



23 October 2013

Our reference: NF/KC/AS

Dear

Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control

In May Newcastle City Council passed a declaration setting out our commitment to tackle the harm smoking causes our communities. This has become known as the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control and been endorsed by, among others, the Public Health Minister, Chief Medical Officer and Public Health England. I'd like to invite your council to join us and sign up to the Declaration.

The Declaration commits councils to:

- Reduce smoking prevalence and health inequalities
- Develop plans with partners and local communities
- Participate in local and regional networks
- Support Government action at national level
- Protect tobacco control work from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry
- Monitor the progress of our plans
- Join the Smokefree Action Coalition

Many of you may already have seen media coverage or attended a briefing about the Declaration. If you are not already planning to do so then I would like to invite you to join us and sign-up. Councils representing all the major parties have already taken a lead and signed up to the Declaration including Salford City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council. I am keen that other councils have the opportunity to get involved ahead of a formal launch in early December in Parliament.

Tobacco remains the single greatest cause of preventable deaths in England – killing over 80,000 people every year, more people each year than obesity, alcohol, road accidents and illegal drug use put together.

Thousands of children also suffer harm as a result of smoking. Not only are 17,000 children under the age of five admitted to hospital every year as a result of passive smoking but cancer Research UK also estimate that 430 children in England start smoking every day.

If you need this information in another format or language, please contact the person who sent it.

Although smoking has fallen from 40% to 20% since 1980 there has been little change within our poorest communities and smoking is responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between the richest and poorest. There can be no doubt that, in the context of our public health responsibilities, smoking is the greatest challenge facing us today.

In response, this declaration has been developed to provide a very visible opportunity for local government: to publically acknowledge the significant challenge facing us; to voluntarily demonstrate a commitment to take action; and to publish a statement of our dedication to protect local communities from the harm caused by smoking.

The Declaration includes a specific and important commitment to protect health policy from the influence of the tobacco industry. This is an obligation already placed on local authorities through the World Health Organisation treaty on tobacco – however the Declaration reminds us of our obligations and restates our commitment.

The threat is a real one. In the past there have been examples of local councils allowing tobacco companies inappropriate access through, for example, their funding of city academies, museums and smoking shelters on council property. This summer representatives of a British American Tobacco subsidiary contacted councils across England, almost certainly yours too, to speak to local councils about their tobacco harm reduction strategies.

It is also true that almost all local government pension schemes in England have some investment in tobacco companies. I share the frustrations of many in public health regarding these investments, however our fiduciary duties makes effective action difficult. The greatest threat from the tobacco manufacturers comes not from investments by our pension fund managers but from their influence on our health policy. This Declaration is about taking effective action against real threats.

I have attached a copy of the declaration for you to look at along with some additional information, which should answer any initial questions that you may have. Formal launch of the declaration will take place at the House of Commons on Wednesday 11 December, where the Health Minister and some of the councils who have already signed-up will be available to discuss why they considered it so important to give their support to this initiative.

If you would like any further information or details about the declaration or the launch event please do not hesitate to contact Hazel Cheeseman at Action on Smoking & Health at hazel.cheeseman@ash.org.uk or on 020 7404 0242; or Karen Christon at karen.christon@newcastle.gov.uk or on 0191 211 5024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Forbes .".

Councillor Nick Forbes
Leader of Newcastle City Council

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