



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Steve Brine MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care*

*39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU*

Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive  
Public Health England  
Wellington House  
133-155 Waterloo Road  
London  
SE1 8UG

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Dear Duncan,

Public Health England (PHE) is entering its sixth year and I would like to congratulate all the people in PHE who have worked so hard and successfully in building a national public health agency of global standing during this period. Recent events have underlined the importance of and reliance on PHE's scientific expertise and ability to deliver essential public health functions in emergencies. Thank you for your continued work to protect and improve the public's health.

This letter sets out PHE's role across the health and care system, how PHE should perform that role, the Government's priorities of PHE from April 2018 to March 2019, and reporting arrangements.

### **PHE's role**

As an Executive Agency of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) with operational autonomy, the Government expects PHE, as set out in the Framework Agreement, to be an authoritative voice on public health. PHE's scientists, public health professionals and operational experts provide expert knowledge, information and a strong credible evidence base to support local and national services, inform Government policy, improve outcomes and protect the health of the nation.

PHE's role will continue to evolve as Government takes forward changes to future local government public health funding arrangements, as we achieve greater integration between the NHS, social care and public health, and as devolution deals develop.



Alongside DHSC, and the Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) across the health and care system, PHE has a key role in supporting the system to maintain and improve outcomes and to live within its means. In this time of financial and operational challenge, it is therefore vital all ALBs, including PHE, deliver their remit as part of their overall responsibilities as system leaders, within available resources.

PHE's Business Plan will reflect the NHS Five Year Forward View, PHE's Strategic Plan and the priorities highlighted in this letter, as well as other programmes of work that are critical to improving public health outcomes and reducing health inequalities.

More detail on PHE's role, and how PHE will provide leadership across the system, is set out at Annex A.

### **Priorities for 2018/19**

In 2018/19, the Government expects PHE to focus in particular on implementation of the following **public health priorities**.

1. *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, with a particular focus on:*
  - 1a. **Global Health** – support the one-HMG approach to global health, working closely with DHSC and the Department for International Development on agreed priorities, including the global health security agenda; and respond to emerging threats, specifically delivering the UK-Public Health Rapid Support Team work plan in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the International Health Regulations Strengthening Project.
  - 1b. **Antimicrobial Resistance** – support the Government's goal to slow the growth of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) by continuing work on surveillance and contributing to the human health aspects of the revision of the AMR strategy and supporting NHS Improvement and NHS England in delivering on Gram negative bloodstream infections and of reducing inappropriate prescribing including better use of diagnostics, respectively.
  - 1c. **Genomics** – support the Government's strategy on genomic technologies in healthcare by contributing to the 100,000 Genomes project and delivering the PHE-led recommendations in the Chief Medical Officer's Generation Genome report and the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy.



- 1d. **Pollution** – with DHSC, respond to the PHE-led recommendations in the *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, Health Impacts of All Pollution – what do we know?*.
  
2. *To secure the greatest gains in health and wellbeing, 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, with a particular focus on:*
  - 2a. **Best Start in Life** – work with local government, the NHS and health professionals to drive improvements in outcomes at scale with a particular focus on infant mortality, child health speech, language and communication needs and school readiness; lead delivery of the year 2 prevention workstream within the Maternity Transformation Programme, leading and supporting prevention initiatives designed to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes and reduce health inequalities, in support of the national maternity safety ambition, across the local NHS and local government.
  
  - 2b. **Childhood Obesity** – deliver the agreed programme of work to significantly reduce childhood obesity, including sugar reduction and total calorie reduction programmes; support local delivery of the childhood obesity plan, including by the wider public health workforce, and working with industry, schools, local government and the NHS; and continue work to reduce salt intake within the population.
  
  - 2c. **Health Inequalities** – support national and local action to improve the health of the poorest fastest, working in partnership with DHSC and its ALBs, other government departments, the Local Government Association, local government, the NHS and other relevant bodies; focused specifically on supporting progress on inequalities in cardiovascular disease, obesity and cancer.
  
  - 2d. **Alcohol** – deliver a programme of work to reduce alcohol related harm in line with cross-government priorities and support DHSC to address the needs of children living with alcohol dependent parents.



- 2e. **Mental Health** – promote good mental health, prevent mental health problems and improve the lives of people living with and recovering from mental illness; specifically engage 1 million people on how to take care of their own mental health and the mental health of others; and continue to deliver the PHE-led commitments on mental health from the Five Year Forward View.
- 2f. **Smoking** – implement the PHE-led commitments in the Government’s Tobacco Control Delivery Plan.
- 2g. **Sexual and reproductive Health** – support the commissioning and delivery of services, focusing on helping delivery organisations reduce the variation in outcomes for reproductive, sexually transmitted infection and HIV services across England; and support NHS England in their PrEP Impact Trial.
- 2h. **Improving Work and Health Outcomes** – support improved health and wellbeing by helping people to enter, return to and stay in work, delivering the commitments set out in ‘Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability’ and ‘Thriving at Work’ Stevenson Farmer review on mental health and employers and support the development of an employers’ network.
3. *PHE will work with the NHS and local government to seek to reduce inequalities and demand on NHS services, improve population health through evidence-based sustainable health and care services, making use of behavioural science and innovative digital approaches, with a particular focus on:*
  - 3a. **Prevention** – provide advice and support to NHS England, NHS Improvement and local government on the implementation of preventative interventions at scale, focusing in particular on high-risk cardiovascular conditions, obesity and cancer, on reducing health inequalities in these areas and on optimising access to and follow-up of the NHS Health Check.
  - 3b. **Screening and immunisation** – improve the world-class screening and immunisation programmes, including supporting the implementation of the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT), supporting planning and delivery of an optimal flu vaccination programme, and national roll out of the human papillomavirus vaccination programme for men having sex with men.



