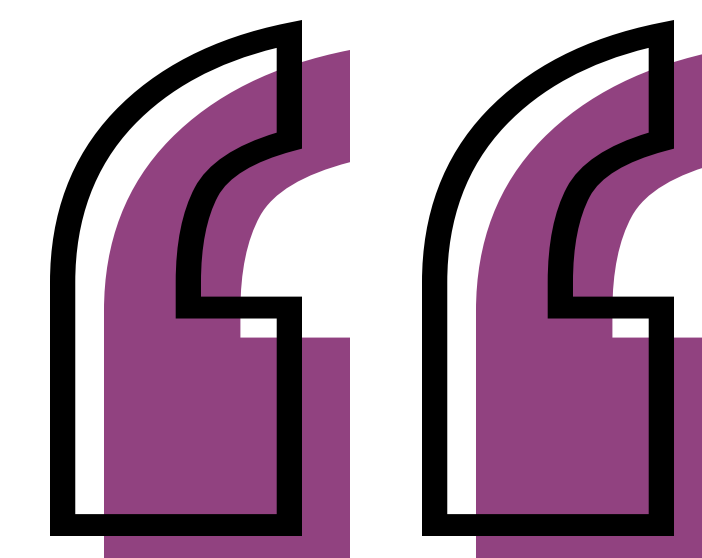
Over the last 24 months of the pandemic, local government has done remarkable work in protecting local residents, stepping up to assist the national vaccination effort, and rolling out public health initiatives.

From summer 2021, with a year of lessons learned from the pandemic under their belts, CCN member councils continued to showcase local leadership and strong partnership working to keep residents safe. This was a new phase of the pandemic when the national effort was focused on the vaccination and combating the Omicron variant.

Last year, county councils and unitary authorities put in place high performing localised test and trace systems, which helped track the virus in the summer and autumn of 2021 as the virus' wave receded. County authorities were able to seamlessly switch from focusing on contact tracing to using data to encourage people to get vaccinated, targeting hesitant individuals with key messages and support.

Other county authorities laid on free transport to ensure that rural residents were able to get to a vaccination centre; imaginatively repurposing their school transport fleet which was not being used. CCN member councils have also played a prime role in supporting the vaccine rollout, using their local knowledge to ensure as many people from groups who were vaccine hesitant got the jab.

**Across the country, there are numerous examples of how councils have worked together with neighbouring authorities and with the public sector to lead their communities through successive waves of the pandemic and during three national lockdowns.**



Councils have done remarkable work in protecting local residents, stepping up to assist the national vaccination effort, and rolling out public health initiatives during a pandemic.





# Cumbria County Council

## Successfully delivering two different vaccines

Facing the daunting prospect of having to deliver both the flu vaccine and the Coronavirus vaccine to school pupils at the end of 2021, a team effort from both Cumbria County Council and its NHS partners saw uptake for both vaccines above the national average.

In normal circumstances, vaccination teams would have been stretched just delivering the flu vaccine in schools. North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Trust decided to split the administration of both the vaccines, with the NHS's school immunisation service focusing on the flu vaccine and the council's public health nursing teams helping with the logistics of administering the Coronavirus vaccination from GPs and pharmacists.

These nursing teams know their schools well and helped to facilitate vaccination clinics and also helped to calm pupils and encourage them to get vaccinated. As a result of this partnership work, the area's mainstream schools were all completed in an eight-week period.

[Find out more here](#)

# Gloucestershire County Council

## Contact tracing to ensure people isolate

With the third wave of the Coronavirus abating in summer 2021, Gloucestershire County Council stepped up its localised test and trace efforts to manage the virus by trying to reduce community transmission.

Under the arrangement, if the government's national test and trace programme could not contact an individual with a positive test, then the county council would step in, with its team of officers making home visits to those who cannot be tracked over the phone, and carrying out welfare checks for people, encouraging them to isolate.

In addition, the county council worked with its district council partners to offer tailored support for those who tested positive, including arranging food and medicine deliveries – or even finding someone to walk a dog. This support made it easier for people to isolate and reduce transmission.

