

Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control

Based on the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, which has been signed up to by over 200 councils, it aims to ensure tobacco control is part of mainstream public health work.

The Declaration includes a number of specific commitments to enable local authorities to take leadership on tobacco:

- Reduce smoking prevalence and health inequalities
- 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 80,000 people a year die from smoking related illness making smoking the biggest cause of premature death. Not only does smoking cut lives short it damages local communities and economies. It takes money out of the pockets of those who cannot afford it and causes half the difference in life expectancy between the richest and the poorest.

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.

3. How would we implement the Declaration?

To some extent this depends on local practice. For some authorities it would be an acknowledgment of ongoing best practice activities for others there may be areas where further action is needed.

For many local authorities the most appropriate route for ensuring implementation of the Declaration will be through the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Health and Wellbeing Board can be tasked with assessing current practice and establishing a clear way forward. Areas for action might include:

- Ensuring there is a comprehensive tobacco control plan being implemented

- Developing a policy on protecting health policy from the influence of the tobacco industry
- Supporting local and regional networks of support
- Reviewing monitoring processes
- Joining the Smokefree Action Coalition

Regardless, of what actions need to be 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.

4. 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

- Sponsored schools and museums
- Paid for industry branded smoking shelters on council property
- Provided staff and funding and sniffer dogs for joint work on illicit tobacco. These campaigns have focussed on counterfeit and “cheap white” brands rather than main stream branded products sold without tax.
- Worked through front campaigns such as “Love where you live”. Supporting environmental campaigns is a great strategy for companies that produce a large proportion of street litter. It has also been a way of distributing industry branded giveaways such as portable ash trays.
- Used subsidiaries to arrange meetings with members and officers on local harm reduction policies

When they cannot divert local policies in their favour they will seek to delay and dilute their implementation. Previously secret industry papers released in court talk of “throwing sand in the gears” of health policy.

Under the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to which the UK is a signatory, countries have pledged to protect health policy from the commercial interests of the tobacco industry. Local authorities are also subject to this treaty however policies on how to ensure local compliance are rare. By signing the Declaration councils are reinforcing their existing obligations and sending a message that they will protect policies from tobacco industry lobbying.

5. How can local government protect health policies from 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.

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”*

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

6. 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 industry branded smoking shelters on its property, its councillors and senior officers meet with industry representatives and attend industry funded events on illicit tobacco. It is Beeborough that needs to look at its policy urgently and would not comply with the commitments in the Declaration.

No. The Declaration does not conflict with other duties. It is a strong way of demonstrating that council's 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.

The Declaration is not in conflict with existing duties. It 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.

7. We already have a strong approach to tackling smoking, do we need to sign?

Many of the early signatories will already be leaders in the field. Early signatories are not only sending a message of their commitment to their local community but also to other councils who need to make further progress.

As with the Nottingham Declaration on Climate change early adopters will lead the way for other councils and set the standard for local tobacco control.

8. This was created by a Labour-led council, is it party political?

This is a cross-party document built on the same principles as the Nottingham Declaration on Climate change which is now endorsed by over 300 councils across the country.

There is strong cross party consensus on tobacco control with every major party signed up to a comprehensive approach to reduce smoking. Everything contained in the Declaration has previously been committed to at a national level by all political parties. The Declaration is also strongly supported by the wider public health community including The Trading Standards Association, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Association of Directors of Public Health as well as Public Health England, the Public Health Minister and the Chief Medical Officer.

9. 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 can't 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.

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 170 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 council's 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)