

Building Better Relationships between Planning & Health

This summary outlines some of the key points raised by delegates in the Planning for Health workshop session 'Building Better Relationships between the Planning and Health Sectors'.

1. **Are there examples of where engagement between the planning and health sectors has worked or not worked?**
 - A number of positive examples were discussed, where engagement between the planning and health sectors is being promoted, and where organisations (both local authority and PCT-led) are taking the first steps towards bringing the sectors together.
 - However, there were also examples of complete disengagement, particularly linked to specific issues such as securing section 106 agreements.

2. **On what particular actions do planning and health sectors need to work together?**

Suggestions included:

 - Section 106 agreements
 - To agree priorities for spending
 - In the negotiation process
 - To ensure monies are being used appropriately.
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal (to ensure best use of the existing evidence, and to engage experts from both fields in the process)
 - Long-term planning for population change.

3. **What are the obstacles to better joint working at the moment?**
 - Contacts
 - Knowing who to contact (teams and/or individuals) – within both sectors
 - Lack of clarity over the split between development control and policy planning – and need for better internal communication between the two, as well as better coordination with the health sector
 - Reconfiguration and reform of structures (particularly within PCTs) means making and retaining contacts may be difficult.
 - Operational
 - Health and planning often work to different timescales.
 - Health and planning speak quite 'different languages'.
 - Agendas/ interests
 - Health and planning sometimes have contradictory agendas – eg planners want to reduce the need to travel but there seems to be a push to centralised health services; planners want to concentrate services and development within urban centres but this can lead to poor air quality and less open space
 - Planners need better knowledge and understanding of the new 'spatial planning' system, and about how to engage with partner sectors.

4. How could these obstacles be overcome?

- **Contacts**
 - Role of the Director of Public Health – should be leading, facilitating and encouraging engagement. Could also have a role in influencing elected members to ‘sign up’ to issues.
 - Engagement seems particularly difficult in two-tier areas. Identifying ‘champions’ or leads to coordinate engagement within these complex systems is important.
 - Share structure charts and key contacts – job titles and individual names so people know who to contact on different issues.
 - Formal identification of mechanisms and opportunities for engagement.
 - PCTs and Local Planning Authorities need to act as signposts to other partners.
- **Operational**
 - Avoid technical language – provide summaries, or point colleagues to the key sections.
- **Agendas/ interests**
 - Take time to build understanding of mutual agendas - where sectors overlap - and areas of conflict
 - Share data sets and knowledge to strengthen the case for the health agenda eg developing accurate demographic modelling linked to planning policy to identify the infrastructure needs for ageing population.
 - Address priorities through Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
 - Address priorities through Local Strategic Partnerships
 - PCTs can influence local authority resources through Local Area Agreements.
 - Spend time to develop understanding of scope and limitations of relevant sectors eg does the health sector have unrealistic expectations of planners’ powers? Does the health sector understand the political nature of local authorities?

5. Are there any other departments or stakeholders who can contribute to joined up planning for healthy communities?

- Health needs to be put on the corporate agenda so that whole organisations understand its importance, and so that there is high-level technical and political commitment.
- Environmental organisations have an important role to play.
- CAGE can provide advice and information about good practice – eg planning for health and access.