

Health promotion and climate mitigation in Middlesbrough



1. Summary

Climate change has been described as both the greatest threat, and the greatest opportunity, to public health in the 21st century. While climate change poses threats to health, many of the measures that could be taken in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change have co-benefits in terms of health and wellbeing.

This case study sets out how Middlesbrough Council has been addressing climate change and its public health implications by:

- including climate change in its public health planning, assessing the risk of climate change in its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and utilising the *One Planet Living*[®] approach to sustainability developed by BioRegional and
- working collaboratively with Middlesbrough Environment City to take action to promote healthy, sustainable communities – from support for vulnerable residents to access home energy efficiency measures and a training scheme for energy champions, to active travel and healthy eating programmes.

The case study explores barriers to the inclusion of climate change in public health planning and subsequently taking action on climate change and how these barriers have been overcome. The case study is of particular use for public health professionals aiming to embed climate change mitigation and adaptation into their local planning and practice, as well as wider public and voluntary and community sector professionals wishing to encourage public health departments to tackle climate change and the environmental determinants of health.

2. Activities

Planning

Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) are reviews of current and future health and social care needs of the local area. They are a statutory requirement for Health and Wellbeing Boards and central to the new public health structures in England.

Middlesbrough's JSNA includes a chapter on the environmental determinants of health, including climate change. This chapter outlines the potential future effects of climate change to health in Middlesbrough and sets out a number of commissioning priorities to tackle the issue, including:

- Working in partnership to tackle climate change to bring public health benefits, enhance quality of life and reduced burden on health services;
- Raising awareness about the importance of greater integration of the climate change and public health agendas to recognise the mutual benefits of greater joint working;
- Ensuring that health professionals play a greater role in the development of sustainable lifestyles; and
- Ensuring that public services lead by example to encourage more people to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

In Middlesbrough, the *One Planet Living*[®] approach has been used to help embed the principles of both healthy and sustainable living and promote the linkages between a preventative approach to improving health and mitigating the future effects of climate change. An Action Group oversees the delivery of *One Planet Living*[®] in the town through an adopted Action Plan. Maintaining the town's One Planet status is one of the Elected Mayor's nine promises, demonstrating strategic level buy-in to the programme. As the new Tees Valley Combined Authority develops, Middlesbrough's approach will also have a valuable role to play in embedding tackling climate change in the new authority.

Action

Public Health at Middlesbrough Council has since funded and worked in collaboration with Middlesbrough Environment City – a local third sector organisation charged with implementing *One Planet Living* amongst communities in Middlesbrough – to take a number of actions to both mitigate climate change and promote health and quality of life in the town. Actions include:

- Support for vulnerable residents to access home energy efficiency measures through home insulation; and energy champion training for residents and front line staff to give advice on basic energy efficiency to their neighbours and clients, and to refer residents at risk of cold- and damp-related illnesses to available services.
- A partnership approach to draw up and implement a Food Action Plan focused on health, sustainability and food poverty.
- The promotion of action travel, through the delivery of 'Bikeability' in schools and the creation of a Bike Academy that provides training in safe cycling and cycle maintenance to various groups including unemployed adults and young people, black and minority ethnic and asylum seeker/refugee communities and other vulnerable groups.
- 'Hearty Beats', a pilot project that works with primary schools through a programme of physical activity, cycling, food growing and healthy eating; and a programme entitled Emerging Communities which aims to reduce the risk of Type 2 Diabetes and encourage sustainable living among black and minority ethnic residents through a programme of cycling, walking and support for food growing.

Funding

Core funding for the activities is provided through Middlesbrough Council Public Health, with Middlesbrough Environment City leveraging additional external funding towards specific initiatives and the engagement of a range of groups. Significant successes have included funding from the Big Lottery Fund through the Communities Living Sustainably and Our Bright Future programmes, the Department of Energy and Climate Change's Big Energy Saving Network and Community Energy Saving Competition, and British Gas Energy Trust.

Partners

A range of partners are involved including Middlesbrough Council Public Health and other Council departments, Middlesbrough Environment City, Teesside University and its Students' Union, Middlesbrough College, and local voluntary and community sector organisations.

