

Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control – Frequently Asked Questions

March 2022

1. What is the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control?

The Declaration is a statement of a council's commitment to ensure tobacco control is part of mainstream public health work. The Declaration has also been widely endorsed by leading figures and organisations in the public health community, including the Chief Medical Officer, the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Faculty of Public Health, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. At the time of writing, over 120 councils have signed and the Declaration has strong cross-party political support at the local level.

The Declaration includes several specific commitments to enable local authorities to take leadership on tobacco:

- Reduce smoking prevalence and health inequalities
- Support delivery of the national smokefree 2030 ambition
- Develop plans with partners and local communities
- Participate in local and regional networks
- Support Government action at national level
- Protect tobacco control work from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry
- Monitor the progress of our plans
- Join the [Smokefree Action Coalition](#)

2. Why does it matter?

Every year around 75,000 people a year in England die prematurely from smoking related illness. For every death caused by smoking, at least another 30 people are living with a smoking related disease. Smoking is the single largest driver of health inequalities in England, accounting for half of the difference in life expectancy between rich and poor. Not only does smoking cut lives short, it damages local communities and economies. Smoking costs the UK economy £17bn per year and puts 31% of households containing a smoker into poverty.

The Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control is a response to the enormous and ongoing damage smoking does to our communities. It is a commitment to take action and a statement about a local authority's dedication to protecting their local community from the harm caused by smoking.

Further, it is an opportunity for local leadership. We know the best way to tackle smoking is through a comprehensive approach working with all partners. The Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control can be a catalyst for local action showing the way for partners both inside and outside the local council. The NHS Smokefree Pledge acts as a sister document for NHS organisations to sign and commits local health organisations to support colleagues in local government to reduce smoking prevalence.

3. Why have we relaunched the Declaration?

The Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control was originally developed by Newcastle City Council in 2013. On No Smoking Day 2022 (9th March 2022), the Declaration was relaunched to bring it into line with the Government's ambition for England to be smokefree by 2030 and commitments made to improve smoking cessation support available through the NHS in the NHS Long Term Plan. You can read more about these here:

- Cabinet Office & Department of Health and Social Care: [Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s](#)
- NHS: [The NHS Long Term Plan](#)

4. How would we implement the Declaration?

ASH and partners have produced several documents outlining specific actions councils can take to implement the Local Government Declaration and pursue comprehensive tobacco control. These include:

- [The End of Smoking: Strategic guidance for local authorities](#)
- [10 high impact actions for local authorities and their partners](#)
- [Local Alliances Roadmap](#)
- [WHO MPOWER](#)

Regardless of what actions are taken, all the commitments in the Declaration are contained in existing policies, strategies, and treaties which local authorities are subject to. The Declaration reaffirms these commitments and adds the weight of local council leadership. If you would like further advice on how your council can implement the Declaration, please email admin@smokefreeaction.org.uk.

5. Is it really necessary to protect local policy from the tobacco industry?

Yes. Tobacco companies have a long record of attempting to influence council policies. In England they have:

- Directly and indirectly (via intermediaries such as industry and trade organisations) lobbied local decision-makers aiming to influence health policy.
- Offered funding to councils to support delivery of public health, tobacco control, or tobacco litter management services.
- Used “corporate social responsibility” schemes or related schemes to improve public relations. For instance, between 2019 and 2021 Philip Morris International funded two tobacco litter management schemes carried out by Clean Up Britain in UK cities.
- Drafted legislation or policy for councils, or voluntary codes as substitutes.
- Funded research to build libertarian and economic arguments against tobacco control policies.
- Tried to gain representation on local or national government tobacco control bodies.

The World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to which the UK is a party, commits signatories to protect health policy from the vested and commercial interests of the tobacco industry. The UK has explicitly committed to meet this obligation and local authorities are subject to it. By signing this Declaration councils are reinforcing their existing obligations and sending a message that they will protect policies from tobacco industry lobbying.

6. How can local government protect health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry?

Where local authorities want to take a best practice approach to protecting health policy from the influence of the tobacco industry they should look to develop and implement a local policy. That policy would ensure they were fulfilling their commitments under Article 5.3 of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Help is available to develop local policies by contacting admin@smokefreeaction.org.uk.

As the Declaration states the policy should include: “not accepting any partnerships, payments, gifts and services, monetary or in kind or research funding offered by the tobacco industry to officials or employees”. This is in line with the guidelines to Article 5.3, which can be found here.

Such a policy should be developed with all relevant council departments and implemented among all staff that might have contact with the tobacco industry.

