



Department  
of Health

From Jane Ellison MP  
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Dear Duncan

## **PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND STRATEGIC REMIT & PRIORITIES**

I would like to thank all the people in PHE who have worked so hard and successfully over the past year to protect and improve the public's health.

This letter sets out the role that the Government expects Public Health England (PHE) to play in the health and care system. It also highlights the priorities of PHE in the period from April 2016 to March 2017.

### **PHE's role**

PHE is the expert national public health agency which fulfils the Secretary of State for Health's statutory duties to protect health and address health inequalities, and executes the Secretary of State's power to promote the health and wellbeing of the nation. PHE undertakes a range of evidence-based activities that span the full breadth of public health, working locally, nationally and globally, and is responsible for four critical functions.

1. PHE's first function is to fulfil the Secretary of State's duty to **protect the public's health** from infectious diseases and other public health hazards, working with the NHS, local government and other key partners in England but also working with the Devolved Administrations and globally where appropriate. This means providing the national infrastructure for health protection including: an integrated surveillance system; providing specialist services, such as diagnostic and reference microbiology, and developing the application of genomic technologies; investigation and management of outbreaks of infectious diseases and environmental hazards; ensuring effective emergency preparedness, resilience and response for health emergencies, including global health security and work on antimicrobial resistance; acting as the focal point for the UK on the International Health Regulations; evaluating the effectiveness of the immunisation programme and procuring and supplying vaccines.
2. PHE's next function is to secure **improvements to the public's health, including supporting the system to reduce health inequalities** and to deliver From Evidence into Action and the Five Year Forward View commitments to a radical

upgrade in prevention. It should do this through its own actions and by supporting Government, local government, the NHS and the public to secure the greatest gains in physical and mental health. PHE will promote healthy lifestyles, provide evidence-based, professional, scientific and delivery expertise and advice, develop data, information resources and tools (particularly on return on investment and value for money) and support the system to meet legal duties to improve the public's health and reduce health inequalities.

3. PHE has a key role in **improving population health through sustainable health and care services** through, for example: promoting the evidence on public health interventions and analysing future demand to help shape future services; working with NHS England on effective preventative strategies and early diagnosis; providing national co-ordination and quality assurance of screening programmes, the introduction of new programmes and the extension of existing programmes; running national data collections for a range of conditions, including cancer and rare diseases; and providing data analyses which support the NHS in improving services and outcomes.
4. PHE should also ensure the public health system maintains the **capability and capacity** to tackle today's public health challenges and is prepared for the emerging challenges of the future, both nationally and internationally. This will mean: undertaking, contributing to, and supporting research and development; supporting and developing a skilled public health workforce; supporting local government to improve the performance of its functions; providing the professional advice, expertise and public health evidence to support the development of public policies to have the best impact on improving health and reducing health inequalities; and collecting, quality assuring and publishing timely, user friendly high quality information on important public health topics and public health outcomes.

### **How PHE should perform its role**

As an Executive Agency of the Department of Health (DH) with operational autonomy, the Government expects PHE to be an authoritative voice on public health and acknowledges that this can include constructive mutual challenge between PHE and national Government, as set out in PHE's Framework Agreement:

*“PHE is therefore free to publish or speak on issues relating to the nation's health and wellbeing in order to set out the professional, scientific and objective judgement of the evidence-base. Ministers will remain responsible and accountable for policy decisions”.*

PHE has a vital public health system leadership role. This has been particularly important in supporting the transition of public health responsibilities to local

government; and will continue to evolve as we consult on changes to future local government public health funding, and as local government and devolution settlements start to impact locally.

This will require PHE to develop its future role, with a very clear focus on providing the support, information and advice needed locally. In particular, it will mean PHE as a system leader:

- developing its integral role in supporting local government to take advantage of the significant opportunities offered by devolution to improve health, tackle the wider causes of ill health and reduce health inequalities, and demonstrate how it acts on feedback from key local government “customers” to provide the support they need;
- furthering its role in implementing the NHS Five Year Forward View, alongside From Evidence into Action, to realise the radical upgrade in prevention that is necessary, particularly on closing the health, financial and quality gaps, and supporting an NHS that embeds prevention in all that it does;
- supporting a whole system approach to tackling preventable ill health, working within the context of a strategic “one government” approach domestically and globally;
- developing the evidence on effective interventions to reduce health inequalities and supporting the system to interpret and implement those interventions with the greatest impact to close the gap on health inequalities;
- working to support the development of the wider public health system, including ensuring the current and future excellence of the workforce, supporting Directors of Public Health in their local leadership role, and delivering savings and prioritising activities with the greatest impact on the public’s health in order to support improved value for money;
- working as effectively and efficiently as possible across the public health system including DH, local government, the NHS and others to maintain due accountability and oversight and where appropriate supporting wider public health delivery;
- strengthening its organisational capability as well as its long-term sustainability and resilience; and
- reshaping its working arrangements with teams in DH, especially in light of the collective need for greater efficiencies, so that responsibilities are clear, working

methods are efficient and capabilities are matched to expectations across the full range of its activities.

### **Priorities for 2016/17**

The DH Shared Delivery Plan (SDP) sets out the Government's delivery priorities for the health and care system over the next four years. It has a number of commitments, covering PHE's core functions, on which PHE will either lead or support delivery. Taken as a whole, this will make an important contribution to the Government's vision for measureable and sustained reductions in health inequalities.

PHE's Strategic and annual Business Plan reflects the SDP, the Five Year Forward View, From Evidence into Action and the priorities highlighted in this letter, as well as other key programmes of work that are critical to improving public health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. The annual Business Plan clearly sets this out in terms of PHE's leadership and support to international partners, national and local government, the NHS, the public as well as to PHE staff.

The Government expects PHE to deliver all the relevant SDP priorities, with particular focus on the following **public health priorities** in 2016/17:

PHE will support the national response to the risk and harm from infectious diseases and environmental hazards, as well as addressing global threats to public health, by:

- leading implementation of the domestic health elements of the UK Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Strategy in England, by specifically supporting in 2016/17 the implementation of the CQUIN and QoF payments and development of local system action plans;
- working with Government and NHS England to develop a joint programme of work and production of plans for the public health system's response to high consequence infectious disease incidents – expect to be completed in 2017/18 with interim outputs throughout 2016/17;
- working, as part of one HMG strategy on global health, to strengthen global health activities on infectious disease, environmental hazards, health improvement and to support the development of public health systems specifically by:
  1. establishing the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team to support international response to outbreaks and emergencies;
  2. drawing on Official Development Assistance funding to support relevant activities to build public health capacity and expertise in developing economies, such as Sierra Leone and Pakistan;

- continuing to develop the resilience of PHE's scientific response to the threats to the public's health through on-going scientific advances (including PHE's role in the next steps of the 100,000 Genome programme) and contributing to preparedness by revising PHE's incident response plan and running national simulations such as Exercise Cygnus.

To secure the greatest gains in health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities and demand on NHS services, PHE will support the Government, local government and the NHS to build healthy communities and support people to make healthier choices across the life course, making the case for prevention and early intervention with a focus on:

- enabling England to become the first country in the world to significantly reduce childhood obesity, including contributing to the delivery of the Government's Childhood Obesity Strategy (due to be published this summer) and the development of the sugary drinks levy;
- reducing the gap between people with mental health problems, and the population as a whole, including children and young people. PHE alongside local and national partners will take forward the recommendations of the Mental Health Taskforce, in particular, the development of a national Mental Health Prevention Concordat programme by Summer 2017 and support delivery of the national suicide prevention strategy, including supporting all local areas to have multi-agency suicide prevention plans in place by 2017;
- supporting achievement of world-class cancer outcomes, in line with the recommendations in the Cancer Task Force report, PHE will contribute to the all 'Arms Length Body' cancer implementation plan and then deliver those actions for PHE, including continuing to deliver the Be Clear on Cancer campaigns;
- improving sexual health services, PHE will work with the Association for Directors' of Public Health, using the findings from the recent sexual health survey, outcomes data and other relevant information, to support the commissioning of services locally;
- supporting the local transformation of maternity services in England, PHE will lead the public health and prevention workstream of the Maternity Transformation Programme, including maximising the public health contribution to the national maternity ambition to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths and intrapartum brain injuries by 2030; and
- supporting people to make healthier lifestyle choices, specifically through the refreshed Change4Life programme and maximise the impact on the public's health

of 40-60 healthy lifestyle campaign (One You) to inspire and support positive behaviour change.