Length of time

The collaboration between Middlesbrough Environment City (MEC) and Public Health at Middlesbrough Council to take action to create healthy, sustainable communities has lasted around eight years, having its origins in an earlier Department of Health Healthy Towns Programme and an historically strong working relationship between Middlesbrough Council and the then Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust. It is also built upon a long term commitment by Middlesbrough Council to sustainability, including being one of the first councils in England to develop a Climate Change Community Action Plan and adoption of the *One Planet Living*[®] approach to sustainable living.

3. Outcomes

Outcomes from the work include the following:

- In one year, MEC provided energy efficiency and tariff switching advice to 1,350 people and trained 80 front-line staff to identify people in fuel poverty and make referrals for support. Over two years, MEC worked with local installers to provide energy efficiency measures valued at over £3m to homes in Middlesbrough.
- Work to reduce risk of Type 2 Diabetes amongst BME communities in Middlesbrough supported 111 women and 60 men through twelve structured eight-week activity programmes including both increasing physical activity and healthy eating.
- A local private sector partner funded a 'Slowcooking' project, providing free slowcookers, recipe books and training in both using the slowcooker and healthy eating. The project was delivered in partnership with the Middlesbrough Foodbank. 200 slowcookers were distributed, with 200 people taking part in the training sessions. Positive feedback was obtained from the courses with 98% of participants surveyed more confident in cooking basic recipes and 89% saying that they had improved their cooking skills. 98% of participants stated that had learnt how to cook healthy food on a budget and 87% said that they would eat fewer takeaways and less processed food as a result of participation.
- MEC delivered 'Bikeability' cycle training on behalf of Middlesbrough Council. Over the year the programme provided training at Levels 1, 2 and 3 to 1100 pupils in 37 schools.

The Bike Academy trained 108 adults in 'Bikeability' safe cycling and 23 cycle maintenance courses were provided resulting in 64 people receiving accredited training. 118 cycles were also recycled into community use through the project and 15 'Dr Bike' sessions were delivered in workplaces and at community events. In total the project reached 306 people during the year.

4. Barriers

Austerity measures present a major barrier to embedding climate change into the work of public health teams. Cuts to local authority budgets and the long-term nature of climate change mean that it is seldom regarded as a priority.

In addition, while climate change is included within Middlesbrough's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, it is not included as a strategic priority in their Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS). JHWSs are strategies for meeting the needs identified in local JSNAs. While action is possible without inclusion in the JHWS, they are often thought to be important for securing cross-departmental support, leadership and sustainability in a time of financial constraint. This has been addressed in Middlesbrough through the overarching use of *One Planet Living*[®] as a tool to embed healthy and sustainable living.

Integral to overcoming these barriers has been local champions who can make the case for climate change based upon the synergistic benefits of action, as well as high level political buy-in within the Council. Mark Fishpool, Director of Middlesbrough Environment City, has been successful at championing the issue, making the case for the inclusion of climate change in the JSNA and for public health action on climate change based on the shorter term benefits to health and wellbeing (such as improved health and wellbeing, prevention and quality of life).

5. Guiding Principles

- ✓ **Do:** Look for commonality of benefits - how promoting tackling climate change can make demonstrable benefits to people's well-being.
- ✓ **Do:** Be prepared to take time to develop meaningful partnership arrangements, engagement is not always a quick process.
- ✓ **Do:** Look at opportunities to engage a range of partners and access external funding.
- ✓ **Don't:** Expect health professionals to immediately understand the relevance and impacts of climate change.
- ✓ **Don't:** Rely on a small number of enthusiastic individuals; seek to build actions into the work of Council departments or partner organisations, using a well constructed and agreed framework.

6. Links

- Warmer Homes in Middlesbrough: www.menvcity.org.uk/whim
- Middlesbrough Food Action Plan: www.menvcity.org.uk/fap
- Hearty beats: www.menvcity.org.uk/heartybeats
- Emerging communities: www.menvcity.org.uk/emergingcommunities

7. Contact

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