

Case study

Devon County Council: a website to support collaboration and communication on health and wellbeing

“The website enables us to work alongside some of the key services that influence the health of our communities, such as environmental health, employment, housing, and air quality. Since the transition of public health to Devon County Council, the website has evolved to become a valuable source of information and communication tool.”

Cllr Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Chair of the Devon Health and Wellbeing Board

“Through the JSNA, we can collaborate more effectively with our colleagues in the Clinical Commissioning Groups, district councils, providers and communities to ensure what we are doing secures the best health outcomes for those who most need it.”

Dr Virginia Pearson, Director of Public Health

“The county council’s role, as a champion and leader for its local communities puts us in an ideal position to deliver the government’s vision for a fitter, healthier society that doesn’t rely on long-term health and social care services. Our Health and Wellbeing site enables us to bring together a wealth of information to help us to address some of the health inequalities that exist across the county.”

Phil Norrey, Chief Executive

Key messages

- Development of a living and interactive JSNA offers huge opportunities to provide information that can be used by many different groups and communities of interest and to be more open to scrutiny and challenge
- A website that fulfils this role needs to be monitored and continually updated and promoted in the community.
- Open access to information by the community and transparency about health and care planning should be at the core of local health and wellbeing agendas.

Context

Devon is the third largest county in England, with the twelfth highest county population – about 770,000 residents. It has a dispersed rural population mainly centred on the 28 market and coastal towns and the City of Exeter. However, nearly a quarter of the population live away from the biggest settlements, presenting the challenge of providing services that are equally accessible to all. The population is older than the national average. This older group is expected to grow significantly, with people over 65 expected to make up over a quarter of the population by 2031. The county has a very small minority ethnic population well below the national average. This presents the challenge of ensure that the small minority ethnic groups

are seen as integral to the county and are not disadvantaged or excluded in any way.

The health of people in Devon is generally better than the England average. Deprivation is lower than average, however about 17,700 children live in poverty.

Life expectancy in Devon is higher than in comparison to England and Wales: 87.5 years in the ward with the longest life expectancy and 74.7 in the ward with the shortest. The commonest cause of premature death is coronary heart disease (which has been reducing in line with national patterns), followed by lung cancer. Over the last 10 years, all cause mortality rates have fallen. Early death rates from cancer and from heart disease and stroke have fallen and are better than the England average. The level of alcohol-specific hospital stays among those under 18 is worse than the England average. Levels of teenage pregnancy, breast feeding and smoking in pregnancy are better than the England average. Estimated levels of adult 'healthy eating' and physical activity are better than the England average. Rates of hip fractures, road injuries and deaths, smoking related deaths and hospital stays for alcohol related harm are better than the England average. The rates of incidence of malignant melanoma and hospital stays for self-harm are worse than average.

Maximising use of information and data

When the transfer of public health to local government was mooted, commentators suggested that one advantage could be bringing together local authority population data with public health data analysis and modelling skills. In Devon, leading up to the transfer of 30 public health staff, it was decided that this opportunity could be built on, not only to create an up-to-date Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), but also to make the information that informs the JSNA both visible and suited to many uses by

many different constituencies. In the months leading up to the transfer, public health and local authority staff worked together to review the existing JSNA, to consider and assess examples of best practice across the country. They aimed to draw on these examples to create a multi-purpose website for the Health and Wellbeing Board that would also be a community resource.

It was decided that, to reinforce its status as an independent resource that resulted from partnership working, a separate website would be created away from the county council's website and with its own identity and branding. The website now contains information on Devon's Health and Wellbeing Board, including the usual minutes and agendas, but also briefing papers produced for the Board, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS), Annual Public Health Reports, JSNAs and a library of strategies, plans, needs assessments and other reports and information relevant to health and wellbeing in Devon. The website also hosts the Devon Health and Wellbeing newsletter, produced regularly, which gives news about the Health and Wellbeing Board, the CCG and local Healthwatch; and is used to promote consultations and relevant events such as Devon's hosting of the Rural Health conference.