[Find out more here](#)

# Central Bedfordshire Council

## Switching from testing to boosting vaccine uptake

Central Bedfordshire worked effectively with its neighbouring authorities Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes Council to switch from successful contact tracing to boosting vaccine uptake.

Even though the area had run a successful contact tracing system, it was struggling with the increased numbers in summer 2021. The councils made the decision to switch the 20-person strong team away from a focus on tracing to calling those who had not been vaccinated, using local data to contact people. Staff were on hand to reassure individuals who had anxiety over getting the vaccine, and answer any questions they had. This included working with the Clinical Commissioning Groups to offer therapy sessions, and working with GPs to encourage pregnant women. Staff were also able to book people in over the phone who had not got round to booking in their vaccination.

[Find out more here](#)

# Shropshire Council

## Free transport laid on to get rural residents vaccinated

The area Shropshire Council covers has two-thirds of its population live in rural locations. In order to enable elderly and vulnerable residents in rural areas to get their vaccinations in early 2021, the council repurposed its park and ride school transport fleet to transport people to vaccination sites.

This on-demand service, where people book in council transport, assisted hundreds of people to attend their vaccination slot. The council also converted one of its buses, into a mobile vaccination unit. The bus has been used in partnership with the NHS and Telford and Wrekin Council to deliver pop-up clinics and increase uptake of vaccinations and boosters. The partnership is helping to reduce inequalities by targeting communities where people might be vaccine hesitant or find getting to a vaccination session difficult, and offering them information and advice as well as the vaccine.

[Find out more here](#)

# BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE

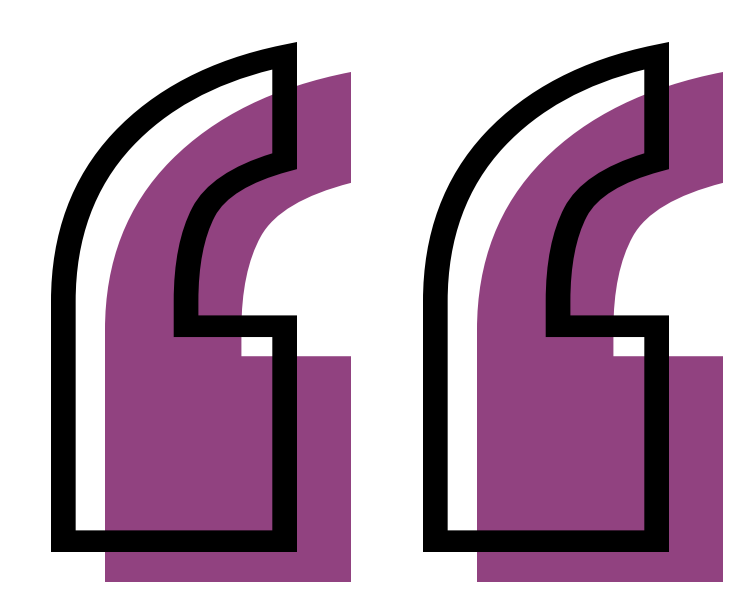
With England looking likely to be moving away from the worst of the Coronavirus pandemic, now that a majority of the country now triple-vaccinated, local authorities have begun to look towards the future and embed lessons learned in public health from the last two years.

Local authorities recognise that whilst the worst is likely to be over with, cases will continue to spike for many years to come. Therefore, county councils and unitary authorities in the CCN membership have put in place measures to protect the most vulnerable in society, as well as building on the excellent public health practice over the last 24 months; embedding it across their service areas.

