

Foreword

The message in a nutshell

Halton is a great place to live and work. This report is about preventing ill health and promoting positive health, so that those who live or work in Halton can live longer and stay well. It is the first Public Health Report that has been produced since the creation of Halton Primary Care Trust. Before 2002, the Director of Public Health for North Cheshire Health Authority, Dr Paula Grey, produced Public Health Reports.

The Public Health Report is addressed to people who live or work in Halton. The purpose of the report is to summarise the main health challenges facing Halton, and to suggest what we should do now to improve our own health. More importantly, the report suggests what we should do now so that our children and grand children can grow up to live healthy and long lives.

The Halton Health Study was published twelve months ago

This Public Health Report is published about twelve months after the Lancaster Health Study in Halton. That Study was commissioned because many local health indicators were worse than we would expect just from Halton's social profile. Some people put this down to environmental pollution from Halton's industrial past, but the Health Study findings suggested that our life style choices are more important.

I have not repeated the study findings here: it remains a very important piece of evidence in understanding health in Halton, and is available on the Borough Council web site as a summary or full document (at halton.gov.uk - or simply type **Halton Health Study** into a web "search engine"). Local libraries have copies, and they can still be made available through the Primary Care Trust or Halton's Direct Link centres. The Borough Council, Halton Strategic Partnership and the Health and Community Care Forum are responding to the study recommendations on how best to improve health.

This Public Health Report is about what we can do to improve future health and well being, not about the past.

What is in this Public Health Report

There is too much information on local health and well being, and too much evidence about what makes a difference, to try to cover everything in a single report. Instead, I have chosen to start with a case study on why I believe that we should put more effort and resources than we do into the prevention of illness. Of course, the resource for prevention has to come from somewhere, and each reader will have their own idea of where funds should come from. The case study, using the example of heart disease, is in chapter one.

Chapter 2 is important: here I have suggested a local interpretation of the Chief Medical Officer's "Ten Tips" for better health. I have tried to emphasise positive things we can all do to improve our own well being, and to help others be healthy. All of these tips are based on sound scientific evidence...I don't apologise for repeating an example here: every portion of fruit or vegetables eaten daily will decrease a person's heart disease risk by 5%.

I am very pleased to include a local children's "take" on these ten tips in Chapter 17.

In chapter 3, I have given an overview of the big government theme on improving health in England today: tackling health inequalities. A much fuller discussion of this topic is in Halton's Health Equity Profile, which is being published at the same time as this report.

Chapters 4 to 15 contain information about a range of other health problems that affect people in Halton: such as accidents, cancers and problems due to alcohol. It is not possible to include everything, and I hope that further reports will be possible during coming months to cover other areas of importance. I also want to use future reports to develop one or two of the themes that are started in this report. For example, kidney disease in Halton is commoner than some other parts of the North West, and this merits some further work.

This is a very big task. One report cannot provide all the information that people might want, or that is available. So each chapter has a section at the end on where to find out more. I also hope that we will be able to develop the health pages of the Borough Council web site to include links to a wide range of relevant health information, and to strengthen the health information sections of our local libraries.

Recommendations

We are awash with recommendations on how to improve health in Halton:

- From the NHS, we have National Service Frameworks and National Plans that set milestones and targets for effective prevention, treatment and care
- In the Halton Health Study, we have a series of 21 recommendations on how to improve health and well being in Halton
- In Halton's Community Strategy, we have a smaller number of strategic health targets
- In the Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2003, there are 21 excellent health targets

In this report I have stuck to **three** strategic recommendations. **Firstly**, the ten tips on health are addressed to everyone who lives or works in Halton. It should be clear from the rest of the report what a

huge difference could be made if we put these into practice. **Secondly**, I have made some recommendations about how we can make sure that we don't neglect prevention, such as "ring fencing" resources. **Lastly** I have suggested what future Public Health Reports should look at. These recommendations are in chapter 2 (the ten tips for health) and chapter 17.

Choosing Health: the new public health white paper from the government

The Choosing Health white paper was published late in November 2004. The white paper describes the government's strategy to tackle many of the health issues that are in this Public Health Report, especially sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol problems, obesity and smoking. Halton has been chosen as one of 88 "spearhead" areas to test out three ideas: personal health trainers, personal health guides for children, and additional services to help smokers quit. As we go to press, we are waiting for more information about what this will mean in practice, and whether any new resources will be forthcoming.

The white paper is available from the Department of Health, and on the DH web site at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>. Or type **Choosing Health Summary** into an Internet search engine.