The county council and partners already had strong place-based information and community health and wellbeing profiles which are posted on the website. They include:

- constituency profiles
- town health profiles
- local authority profiles
- NHS locality profiles
- GP practice profiles

Posting profiles which cut across each other means that they can be used for a variety of purposes and by different geographically based groups.

It was also decided to enhance this place-based information with information on different health topics or themes which, if placed in the public domain, would be of interest and use to different communities of interest. Each topic has a page on the website which outlines the issue, lists evidence of what works to tackle it (including NICE guidance where available) and relates it to the Devon context and what is currently being done in the county. Together, the pages cover a wide range of issues, including:

- issues around the wider determinants of health such as poverty and housing
- information on promoting healthy lifestyles, such as preventing unintentional injuries in children and young people, teenage pregnancy, skin cancer prevention and early diagnosis (a significant issue in Devon) and smoking
- improving the health and wellbeing of the population, including safeguarding adults and children, learning disabilities, homelessness and domestic and sexual violence and abuse

The website will be updated later in 2014 to include a new section on major diseases and conditions based on health needs assessments which are currently under way.

There are also sections on 'resources for professionals' and 'resources for schools', although care has been taken to ensure that all parts of the website are publicly 'digestible'. The intention has been to give the 'whole story' of an issue as part of the county council's and its partners' approach to open data both for professionals and for the community.

Information for the community

The Devon Health and Wellbeing website has been extensively used by and developed with input by community and voluntary organisations. The website has been promoted at over 30 public events across the county. Working with local Healthwatch,

the public health team has taken groups of people through the website and drawn on JSNA community health profiles as a mechanism to discuss health and care issues with local communities. Health profiles and related JSNA information have been used in the preparation of community funding bids, and public events and website feedback has been useful in developing the website.

As a result, the website has a, perhaps surprisingly, large non-professional audience, with 16,300 separate visits during 2013. The public health team is able to get a flavour of the reasons for people's visits and the range of visitors, through a feedback mechanism that permits queries and responds to them. Queries have been received from community groups, people in education, including university students, schools and interested individuals.

Working with elected members

The website has been useful for introducing elected members to the new local authority health responsibilities and providing health and social care information for their communities. A number of briefing and awareness sessions have been run to ensure that the website is an informative and useful source of information for councillors. Elected members appreciate that the website enables the Health and Wellbeing Board and the health commissioning bodies to be open to scrutiny and challenge by providing information that is easily accessible and easily understood. They can drill down to look at the health profile of residents that they themselves represent as individuals, but also find information to help them develop policy (in the 'what works' sections) and monitor progress (in the 'what is currently being done in Devon' sections).

Support to the Health and Wellbeing Board and CCGs

Public health and other staff supporting the Health and Wellbeing Board believe that the website has really helped the Board to develop because it has been flexible enough to provide information for the disparate interests of Board members.

The website has also been important for the delivery of public health support to local Clinical Commissioning Groups and includes a number of resources for local health professional around health checks, local public health courses, along with CCG reports, performance indicators, maps and other documents.

Resources

The website was initially put together collaboratively by the council's web, public health and social care teams, and is set up so public health and social care staff can manage content and upload material directly. Promotion of the website at public events and feedback through its pages, along with similar work with councillors and local professionals, have assisted the public health team in tailoring website content to what people require. The public health team estimates that there is a net saving of time because people can be directed to relevant information on the website rather than ad-hoc analyses and reports having to be completed and sent individually.

The general shape and content of the website is steered by two JSNA groups – one group of technical officers and a broader JSNA development group which includes the local NHS, public health, the voluntary and community sector and local Healthwatch and gives a strategic steer.

Future plans

Further briefings for the themes and topics section of the website are currently being developed, including briefings relating to the characteristics protected by the equalities legislation and briefings on different long-term conditions for a planned 'major diseases and conditions' section.

Other planned developments include expanding and improving the library of documents, developing mapping and interactive reports, and making more datasets available to the public.

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