

**York: The Pandemic Years, Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022**

**Summary**

1. The production of a Director of Public Health Annual Report is a statutory duty set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Every local authority Director of Public Health has a duty to produce an independent annual report in their role as the chief advocate for the health of the local population, and the local authority has a duty to publish it. The council Executive met and agreed the publication of the report on 6 October 2022.
2. In common with many local authorities, there was no annual report produced in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and so this report covers the two year period 2020-2022. The report focuses on the city's response to the pandemic.
3. Directors of Public Health (previously Chief Medical Officers for Health) have been producing annual reports on the state of the health of the population of York for over a century. In this report 'York: The Pandemic Years' we have delved into the city archives and, as we tell the story of COVID-19, we will interweave past and present, reflecting on the story of our most recent pandemic while using the historical narratives of past infectious disease outbreaks, such as the Black Death of 1349.
4. I hope that these stories from the past will resonate with some of the experiences we have lived through over the last two years, and continue to live through to some extent, giving them new meaning.
5. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences and sympathies to all those whose lives have been affected by what has happened during the pandemic.

6. Finally, I want to thank everyone who contributed to the development of the annual report and thank those who will hopefully read it.
7. A copy of the report is attached as an Annex.

## **Background**

8. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our health and care system like never before and alongside it the systems of support we all rely on but perhaps take for granted – those who fill our supermarket shelves, drive our buses, teach our children and other critical workers too numerous to mention.
9. So I want to take the opportunity, here, to thank everyone living or working in York for going above and beyond the call of duty during this difficult period in serving our city and its people in one of our darkest moments.
10. Public Health has found itself a focal point of the city's history in 2020-2022. I remember vividly the call received on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 informing me that the first UK cases of COVID-19 had been identified in York.
11. Playing such a pivotal part in city life is not new to Public Health. Whether through the slum clearances of the early 1900s, improving air pollution in the 1950s, rolling out polio inoculation in the 1960s, tackling the HIV epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s and the modern epidemics of smoking related diseases and obesity, public health issues are never far away from the news.
12. The COVID-19 pandemic thrust the York Public Health Team into the limelight as never before as we lead the city pandemic response navigating lockdowns, social distancing, masks and vaccinations working with our city partners. All of these have historical antecedents in the story of infection in York as we have strived to keep death and disease under control.
13. As the story of COVID-19 unfolds in the report, past and present is interweaved reflecting on the story of our current pandemic while using the historical narratives as a counterpoint.

## Main/Key Issues to be Considered

14. The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020-2022 is structured in such a way that it guides the reader through the three phases of any infectious disease outbreak:
  - a. The **spread**, or the story of an outbreak or pandemic beginning
  - b. The **impact**, or the story of what effect a disease has on the population
  - c. The **control**, or the story of how an outbreak begins to end

The report also tries to capture the **voices** or the story of the lived experience of people living through a pandemic.

15. The report makes four recommendations:
  - a. Public Health should seek to build on the city-wide partnership working relationships developed during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lead the development of a York strategy for 'living with Covid' to be recommended for adoption by all city partners.
  - b. The Director of Public Health to establish a York Health Protection Committee with responsibility for ensuring that the city has the necessary plans in place to respond to large scale events such as future pandemics, disease outbreaks and the health impacts of adverse weather events, learning from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. The York Health Protection Committee to present an annual report to the Health and Wellbeing Board on progress together with recommendations for action.
  - c. Children and Young People in York, and across the country, have been particularly badly affected by the lockdowns and other restrictions over the past two years. The 2022 school survey has identified a number of needs that will have to be addressed if we are to succeed as a city in giving every child and young person the best start in life. It is recommended that the findings of the school survey are used to inform the development of a new Children's Plan for York to be adopted by the Safeguarding Children Board Executive and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

- d. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had wider impacts on the health behaviours of some residents. Alcohol consumption has increased, the number of people reaching recommended levels of physical activity have gone down and many people are struggling with their mental health and extra weight gained during lockdowns. It is recommended that the council's public health team continue to lead an evidence-based approach to tackling these issues across the city working with individuals, families, communities and our partners in focusing our collective efforts on those who need help the most.

### **The 2019 Director of Public Health Annual Report**

16. The 2020-2022 report has a section, starting at page 50, which summarises the work being taken to address the recommendations in the 2019 Director of Public Health Annual Report. These recommendations were based on the life course – starting and growing well, living and working well, ageing well and mental health and are listed below:
  - a. Public Health should work with partners to develop a way of supporting children and young people to engage in physical activity and eat a healthy diet.
  - b. A strategic approach to tackling alcohol misuse should be developed for the city.
  - c. Public Health should continue to work with partners to ensure that the uptake of flu vaccines in the over 65s is increased.
  - d. Undertake work to understand self-harm in York and what can be done to decrease the number of hospital admissions from this cause.
17. Despite the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public health team and our partners, progress has been made in each of these areas and I encourage you to read this section of the 2022 Director of Public Health Annual Report for further information.

### **Consultation**

18. The report is the independent report of the Director of Public Health as required in statutory guidance and no consultation has taken place.

## Options

19. None.

## Strategic/Operational Plans

20. The report is not directly linked to any strategic / operational plans but should seek to influence these.

## Implications

21. There are no specialist implications in this report.

## Risk Management

22. There are no risks associated with this report.

## Recommendations

23. The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to:
- i. Receive the report.
  - ii. Agree to support the recommendations
  - iii. Note the progress being made on the recommendations of the 2019 Director of Public Health Annual Report

Reason: It is a statutory requirement for the Director of Public Health to produce an annual report. The HWBB need to be aware of the recommendations within it.

## Contact Details

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**Wards Affected:** All

**Annexes:**

Annex A - York: The Pandemic Years. Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2020-2022.