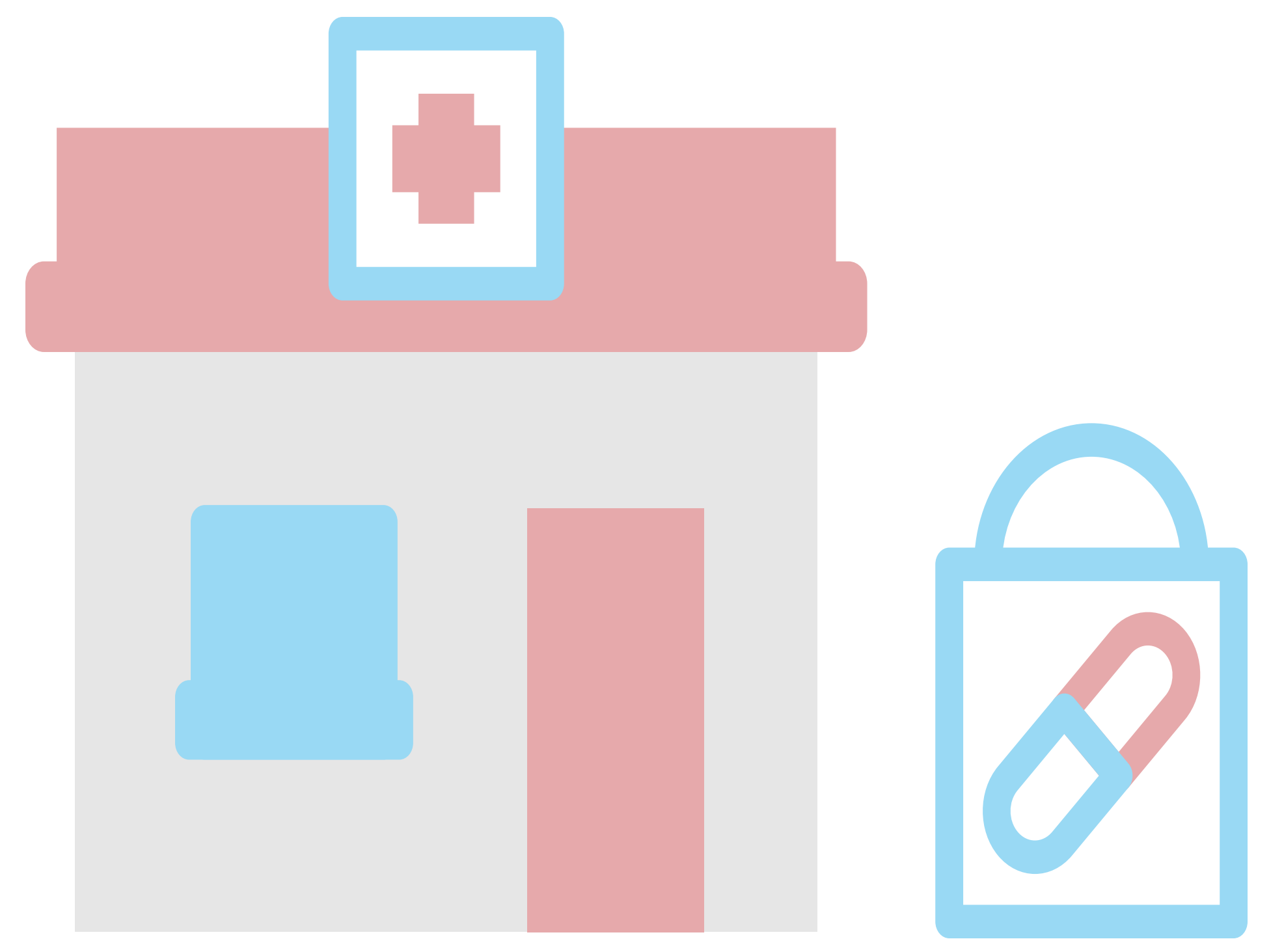
Some of the measures taken by CCN member councils over the past year include distributing millions in grant funding to protect residents who have shielded during the pandemic and for initiatives to build their confidence. Other county authorities have invested in their public services, including ramping up local tracing capabilities, research on pandemic impacts, and in services that address new and emerging issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as mental health. Other councils have fused both public health and adult social care in rolling out technology to track the health of care home residents.

As well as atypical public health measures, county councils and unitary authorities have also had an important part to play in improving their residents' mental health and wellbeing, as the country transitioned out of successive lockdowns - particularly young people.

