

**From:** Dan Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health  
Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

**To:** Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee – 5 March 2024

**Subject:** **Public Health Communications and Campaigns Update**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** None

**Future Pathway of Paper:** None

**Electoral Division:** All

**Summary:** This paper reports on the campaigns and communications activity which supported the delivery of public health priorities in 2023/2024

The report notes the winter preparedness communications response and other public health priorities. The paper also notes the continued partnership working with colleagues across health and care as well as the roll out of the Start for Life elements of the Family Hub programme.

**Recommendation:** The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the progress and impact of public health communications and campaigns in 2023/2024 and the need to continue to deliver throughout 2024/2025.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Marketing and communications activity continues to play a critical role in supporting our residents and providing trusted and timely information about public health priorities throughout the year. Proactive communications have so far managed the impact of severe weather, infectious outbreaks, the resurgence of Avian flu and reminders of immunisations programmes, among many others.

1.2 As part of the council's statutory warn and inform responsibilities, the Public Health and Marketing and Resident Experience Teams ensure continued awareness of threats to health as they arise, particularly Strep A and measles over the last six months. The subject of public health continues to dominate the news agenda, and cabinet members and senior officers are often called upon to talk about, and provide statements to highlight, key messages which encourage healthier behaviours and help residents stay safe and well.

- 1.3 Marketing and communication campaign activity has continued to focus on three main drivers:
- Promoting healthier behaviours and self help
  - Giving information and advice
  - Promoting local services where available and highlighting online and digital support.
- 1.4 This paper covers communications activity for 2023, along with key activities and plans for this financial year.

## **2. 'Warn and Inform' Health Communications (including severe weather, infectious diseases and immunisations)**

- 2.1 Winter pressures across Kent meant continued proactive and reactive communications as the trusted source of public health information and advice for residents, along with supporting our NHS colleagues with specific vaccinations.
- 2.2 Communications for any outbreaks are carefully co-ordinated with partners from Medway Council, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the NHS and central government departments. Considerable communications activity continues with partners and stakeholders as part of our role on the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF).
- 2.3 This winter the focus has been on Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccinations, with a concerted public relations campaign encouraging families to understand the risk posed by not taking up the offer of the MMR vaccination. Kent County Council (KCC) also highlighted the importance of the Covid and flu top-up vaccinations to prevent NHS urgent care departments becoming overwhelmed at a time when seasonal flu is at its highest.

## **3. Public Health Campaigns and Communications 2023/2024**

### **3.1 Overview of activity from January 2023:**

- Mental health and wellbeing – promotion of Every Mind Matters online tool and Live Well Kent Services.
- Suicide prevention – ongoing targeted promotion of Release the Pressure helpline and text service.
- Children's mental health and wellbeing - support and sharing of Headstart Kent, Kooth and partners' campaigns and promotions.
- Smoking cessation campaign – signposting to 'One You Kent' local support services for Stoptober.
- Perinatal Mental Health – a brand new helpline service available to families either planning to have children or adjusting to life after having had children.

### **3.2 Mental Health and Wellbeing – Release the Pressure and Every Mind Matters**

3.2.1 KCC Public Health has ongoing promotion of the suicide prevention 'Release the Pressure' campaign through Google Adwords. Targeted mobile adverts have also been used in areas of concern identified by the Suicide Prevention leads. Paid-for promotion in December 2023 saw an increase of 18% in calls to the Mental Health Matters helpline.

### **3.3 Adult Obesity - One You Kent/Better Health (healthy weight services)**

3.3.1 A countywide campaign in January 2024 focused on physical activity and healthy eating including meals on a budget with adverts targeted to key areas identified by Public Health leads. Reach exceeded 1.5million across social media and news channels with 35,000 'engagements' which means people actively clicked on links or searched for further information or advice. There were over 10,000 page views of [www.kent.gov.uk/healthyweight](http://www.kent.gov.uk/healthyweight) during January 2024 –an increase on this time last year by nearly 3000. This should lead to an increase in weight-management referrals to our commissioned providers – more information will be reported once data has been received.

3.3.2 Partners were encouraged to share the campaign through their own channels to increase reach and engagement. KCC's Marketing and Resident Experience (MRX) Team continue to join the multi-agency communications group set up as subgroup workstream for the Whole Systems Obesity Approach.

### **3.4 Alcohol Reduction – 'Know Your Score' online tool promotion app**

3.4.1 We supported Alcohol Awareness Week in July 2023 with a campaign promotion of the 'Know Your Score' online tool at [www.kent.gov.uk/knowyourscore](http://www.kent.gov.uk/knowyourscore). Evaluation reports showed a reach of over 300,000 social media accounts across Kent and the Know Your Score page had an increased number of visits from this time last year, from 17,000 to just under 21,000 visits.