7. Would the Declaration cause problems for our pension fund investments?

No. Imagine Ayton Council's pension scheme has tobacco investments, but they have a clear stance which protects local policy from tobacco industry interests and lobbying. On the other hand, Beeborough Council has no tobacco investments, but has run a pilot promoting British American Tobacco vapes for smokers trying to quit, and its councillors and senior officers meet with industry representatives and attend industry funded events on illicit tobacco. It is Beeborough that would need to look at its policy urgently and would not comply with the commitments in the Declaration.

The Declaration does not conflict with other duties. It is a strong way of demonstrating that councils have a robust approach to engagement with the tobacco industry regardless of any share investments. It can also be a tool to deflect media and other criticism regarding tobacco industry share investment by focusing on the key issues of protecting health policy from interference.

Councillor Nick Forbes, leader of Newcastle City Council, who developed the Declaration said:

"It is... true that almost all local government pension schemes in England have some investment in tobacco companies. I share the frustrations of many in public health regarding these investments, however our fiduciary duties makes effective action difficult. The greatest threat from the tobacco manufacturers comes not from investments by our pension fund managers but from their influence on our health policy. This Declaration is about taking effective action against real threats."

The Declaration commits the council to protect health policy from the influence of the tobacco industry and this can be achieved through a strong policy on engagement and transparency locally. It is possible for a local authority to do this while retaining pension investment in tobacco shares. However, as part of the development of any policy it may be appropriate to review tobacco share investment in line with a local authorities' fiduciary duty. This will show that the council is acting appropriately.

8. Can we add to the Declaration or change some of the wording?

No, but you can commit to go further. The Declaration contains overarching principles not policies. It is for local authorities to decide on the policies which are relevant for their tobacco control plan. For the Declaration to have meaning at a national level it needs to be signed up to as is. The goal of the Declaration is both to support local authority leadership on tobacco control but also to make a collective statement about the importance of this issue. Having multiple versions of the Declaration would weaken this collective statement.

That does not mean that councils cannot choose to go further or focus their energy on a specific set of issues. Such extensions to the Declaration might best fit in a council's local tobacco control plan. In Nottingham, for example, the council has created a community declaration, designed to help local organisations, including businesses and charities, demonstrate their support for tobacco control. In Somerset, the County Council has used the Declaration as tool to engage District Councils in tobacco control work, offering a small pot of money to implement Smokefree playgrounds projects for district councils who chose to sign.

9. Why is the Declaration relevant to district councils?

Smoking remains the biggest cause of premature death in the UK and has been identified as the single biggest cause of inequality in death rates between rich and poor in the UK. The Declaration provides a public statement of intent on tobacco control for district councils committed to tackling this burden.

Although existing services and additional public health capacity varies between district councils, smoking cessation services are often based at district level and other specific areas affected by smoking which fall within the responsibilities of district councils include:

- Street cleaning: Cigarette butts are a major cause of litter. It costs an estimated £40 million annually to clean smoking-related litter from streets in England.
- Environmental health: This includes ensuring smoke-free laws are applied and can also involve dealing with smoking related issues within homes and workplaces. This can include making sure tenants and workers are not affected by smokedrift and second-hand smoke.

For further information on district councils and public health, please see the King's Fund & District Councils' Network report, [*The district council contribution to public health: a time of challenge and opportunity*](#).

10. What does it mean to be a member of the Smokefree Action Coalition?

Membership of the Smokefree Action Coalition (SFAC) is a further demonstration of a local council's commitment to tobacco control and also offers additional benefits.

The SFAC is a coalition of over 300 local and national organisations and has wide membership among the Royal Colleges, the public health professional bodies, local councils and health charities. It campaigns for tobacco control at a national level and provides a network of support and advice to local public health professionals.

Membership of the SFAC gives local councils a national platform to make the case for central Government action to reduce the level of smoking in support of local authorities. However, no member is required to agree with every policy position and all members would be contacted ahead of their name being put to a specific public statement (e.g. a briefing on a particular issue).

11. What can we do to publicise the Declaration?

There are a number of steps you can take to maximise the publicity for the Council signing the Declaration and to use the Declaration to publicise tobacco control work to local media:

- A press release and photo with the Declaration signatories. You can see previous examples from [Luton Borough Council](#) and [York Council](#). You could include local statistics on the harm caused by smoking to your area, using the [ASH Ready Reckoner and Local Inequalities Dashboard](#), in your press release and other communications.
- Combine signing the Declaration with action on illegal tobacco sales/under-age sales in the local area. For example, the [Royal Borough of Greenwich](#) combined news of a series of spot-checks by trading standards officers on local stores with the news that the council had committed to the Declaration.
- Include news of the Declaration signing in internal communications.
- Tie in your communications around the relaunched Declaration with No Smoking Day, for example, like [Knowsley Council](#).
- Display your Declaration prominently within council buildings.
- Review relevant existing council policies to ensure that they are in line with the Declaration.