**All of these endeavours have an eye on the future - mainstreaming and implementing public health best practice in county areas to ensure that residents' health and wellbeing is a paramount concern as we leave behind the worst of the pandemic.**



*CCN members have put in place measures to protect the most vulnerable in society, as well as building on the excellent public health practice over the last 24 months*



# Cornwall Council

## Supporting shielding residents post lockdown

With the government dropping many of its Coronavirus restrictions by the end of 2021, Cornwall Council distributed a grant of almost £1.5m to support clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) individuals who had to shield during the bulk of the pandemic.

Cornwall selected various local initiatives to support these CEV individuals to receive physical, mental, and emotional support to re-integrate back into 'normal life'. This included funding for a local project which provides residential weekends away for CEV young people, community hubs run by Age UK, and funding for heating repairs and upgrades.

The funding also helped to support frontline workers from the local authority who come into daily contact with CEV people, as well as training for care home staff so they can accompany these individuals on walks and visits. The grant funding was allocated to Cornwall by the government.

[Find out more here](#)

# Somerset County Council

## Embedding public health across the council

Somerset County Council last year spent £10m on embedding public health across all parts of the local authority - including funding for mental health, anxiety, and Coronavirus outbreak services.

Major investment included £2m for support services with people with anxiety and mental health issues, which includes programmes to help people who have been shielding regain their physical conditioning, as well as encouraging people to live healthily.

Further funding was also committed with the long-term in mind - attempting to improve vaccine uptake and investing in research and work to improve understanding of Coronavirus and the changing needs of Somerset's residents as a result of the pandemic.

[Find out more here](#)



# Kent County Council

## Helping children reconnect with pre-pandemic life

Kent County Council is leading a community based programme, *Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People*, supported by £10m from the council and contributions from organisations and businesses, to support children and young people reconnect with their pre-pandemic lives.

The partnership with organisations ranging from children's hospices, schools, and scouts, to sports and arts organisations provides activities and support to encourage young people to take up sports, or catch-up on lost learning. The programme focuses on all aspects of children's lives, their mental and physical health, their learning, their friends and families, and their future economic opportunities. The programme runs until the end of summer 2022, during which time hundreds of local organisations and thousands of volunteers will have contributed to ensuring the county's children and young people are thriving again.

[Find out more here](#)



# Lincolnshire County Council

## Using technology to keep care home residents healthy

Cutting edge technology deployed by Lincolnshire County Council has helped monitor the health of care home residents - which will be important in future Coronavirus case peaks.

The technology, Whzan Digital Health, has been installed in over 150 care homes in the county, and includes blood pressure monitors, pulse oximeters, and thermometers. These instruments are Bluetooth enabled, and then the readings are put onto a portal where local GPs and community teams can monitor the health of their patients who are in care homes.

The aim of this technology is to monitor patients in care homes, improve the health and wellbeing of residents, as well as prevent hospital admissions - alongside monitoring their health during future Coronavirus outbreaks.

[Find out more here](#)

# TAKING ACTION: MAKING RESIDENTS' LIVES HEALTHIER

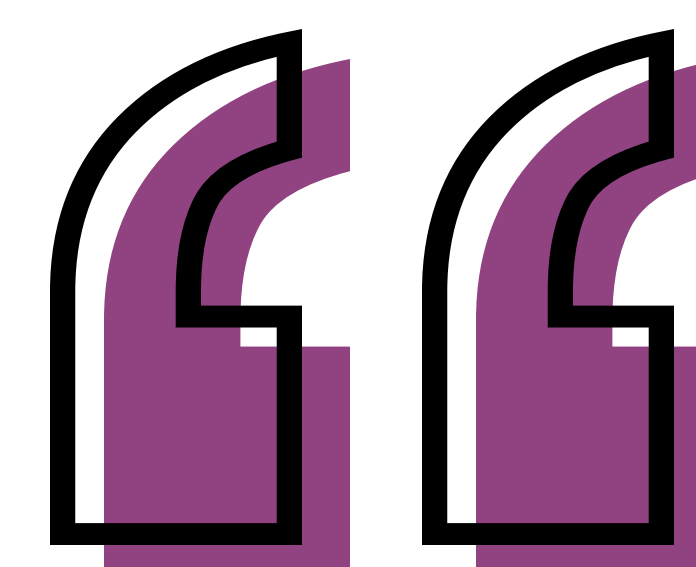
Even before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, public health has been a major part of local government since its responsibility was transferred to councils in 2013. On average, county authorities spend around 7% of their total budgets on public health, with CCN member councils effectively linking it across different service areas, such as children's services and housing.

