

29 January 2008

## **Bid to transform health launched**

Ambitious plans to transform the health of the North East will be formally launched by minister for the region Nick Brown later this week.

The area's first ever health and well-being strategy aims to make people living here the healthiest in the country within a generation.

Mr Brown will unveil *Better Health, Fairer Health* to an invited audience in Newcastle on Friday (Feb 1).

The strategy is being led by regional director of public health Dr Stephen Singleton and has been developed following a three-month consultation.

He said: "We received responses from all quarters about whether we should have an ambitious strategy - and they were overwhelmingly positive.

"We are still at an early stage and this is a first edition. It is by no means an end product.

"I have a vision which informs all the actions proposed: The North East will have the best and fairest health and well-being and will be recognised for its outstanding and sustainable quality of life."

Ten key themes have been identified for the 25-year plan:

- economy, culture and environment
- mental health, happiness and well-being
- tobacco
- obesity, diet and physical activity
- alcohol
- prevention, fair and early treatment
- early life
- mature and working life
- later life
- a good death

Specific actions include setting up a regional office for the safe consumption of alcohol based on the highly successful Fresh – Smoke Free North East model.

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The strategy also calls for people to have 'a good death' - free of pain, with family and friends nearby, dignified and in a place of one's choosing.

As part of this there will be an agreement between health and social care providers specifying the level of public sector funding that should be regarded as appropriate in support of terminal care services.

Regional advisory groups will be created from across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to take work forward in all ten areas.

They will be supported by the establishment of a regional public health centre of research excellence, which was announced last week.

The £5 million development is one of five nationally – and the only one based on a substantial regional collaboration.

A regional infrastructure for social marketing in health and health services is being established and this will also support the work that needs to be done.

Mr Brown said: "The health of people living in the North East has been too poor for too long.

"We are consistently top of the health league for all the wrong reasons, partly as a legacy of heavy industry and partly because of our lifestyles.

"It is to the credit of Dr Singleton and his colleagues that they have taken an unrelentingly optimistic approach to what can be achieved – and I look forward to the day when the North East is the healthiest region in the country."

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*Note to editors: An electronic or hard copy of the strategy is available on request.*

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