

## Local Government Declaration Case Study: Somerset County Council

Somerset County Council signed the [Local Government Declaration](#) on the 21 November 2013 and have since become one of two County Councils to date to have achieved full sign up of the Declaration at district council level.

### Why did Somerset sign the Declaration?

*Stewart Brock, Public Health Specialist, Somerset Council:*

Smoking is the biggest cause of premature death in the UK. It kills 80,000 people in England annually and has been identified as the single biggest cause of inequality in death rates between rich and poor in the UK. Half of smokers can expect to die prematurely if they do not quit.<sup>1</sup>

About 17.5% of the adult population of Somerset currently smoke. Although this is around 2.5% lower than the national average<sup>2</sup> it equates to around 75,000 people.

- In Somerset, smoking kills over 850 people a year, half of them in middle age.
- Tackling smoking and its consequences costs Somerset approximately £133.7 million annually.<sup>3</sup>
- Smoking in pregnancy remains relatively high in Somerset, although work commenced in 2013 is showing good early results.
- Every week, on average, an estimated 32 children in Somerset start smoking<sup>4</sup>.

Another factor in our decision to sign the Declaration was the fact that traditionally we have had representation from all districts on the tobacco control alliance, but as a result of spending cuts, this had dwindled in recent years to just one member on behalf of five districts. The transfer of public health from the NHS to local authorities enhances every district's role in improving health outcomes for local residents so we were keen to remedy this.<sup>5</sup>

### How did we secure support from our district councils?

On the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013, Taunton Deane became the first district council in England to declare its commitment to protect residents from the harmful effects of tobacco by signing the Local Government Declaration. Since then, each of our five district councils have committed to the Declaration.

Initial engagement with district councils on the Declaration was done through our Health and Wellbeing Board, on which each of the district councils is represented by both a Council Officer and an elected Member.

Some of the district councils had concerns about how to ensure being a signatory of the Declaration was more than just words on a piece of paper.

One of the ways we've made sure this hasn't happened is by increasing representation of districts on our Tobacco Control Alliance. Using the Declaration as a lever has enabled us to achieve strategic level engagement with the Alliance, which is now chaired by Councillor John Swayne, a District Councillor for Sedgemoor and attended by a representative from each district.

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<sup>1</sup> ASH, [Smoking Statistics](#), 2014

<sup>2</sup> [Health Survey for England 2012](#)

<sup>3</sup> ASH, [Local Toolkit](#), 2014

<sup>4</sup> Hopkinson N. et al, [Child uptake of smoking by area across the UK](#), Thorax 2013

<sup>5</sup> For further information please see the District Councils' Network report [District Action on Public Health](#)

The County Council also offered to provide signage and a small pot of money for district councils willing to make council-owned play areas smokefree. Four of our districts have now taken advantage of this offer. This was a 'quick-win' enabling the districts to publicly demonstrate their commitment to tackling smoking and protecting children.

#### What next for the Declaration?

At a strategic level, last September the Smokefree Somerset Alliance, newly expanded in membership and scope as a direct result of the Declaration and the [CLeaR assessment process](#), held a workshop to inform the development of a new tobacco control strategy for the County, with a clear emphasis on reducing youth uptake.

At the detailed level, in one of our districts we are working with the Local Strategic Partnership on delivering a hard hitting community fight back against tobacco campaign, while across the County we are working with the Somerset Community Foundation on grants programmes to community organisations such as sports clubs which implement outdoor smokefree policies around children and young people. District networks are important in communicating these opportunities into communities.

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For further information regarding the Declaration, please visit <http://www.smokefreeaction.org.uk/declaration/> or email [admin@smokefreeaction.org.uk](mailto:admin@smokefreeaction.org.uk).