Counties also recognise that public health encompasses a variety of other service areas to tackle the wider determinants of poor health, from welfare distribution to libraries. They have rolled out specialist health hubs across their areas which not only provide typical public health services but also other services such as debt management advice. Other CCN members have taken their public health service hubs on the road - with specialist vehicles travelling to hard to reach communities who may not have easy access to council services and offering them advice from registering with a GP to smoking cessation, and health checks.

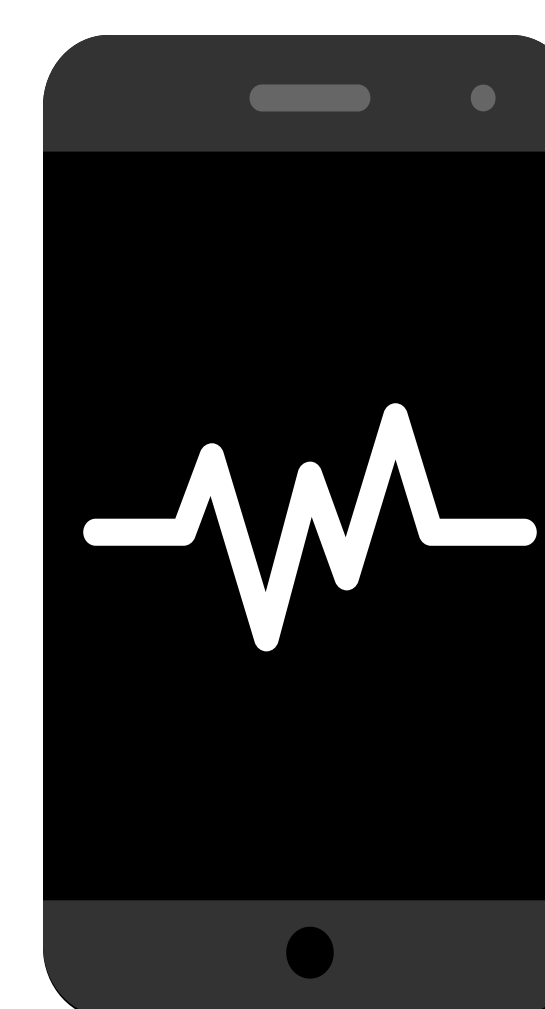
At the same time, the most effective public health services have strong partnership working at their core - and county authorities across the country continue to work with public sector partners such as district councils, the police and health service to improve their residents' health and wellbeing - particularly in reducing drug-related deaths and crime.

County residents' health and wellbeing also extends to emergency situations where there is a risk of loss of life. CCN member councils have the size and scale to play an important preventative role in such circumstances, and when a particularly severe storm was due in February 2022, counties led the preventative approach and the clean-up effort after.

**From improving public health outcomes, to working closely with public sector partners, to leading in emergencies, counties continue to display excellence and innovation in improving their residents' health and wellbeing.**



CCN member councils have effectively linked public health across other service areas, such as children's services and housing.





# Norfolk County Council

## Pioneering partnerships tackle drug crime

Norfolk County Council has pioneered partnership work with public sector partners to tackle drug-related crime in the area – focusing on housing, employment and treatment issues.

Bringing together the county council, police, health services, and treatment providers, this partnership has borne fruit: reaching over 540 individuals in the county since 2021, with 170 of these receiving treatment from substance misuse services. Following sustained police activity, the county now has less than 10 high harm drug lines, with enforcement over those controlling the lines resulting in over 200 years of custody.

