

Climate Change, the greatest threat to Public Health; Establishing Climate Leadership in North Yorkshire.

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BACKGROUND

Climate change has been recognised as the greatest threat to Public Health ⁽¹⁾ but also the greatest opportunity to redefine social and environmental determinants of health. Climate change is an emergency with multiple adverse consequences that will worsen health inequalities. Climate change will directly influence health from changing exposure to heat and cold, air pollution, increases in food- and water-borne infections and emerging infectious diseases, to disruption to services and flooding ⁽²⁾.

“Tackling social inequalities in health and tackling climate change must go together”

Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review, 2010

North Yorkshire Council adopted their Climate Change Strategy in July 2023. The strategy outlines how North Yorkshire Council will respond to the climate emergency by Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Preparing for the climate changing, and Supporting nature to thrive. The strategy has four component areas:

- Mitigation – reducing North Yorkshires Emissions
- Adaptation – preparing North Yorkshire for Climate Impacts
- Supporting nature – helping the natural world, on which we depend, to thrive
- North Yorkshire Council becoming a climate responsible council

This development of the new council strategy and structures provided the opportunity to develop public health practice locally and health in all policy through a climate co-benefits approach.

The North Yorkshire Health and Adult Services Climate Action Plan and complementary Public Health Climate Action plan advocates for climate and health to be embedded into all practice. The action plans provide clear direction to support our ambitions to protect and prevent excess mortality and morbidity from the changing climate in North Yorkshire and beyond. The plans aim to provide tangible opportunities to move the climate agenda forwards and reduce our impact on our planet, people and professionals.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop a clear way forward for public health action at a local authority level to address climate change
- To establish health at the heart of climate discussions throughout the local authority and ensure that the health messages are understood and embedded into all policy moving forwards
- To ensure that the public health workforce locally have an understanding of climate change, their role in it, and begin to move towards improvement focused on a climate-co-benefit approach

REFERENCES

1. The Lancet <https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate>
2. WHO <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Climate%20change%20affects%20the%20social,malaria%2C%20diarrhoea%20and%20heat%20stress>



LOCAL ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

- Establishing leads for climate change within public health through a Public Health Consultant and Public Health Manager enabled capacity to be focused on development of clear local plans and implementation.
- Developed in collaboration with core public health team members leading on key areas of enables existing work priorities and strategies to be streamlined and changes the focus of existing work without changing direction, giving opportunity for climate consideration in day-to-day work.

- The plan sets out the actions we will take to:

1. Develop the evidence base and data

- ✓ Develop a clear evidence base for Climate Change and Health using existing literature, our own research, and national policy to inform a Joint strategic needs assessment to look at the current and future climate and health picture
- ✓ Ensure that health inequalities and the wider determinants of health is embedded into all our work on climate and will provide leadership and advocacy to partners to achieve the same

2. Address the wide range of health impacts

- Health Impacts from high temperatures
- Health impacts of flooding
- Skin cancer/exposure to UV light
- Increased burden on health system
- Health impacts of poor air quality/ozone
- Infectious diseases
- Deaths and injuries from severe weather events
- Health impacts of migration
- Risks to food and water security
- Increased outdoor activity

3. Strengthen climate resilience and sustainability of the local health system

- ✓ Strengthen partnership working and resilience within our communities and stakeholders and ensure to only practice climate sensitive commissioning and procurement activity
- ✓ Conduct climate change impact assessments for all activity undertaken within the team
- ✓ Continue to work with local and regional partners and develop the climate change in all policies approach to ensure that climate change is the responsibility of every member of the team

4. Promote the health co-benefits of climate change in all policy

- ✓ We will use language to develop a positive, clear narrative around the future we want, using behavioural science to understand barriers and levers to change in key communities and maximise health improvement co-benefits through climate change action
- Beneath the four broad objectives within the action plan are 71 individual actions spanning the breadth of public health practice which provide specific details on the actions we will take, and future priorities.
- Three one hour training sessions were developed and delivered to the Public Health team in July 2023 to share evidence and bring everyone up to the same level of understanding with more than 1/3 colleagues attending each session. Post-session evaluation showed levels of understanding and confidence increase in all attendees.
- We have become trusted voices throughout the authority and delivered training and awareness raising sessions to other key areas including Planning, and Health and Adult Services colleagues.
 - This has enabled health and climate to be at the core of other key policy development within the new authority including embedding within the new Local Plan
- We continue to advocate for a health in all climate policy approach within the authority and embed the Climate Action Plan. We will now ensure the board produces climate positive outcomes and embed practice within all professionals throughout the directorate. We will continue to capitalise on opportunities brought by the new authority to improve and transform policy development and retrospectively.