Alongside this, PHE will work with the NHS and local government to seek to improve population health through evidence-based sustainable health and care services in order to:

- provide the NHS and local government with the public health evidence, intelligence, knowledge and analysis, to support and review the development of local Sustainability and Transformation Plans by end of June 2016, and support local implementation including proposals to release £0.5bn of efficiency savings to the NHS by 2020;
- expand and improve the world-class screening and immunisation programmes, in particular, complete the roll-out of the bowel scope screening programme, extend the screening intervals in the diabetic eye programme and expand flu vaccination to all children aged 2,3 and 4 and school years 1,2 and 3;
- support commissioning of public health services for children aged 0-5, in particular, review mandated universal health visitor reviews by Autumn 2016, assess the benefits of the expanded and transformed health visitor service and support local government to ensure effective integration of early years services to improve outcomes for children and families;
- maximise the benefits of the national health checks programme, and enable at least 10,000 people to benefit from the Diabetes Prevention Programme, working in partnership with NHS England and Diabetes UK; and
- work with DH and local authorities to develop new accountability arrangements which reflect the proposed move from the existing ring-fenced public health grant to new funding mechanisms.

To enable the delivery of the public health priorities now and in future, PHE will support the development of the public health and NHS systems as a whole, ensuring access to best evidence and analysis, including its intelligence networks to plan services and assess outcomes, to:

- play a full and active role in maximising the potential of devolution deals to improve health outcomes, as demonstrated by Greater Manchester and London, and reduce health inequalities by sharing best practice from a range of localities;

- contribute to the development and implementation of a new public health workforce strategy, building on the thematic review carried out in 2015/16, to develop and sustain a workforce that is fit for the future; and
- further strengthen the UK Public Health infrastructure by progressing the Science Hub programme to create a national centre of expertise for public health science, focusing on key milestones in 2017/18 of full business case and town planning.

### **Evidence Reviews**

PHE has an important role in **reviewing and publishing the evidence** and supporting scientific expert committees, to allow faster progress on improving the public's health. The Government will continually assess this requirement in-year.

The Government has commissioned PHE to review the evidence and provide advice to Ministers on the estimated number of children likely to be affected by the drug or alcohol use of their parents, and provide advice to national and local government on where action could have the greatest impact on improving life chances.

PHE will also complete work on the previously commissioned evidence review on the public health impacts of alcohol.

### **Work across Government**

In fulfilling the recommendation from the National Audit Office's recommendation to set out a strategy to influence Whitehall, PHE has established a cross government engagement strategy. In keeping with this strategic focus, PHE will make an important contribution to the development of a number of wider **Government strategies** in 2016/17, in particular on:

- reducing the disability employment gap and to increase the number of disabled people in work;
- strengthening the life chances of disadvantaged children and families;
- tackling illegal drugs;
- improving air quality, including support for implementation of the Government's Air Quality Plans;
- strengthening the tobacco control plan; and
- biosecurity, to address the threat of natural disease outbreaks, as well as the less likely threat of biological materials being used in a deliberate attack.

PHE should work closely with DH in engaging across Government, reflecting the individual and collective responsibilities and accountability of Ministers' for making policy decisions.

### **Reporting on success**

The Government looks to PHE to drive real progress in protecting and improving the nation's health and reducing health inequalities and will hold it to account for doing so. PHE is accountable to the Secretary of State for Health and the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Public Health for delivering or supporting delivery of these priorities.

The priorities set out in this letter, alongside the full range of relevant SDP priorities, will inform the development of PHE's Strategic and annual Business Plan and the reporting that underpins the accountability relationship between DH and PHE. Progress against agreed deliverables will be reviewed regularly as part of formal assurance arrangements, allowing progress to be monitored and action taken to address any risks to delivery. PHE will also share and seek feedback from stakeholders on its planned list of products and services and keep these under review.

To ensure a focus on improvements in healthy life expectancy and reductions in health inequalities over time, PHE will continue to report transparently on health outcomes and on progress across the Public Health Outcomes Framework. In recognition of the need for more timely information to support planning and action locally, PHE will look to report shorter-term public health data.

*Kind regards*  
*Jane Ellison*

**JANE ELLISON**