This project has been part of a pilot scheme, with £4.8m made available from government. The council worked with the police to train officers in the deployment of nasal naloxone which reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, and funds one of two Norfolk youth offending officers.

[Find out more here](#)

# Hertfordshire County Council

## Healthy hubs to focus on physical and mental health

Hertfordshire County Council, in partnership with the county's ten district councils, have set up 'healthy hubs', with a focus on mental as well as physical health.

These hubs operate from a range of venues, such as civic centres, food banks, and cafes across Hertfordshire, offer a range of public health services, such as smoking cessation and weight management, alongside mental health, and debt management advice – with the council increasingly focusing on providing support for these emerging issues.

They are free to use for any Hertfordshire resident, with the council committing £1.2m into its health and wellbeing services. There is at least one pop-up hub in every district in the county.

[Find out more here](#)

# East Riding of Yorkshire

## Bringing public health to hard to reach communities

East Riding of Yorkshire's Inclusion Health Vehicle brings together council services including public health, leisure, and libraries, as well as the NHS and food banks – and brings them to local communities that are hard to reach.

The van was out on the road during autumn 2021 and winter 2022 visiting community venues and rural areas, offering varied support such as registering with a GP, finding a dentist, and emotional and physical wellbeing. Two private clinical bays in the vehicle also allow people to discuss sensitive topics, such as drug and alcohol use. The team on board the vehicle are also able to signpost people to further outreach services, such as health training and weight management services.

The project aims to provide public health support to the hardest to reach communities, such as those in rural areas, those from the travelling community, those who are homeless, and asylum seekers.

[Find out more here](#)

# Suffolk County Council

## Public health in a severe storm

Whilst not a typical public health incident, Storm Eunice in February was a particularly severe storm – and Suffolk was right in the storm's path.

Suffolk County Council and the county's utility and emergency services responded to this by declaring a 'major incident' in the days before, which means there is significant risk to people's lives and formalises joint arrangements between public sector partners. Consequently, 100 schools were closed, libraries and family hubs were closed, and some waste collections were suspended to protect people. The council issued updates and advice from its social media.

The council and emergency services worked through the night after the storm subsided, with the authority's highways team clearing almost 100 pieces of fallen trees and debris from the county's roads. The council also worked with emergency services to restore power to thousands of homes.

[Find out more here](#)

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING: ADDRESSING THE ISSUES OF THE FUTURE

As the previous section illustrated, CCN member councils continue to lead with innovative and excellent practice in public health, working effectively with public sector partners. Increasingly, their health and wellbeing efforts are not focussed solely on physical health, but also mental health.

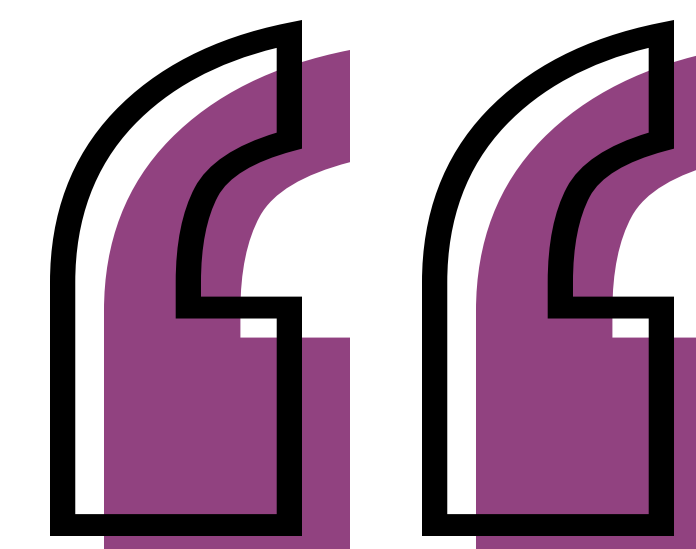
Whilst this work is happening now to try and improve health outcomes for their residents, many CCN councils are also looking at preventative work to make residents' lives healthier, and are beginning to tackle issues that are becoming more commonly accepted and discussed, such as mental health and workplace wellbeing.