3.4.2 Drugs and alcohol services provide invaluable support to people in Kent. In order to improve residents' awareness of the services available in their area, KCC is bringing together commissioners, providers and local voluntary sector partners to develop an online hub for information and support, including vital referral pathways.

### **3.5 Child Obesity - Change 4 Life/Better Health Families**

3.5.1 We continue to support national campaigns locally – raising awareness of childhood obesity by focusing on primary school aged children. This includes local promotion of the new 'Healthy Steps' email programme.

3.5.2 Locally we continue to promote key messages around healthy eating, reducing sugar, being more active and awareness of dental/oral health care through the @BetterHealthFamiliesKent Facebook page.

3.5.3 We encourage KCC's Children's Centres, the Kelsi school bulletin and partners to share content through their own channels.

### **3.6 Smoking Cessation (plus Vaping and Young People)**

3.6.1 We promoted One You Kent commissioned support services for Stoptober in October. Channels used included Facebook advertising, Spotify and Google Adwords. The total number of impressions (number of times the campaign material was seen) was around 1.6 million, and the number of individual accounts reached by the campaign was just over 200,000.

3.6.2 Key messages focused on the physical and mental health harms of smoking plus the financial impact and the quitting benefits to these. The call-to-action signposted people to [www.kent.gov.uk/smokefree](http://www.kent.gov.uk/smokefree) where there is information of One You Kent support services plus self-help tools including the NHS Quit Plan app.

3.6.3 KCC supported the national government “Stop the Start” campaign and its smoke free ambitions with some high profile PR, welcoming the additional funding and highlighting the continued issue of smoking still being the leading cause of avoidable death in the UK.

3.6.4 A Swap to Stop campaign is planned for May 2024, targeting the most vulnerable communities who are most affected by smoking.

### **3.7 Perinatal mental health**

3.7.1 Targeted promotion of the new helpline available to new or expectant mums and dads included using hospital TV screens, radio advertising and targeted social media ads to people searching for mental health advice in pregnancy.

## **4. Winter Preparedness Campaign and Cold Weather Alerts**

4.1 KCC has a “warn and inform” responsibility during extreme weather and leads on the communications for public health messaging. We also support national government and NHS campaigns, providing partners with appropriate social media, marketing, and digital assets during a yellow, amber or red Cold Weather alert, offering advice and signposting support to enable residents to manage their health during extreme weather conditions.

4.2 Messaging this year incorporates the new alerting system for winter weather and supports the UKHSA national campaign.

4.3 A full toolkit of communications materials including video clips and social media assets are ready for sharing in the event of a cold weather alert, through KCC communications platforms, internally to directorates such as social care and education plus key partners and stakeholders.

## **5. Family Hub programme**

5.1 The Start for Life programme is an integral part of the new Family Hub model, offering families and young people a place to come for supported advice and information across the county. Marketing and promotion activity plays a key role

in helping families understand how and where they can access the right support at the right time. Work continues to support the roll out of Family Hubs with MRX leading the brand development work and the promotion of the programme on and offline. The perinatal mental health helpline is the first branded Family Hub campaign to go live and offers new and expectant mums and dads a phone line to call for any mental health support they need.

5.2 New campaigns are planned for 2024/2025 around parent/infant relationship development, as well as other Start for Life initiatives within the Family Hub programme.

## **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 The allocated funding for campaign and marketing activity in 2023/2024 is £110,000 and spend is on track to fully commit all of the budget to campaigns and marketing activity.

## **7. Conclusion and Next Steps**

7.1 We continue to develop key public health communications activity based on priorities identified by the Director of Public Health. These include:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing – adults and children
- Family Hub programme roll out.
- Perinatal mental health and wellbeing
- Parent and infant relationships
- Obesity – adults and children
- Smoking and vaping
- Alcohol
- Health Checks and high blood pressure
- Immunisations and infectious disease outbreaks
- Sexual Health
- Breastfeeding and infant feeding
- Seasonal health – heatwave and winter

7.2 Previous successes and learning will be integrated into future campaigns, focusing on the most effective communication methods and channels to target key groups and issue areas, as well as on the benefits of developing and utilising both social media and digital platforms.

7.3 It has long been recognised that for long-term change requires long-term, consistent messaging, and it is important to continue working with local partners and nationally with the UKHSA to create and deliver consistent public health campaigns and marketing activity.

## **8. Recommendation**

8.1 Recommendation: The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the progress and impact of public health communications and campaigns in 2023/2024 and the need to continue to deliver throughout 2024/2025.

**9. Background Documents**

None

**10. Report Authors**

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