- 3c. **NHS planning** – support and inform a focus on population health, as part of national and local work on new models of care; and continue to support the implementation of public health related CQUINs, including those on alcohol, tobacco, AMR, sepsis and mental health.
4. *To enable the delivery of public health priorities now and in future, PHE will support the development of the public health and NHS system as a whole, with a particular focus on:*
- 4a. **Transparency to improve Outcomes** – support better planning and commissioning of public health services by providing greater transparency on data and through appropriate tools, including the Local Authority Public Health Dashboard; lead a refresh of the 2016-2019 Public Health Outcomes Framework; and develop modelling capability and the range of tools and resources to underpin the economic case for prevention at both a national and local level.
- 4b. **Local Authority Public Health Funding** – with DHSC, develop an appropriate future assurance framework for the public health system, alongside other developments in local government financing.
- 4c. **Public Health Workforce** – build capability in public health by continuing to implement priority recommendations in “Fit for the Future”, and through succession planning to build public health leadership now and in future.
- 4d. **PHE Harlow** – invest in the future public health scientific infrastructure by progressing the Government Major Project, including workforce transition planning, to create a national centre of expertise for public health science.
- 4e. **Leaving the EU** – as part of the Government’s objective of ensuring a smooth and orderly exit from, and agreeing a new, deep and special partnership with the EU, support DHSC and the Government on negotiations with the EU; and to ensure day one readiness for the continuity of health protection and security, and where appropriate, health improvement.



## Work across Government

In fulfilling its role to improve the public's health, PHE will make important contributions to the development and implementation of a number of government programmes in 2018/19, particularly through work to:

- make agreed contributions to cross-government initiatives on the environment, including the **Clean Air Plan**, and implementation of public health recommendations in the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs **25 Year Plan to improve the environment**. Support the revision of the **National Adaptation Programme for climate change**;
- assist local authorities to deliver the Home Office programmes to tackle **child sexual abuse and exploitation**; and support the public health and criminal justice system to implement the Home Office's **Drugs Strategy**; and
- inform and support action on **gambling related harm** as part of the follow up to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport-led **review of gaming machines and social responsibility**.

## 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 and PHE will assess this requirement in-year.

DHSC has commissioned PHE to review the:

- evidence for **effective air quality interventions** and provide practical recommendations for actions to improve air quality, stratified by their health and economic impacts;
- scale and distribution of **prescription drug dependence**, and the optimal means of reducing it; and
- impact on **migrant public health** and health-seeking behaviour arising from the disclosure of administrative data.



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### **Reporting and variation**

PHE is accountable to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care for delivering or supporting delivery of these priorities. Progress against agreed deliverables will be reviewed regularly, including through formal assurance arrangements with the Director General of Global and Public Health, allowing progress to be monitored and action taken to address any risks to delivery. These assurance arrangements also provide a mechanism for agreeing any in-year adjustment of priorities and deliverables.

**STEVE BRINE**





## Annex A

### PHE's role

PHE is the expert national public health agency which fulfils the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care'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 internationally, and is responsible for four critical functions.

- 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 partners in England, and 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; developing, translating and exploiting public health science, including developing the application of genomic technologies; work to address antimicrobial resistance; 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; acting as the focal point for the UK on the International Health Regulations; and evaluating the effectiveness of the immunisation programme and procuring and supplying vaccines.
- **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 for 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, and help achieve a financially sustainable health and care system. 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.





- **Improve population health by supporting 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 immunisation and 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; contributing to the 100,000 genomes project; and supporting local government and the NHS with access to high quality data and providing data analyses to improve services and outcomes.
- 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 research and development and working with partners from the public, academic and private sectors to improve the research landscape for public health; supporting and developing a skilled workforce for public health; 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**

PHE has a vital public health system leadership role. This is reinforced by PHE's 2017/18 stakeholder review which highlighted that PHE is an evidence based and credible organisation providing vital health protection functions and making a critical contribution through intelligence and data. The review underlined the need for PHE to play a part in shaping system changes and new models of care such as STPs.

The Government expects PHE to develop its role with a very clear focus on providing the evidence, support and advice needed locally, nationally and internationally. As the Framework Agreement between DHSC and PHE sets out:

*“PHE shall be free to publish and speak out on those issues which relate to the nation's health and wellbeing in order to set out the professional, scientific and objective judgement of the evidence base. ... Ministers remain responsible and accountable for policy decisions.”*



PHE's role requires it to demonstrate expertise in the fields on behavioural science and consumer behaviour, the creation of innovative digital platforms and trialling new approaches. In particular, it will mean PHE as a system leader:

- supporting local government, informed by information on outcomes and return on investment, to support improvements to health, tackle the wider causes of ill health and reduce health inequalities; and demonstrate how it acts on feedback from local government to provide the support it needs;
- furthering its role in implementing the NHS Five Year Forward View, 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 protecting the health of the nation, working within the context of a strategic “one government” approach globally;
- developing the evidence on effective interventions to reduce health inequalities and supporting the system, including local government and the NHS, to interpret and implement those interventions with the greatest impact;
- developing, translating and exploiting public health science to protect and improve people's health, including working with partners from the public, academic and private sectors to improve the research landscape for public health;
- supporting the development of the wider public health system, now and in the future, including the current and future 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 to maintain due accountability and oversight, including through the provision of authoritative and accessible evidence, data and advice on system performance;
- continually learning from bench-marking information and reviews, including international reviews, to strengthen organisational capability and operational effectiveness as well as long-term sustainability and resilience; and



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- **reshaping working arrangements with teams in DHSC, so that responsibilities are clear, working methods are efficient and capabilities are matched to expectations.**