In particular, residents' mental health is something that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This is not just relevant for adults but for young people too, who have lost vital learning time and life experience.

Recognising this, CCN member councils have put on conferences to encourage young people to talk about the mental impact of the last 24 months and discuss how they can be supported, whilst others have arranged campaigns to discuss mental health, using their community links to work with local businesses and sports teams to try and get people more comfortable talking about mental health discussing what support is on hand.

Other county councils and unitary authorities have arranged specific events where issues such as workplace wellbeing and the menopause were discussed, and what businesses can do to help their workforce.

**From using data insights to map public health outcomes in order to prioritise investment, to encouraging people to discuss sensitive issues such as mental health and the menopause, CCN member councils are looking to the future in implementing preventative public health initiatives.**



Increasingly, CCN members' their health and wellbeing efforts are not focussed solely on physical health, but also mental health.



# Surrey County Council

## Using data to target health support

Surrey County Council has created the Surrey Index, which aims to map out localised data in framework which measures the health and wellbeing of communities in Surrey – amongst other indicators.

This index allows the council to pinpoint parts of the county, which is one of England's largest with pockets of deprivation easy to overlook, that have poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

The index intends to be a starting point: once the areas of greatest need are identified using data, Surrey can then target its resources most effectively. During the height of the pandemic, the index was used as a model to develop a tool called the Local Recovery Index, which measured the broad impact of Coronavirus on communities at district level – showing which areas were recovering well, and those that were struggling and therefore need extra policy and investment focus.

[Find out more here](#)

# Cheshire East Council

## Mental health conference gives voice to young people

It is widely accepted that school-age pupils' mental health has particularly suffered during the pandemic, so Cheshire East's Youth Council held a mental health conference at the end of 2021, designed to discuss how best to support these young people in the area.

The virtual event brought together nearly 140 delegates, including over 80 children, and frontline professionals from Cheshire East Council. Workshops at the event dealt with subjects like coping with exam stress, learning disabilities, and wellbeing as areas recover from the pandemic.

The conference was called 'Taboo' to highlight the stigma that is attached to mental health, and provided the opportunity for those young people to discuss the issues that affect them and explain how they could be supported.

[Find out more here](#)



# Warwickshire County Council

## Famous names for workplace wellbeing conference

Improving workplace health and wellbeing is often an overlooked part of public health – but was the focus of an event organised by Warwickshire County Council last month.

The event, which was open for medium and large businesses in the area, addressed health and wellbeing issues for employers and employees. Topics ranged from the menopause and how this could affect female employees, and mental health – providing information, training and support to businesses. The local authority's road safety team were also on hand to discuss the benefits of active travel.

The event, organised jointly with Coventry City Council, had former Burnley FC manager Sean Dyche as its guest speaker, who discussed the importance of health, wellbeing, and resilience from within a workforce, and Deborah Garlick, who is the founder of Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace.

[Find out more here](#)



# Derbyshire County Council

## Encouraging people to discuss their mental health

A month-long campaign to encourage people to discuss any mental health issues they may have taken place in Derbyshire this winter. Running throughout February, Time to Talk Derbyshire has had over 50 businesses and organisations get involved in the campaign, sharing messages, and promoting the support on offer: encouraging people to talk about their mental health.

As part of the campaign, the council is funding a mental health and suicide prevention project, which will target children, young people, and men – the groups of people that do not often feel comfortable discussing their mental health.

The project will offer businesses, gyms, and football clubs in Derbyshire mental health awareness support and suicide prevention training.

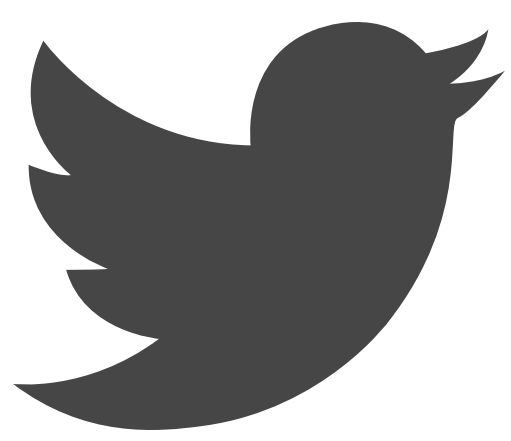
[Find out more here](#)

# CCN

## COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is a network of 23 county councils and 13 unitary authorities that serve county areas. The network is a cross party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the Local Government Association and to the government.

