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Smoking costs the South East £2.6bn a year – £700m more than previous estimates

Regional and local breakdown available

New economic analysis of national data for ASH finds the cost of smoking to society is significantly higher than previous estimates have shown. Commissioned by charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) the new figures [1] published today [Friday 14th January] show the cost of smoking to society totals £17bn for England each year including £2.6bn in the South East. This compares to £12.5bn for England in the previous estimates and £1.9bn for the South East. [2]

The higher estimate is as a result of a new assessment of the impact of smoking on productivity [3]. Smokers are more likely than non-smokers to become ill while of working age increasing the likelihood of being out of work and reducing the average wages of smokers. Smokers are also more likely to die while they are still of working age creating a further loss to the economy. In the South East this adds up to £2bn.

Smokers' need for health and social care at a younger age than non-smokers also creates costs, with smoking costing the NHS in the South East an additional £411m and a further £170m in social care costs. This includes the cost of care provided in the home and, for the first time, residential care costs. However, many of smokers' care needs are met informally by friends and family. It's estimated that to provide paid-for care to meet needs would cost society a further £1.4bn [4], this is not included in the overall £2.6bn figure but illustrates the wider burden of smoking beyond pounds and pence.

Smoking-related fires are the leading cause of fire-related deaths, and the costs of property damage, injuries and deaths amount to another £36m.

These figures represent profound losses to individuals and their families with smokers paying the price of addictions established in childhood throughout their lives.

The cost of tobacco related litter has not been estimated due to differences in how litter is collected locally, but it's estimated that around 178 tons of cigarette butts are dropped on the streets in the South East every year and 425 tons of waste are created overall, most of which ends up in landfill.

Smokers also lose a large part of their income to buying tobacco: an estimated £1.7bn in the South East each year, or approximately £2,000 per smoker. While the tobacco industry argue that what smokers pay in tax compensates for the cost to society, the excise tax paid for 2020/21 totaled just under £10bn [5] in England, higher than in previous years but still nowhere near the £17bn it cost society in 2019.

Other economic analysis commissioned by ASH last year found that if the country could stub out smoking for good the economic benefits would go even wider as smokers switch their spending from tobacco to other goods and services which benefit the economy more. In total this would generate around half a million jobs, more than 82,000 of which will be in the South East [6].

Hazel Cheeseman, Deputy Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health says:

“Smoking is a drain on society. It’s a cost to individuals in terms of their health and wealth and a cost to us all because it undermines the productivity of our economy and places additional burdens on our NHS and care services.

Nationally Government must publish their promised plan for tackling smoking but local councils must also seize the initiative and create plans for their communities that account for the tremendous burden caused by smoking.”

ENDS

Notes to the Editor

Action on Smoking and Health is a health charity working to eliminate the harm caused by tobacco use. For more information see: www.ash.org.uk/about-ash. ASH receives funding for its programme of work from Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

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References

[1] [ASH Ready Reckoner 2022 edition](#).

Area Name	Number of smokers	Overall cost	Healthcare costs	Productivity costs	Social care costs	Fire costs
England	6,144,703	17.04Bn	2.40Bn	13.17Bn	1.19Bn	282.78M
South East	877,585	2.59Bn	411.44M	1.97Bn	170.24M	36.47M

[2] ASH Ready Reckoner 2019 edition.

[3] Reed H. [The impact of smoking history on employment prospects, earnings and productivity: an analysis using UK panel data](#). September 2020.

[4] ASH. [The cost of smoking to the social care system, 2021](#). March 2021.

[6] HMRC. [National statistics: Tobacco Bulletin](#). November 2021.

[5] ASH. [Ending smoking in the UK would increase the number of UK jobs by nearly half a million](#). October 2021.