

From: Allison Duggal, Interim Director of Public Health

To: Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board

Subject: **The Health and Wellbeing of Coastal Communities in Kent and Medway**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Summary:

Kent has a number of coastal communities, and these communities are often affected by poor life expectancy, poor health outcomes and considerable inequalities – both health inequalities and socioeconomic inequalities.

This is a short paper to introduce some of the themes associated with coastal health inequalities and to note some of the initiative planned in the near future.

Recommendation(s):

The Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the proposed work on improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities in Kent and Medway.

Comment and suggest areas where the system can join to strengthen work to reduce health inequalities in Coastal Areas.

1. Introduction

The past two years have been dominated by work to control the spread and mitigate for the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has, quite rightly, shone a spotlight on inequalities seen in our communities, particularly health inequalities.

One area that has been highlighted has been the plight of coastal communities in England. These communities reside in settlements that include seaside towns, ports and other areas which have a clear connection to the coastal economy.

Although coastal communities include important places in English culture and our history and include many tourist destinations and areas of critical infrastructure and industrial importance, they often have the worst health outcomes in England, with poor life expectancy and high rates of disease.

Although there is not a 'One size fits all' to explain poor outcomes and increased inequalities in our coastal communities, these communities often have more in

common with other coastal communities than communities inland, even when these coastal communities might be some considerable geographic distance away.

Often the granularity of data available prevents sufficient analysis. For instance, there might be considerable deprivation on the coast, but an area of affluence further inland. These two areas might compensate for each other, and the area might appear to be average in public health data – hiding the issues associated with the coastal community.

The Kent and Medway health system has several significant coastal communities. These include:

- Broadstairs
- Deal
- Dover
- Folkestone
- Herne Bay
- Hythe
- Margate
- Minster
- New Romney
- Ramsgate
- Sheerness
- Whitstable

This is a short paper to introduce some of the themes associated with coastal health inequalities and to note some of the initiatives planned soon.

2. The Wider Determinants of Health in Coastal Communities

2.1 Economy and Employment

Employment is a challenge in coastal communities. Where communities benefit from tourism in the summer, this is a boost to the economy, but seasonal work is common with less work available outside of the tourist season.

Some of our communities have suffered due to a decline in traditional industries such as fishing. Also, poor transport connections can impinge on employment opportunities, and we see this in areas such as Sheerness.

Coastal areas will have suffered disproportionately due to Covid-19, particularly in areas where tourism has been adversely affected.

There are opportunities to work with anchor institutions to increase opportunities for the population in coastal communities, offering access to long-term employment and career enhancement whilst increasing the workforce in much needed areas of health and social care.

2.2 Education

Education is affected by many factors and young people growing up in coastal communities often have worse educational attainment compared to those in non-coastal areas. This includes access to higher education. The reasons for this are

multifactorial but are thought to include: transient housing and workforce, lack of access to higher education, lack of employment opportunities that might include training and qualifications and difficulties due to the seasonal nature of work in coastal communities.

There are opportunities for public health to work with education colleagues and early years colleagues, including our commissioned health visitors and school nursing colleagues, to improve health and educational outcomes for children and young people in coastal communities.

2.3 Housing

Coastal communities can be very different in character and some of our coastal communities in Kent have particular issues with housing. Areas such as Margate have former guesthouses which have been converted to HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) and these are often associated with poor quality housing in the private sector.

Static caravan parks are also an issue in Kent, particularly for migrant workers who are often housed in caravan accommodation for part of the year. This type of accommodation often has poor access to health services due to the seasonal nature and remoteness of the housing. Caravan accommodation has also been a particular issue in the last two years as it has proved difficult for people to self-isolate when they live in this type of accommodation and have been exposed to Covid-19.

2.4 Health

Coastal communities are challenged by issues with transport and access to health services. This is evidenced in part by the high use of emergency departments and higher emergency admissions in coastal areas.

Difficulties with access to primary care services and screening services, sometimes due to transport issues or issues with understaffing due to Covid or difficulties recruiting staff, can affect service levels and contribute to the lower life expectancy and higher prevalence of chronic disease in coastal communities.

There are opportunities for public health commissioned health promotion services to work to reduce the major risk factors for chronic disease seen in coastal communities, especially high rates of smoking in pregnancy, alcohol and substance misuse and high prevalence of smoking behaviours, (partly fuelled by illegal tobacco coming through the ports).

One area that has been highlighted is the challenge of recruitment and retention of health and social care staff in coastal areas. This is a challenge for Kent, particularly East Kent. It is hoped that the new Kent and Medway Medical School will attract new health and social care practitioners to the area and help retain them in Kent.

2.1.5 Physical geography

Coastal areas are more prone to flooding, often due to storm surges and river flooding where communities have been built on flood plains. Flooding can have significant short term and long-term effects on health, including issues with water

contamination and long-term mental health problems following flooding. Climate change could exacerbate this risk.

3. Planned Future Actions

A national strategy is in preparation to address the disproportionately high concentration of chronic disease, mental illness, and poor life expectancy in our coastal areas. Kent and Medway public health will both contribute towards this national work, alongside partners for the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID, DHSC).

This strategy will be localised by Kent and Medway Public Health Teams who hope to work in partnership with colleagues in economic development to address the wider determinants of health in these areas and affect positive change for our communities.

The KCC 2021/22 Annual Public Health Report is in preparation and is focussed on the Kent's coastal communities and their health and wellbeing. This will be accompanied by a full needs assessment and action plan for improving health inequalities across Kent.

There is ongoing work with the emerging ICS to improve health inequalities across coastal communities. Of note, there is considerable joint work between East Kent Place-Based Partnership and KCC public health to analyse the local issues and publish a health needs assessment focussed on the issues of East Kent's coastal communities. This analysis and accompanying action plan will form a template for future work with other areas within the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System.

4. Conclusion

There are real benefits to living in a coastal area, they are often areas of natural beauty with access to green and blue spaces, historical sites and are often tourist attractions in the summer. However, although coastal communities are important culturally and historically, they are also beset by inequalities and a new strategy is required to enable these inequalities to be addressed.

Kent and Medway partners are working to analyse the data for our coastal communities and to develop a series of recommendations which will address poor health.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation(s):

The Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the proposed work on improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities in Kent and Medway.

Comment and suggest areas where the system can join to strengthen work to reduce health inequalities in Coastal Areas.

5. Contact details

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