**Follow CCN on social media:**



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County Councils Network



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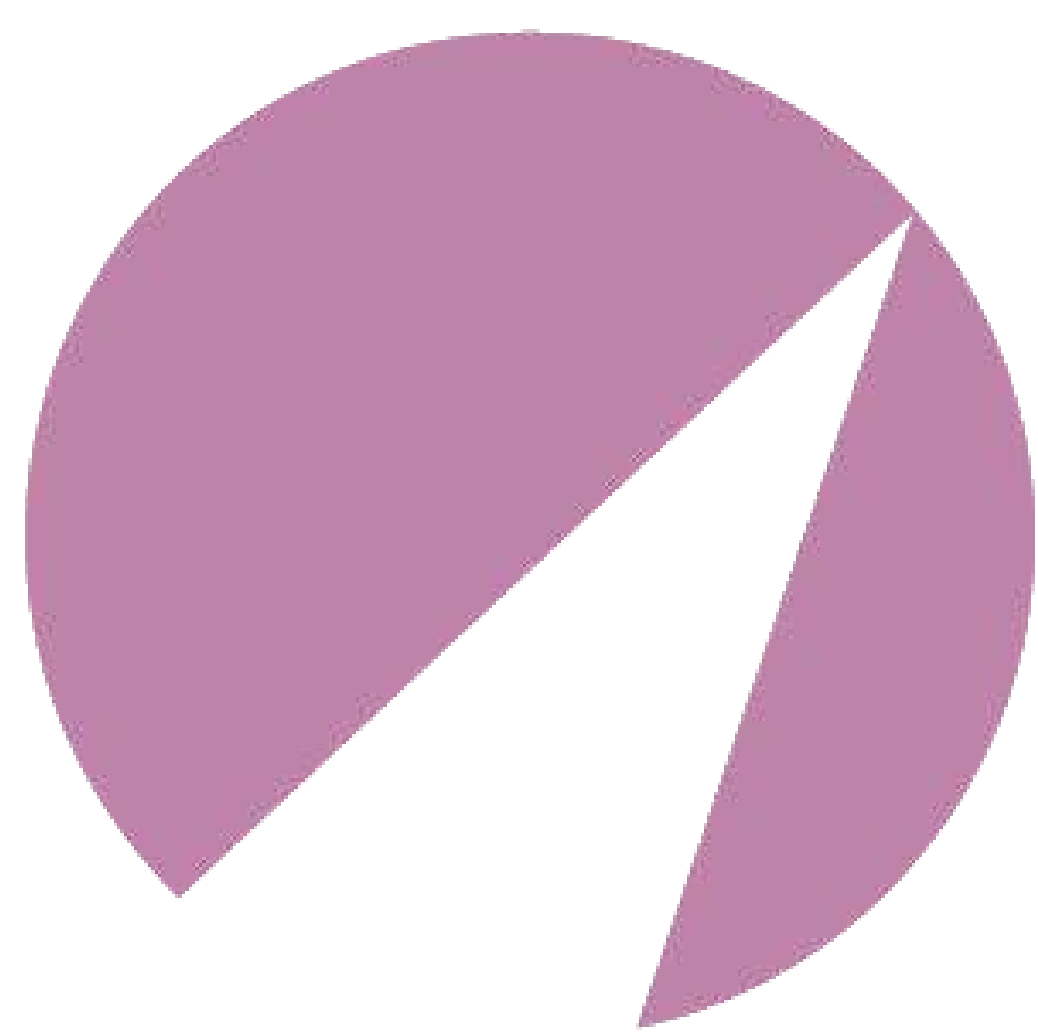
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