

The role of the Director of Public Health



In taking forward their leadership role for public health local authorities will rely heavily on the Director of Public Health and the specialist public health resources he or she has at their command. Indeed the Health and Social Care Bill makes clear that the Director of Public Health is responsible for exercising the local authority's new public health functions.

We have highlighted the duty on each unitary and upper tier authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area.

The Health and Social Care Bill makes clear that each authority must, acting jointly with the Secretary of State for Health, appoint an individual to have responsibility for its new public health functions, known as the Director of Public Health. That individual could be shared with another local authority, where that makes sense (for example, where the senior management team is shared across more than one authority and the authorities are geographically contiguous). Below we cover key aspects of the function and scope of the role of Director of Public Health.

Appointments

We are working with local government and public health stakeholders to produce guidance, which will cover:

- appointments to existing Director of Public Health vacancies in a way that ensures they are fit for purpose for the future
- managing the transition of Director of Public Health posts to local government during 2012/13
- a process for local authorities and Public Health England (in the Secretary of State's behalf), acting jointly, to appoint new Directors of Public Health from 1 April 2013.

The guidance will build on the existing joint appointments process for Directors of Public Health and be consistent with Faculty of Public Health standards, including the use of appointments advisory committees and faculty assessors, and best practice in local government recruitment.

This will ensure Directors of Public Health in local government have the necessary technical, professional and strategic leadership skills to promote, improve and protect health and provide high-level, credible, peer-to-peer advice to the NHS about public health in relation to health services.





Reporting arrangements

We promised in *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: update and way forward* to discuss with stakeholders how best to ensure that the Director of Public Health has an appropriate status within the local authority, in line with the position of the Directors of Children's Services and Adult Social Services.

We have consulted local government and public health interests, and intend to bring forward amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill to reflect our desired policy position. Subject to Parliament, we will add Directors of Public Health to the list of statutory chief officers in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

After Royal Assent, we intend to issue statutory guidance on the responsibilities of the Directors of Public Health, in the same way that guidance is currently issued for Directors of Children's Services and Directors of Adult Services.

While the organisation and structures of individual local authorities is a matter for local leadership, we are clear that these legal responsibilities should translate into the Director of Public Health acting as the lead officer in a local authority for health and championing health across the whole of the authority's business.

This means that we would expect there to be direct accountability between the Director of Public Health and the local authority Chief Executive for the exercise of the local authority's public

health responsibilities and that they will have direct access to elected members.

Responsibilities

The Director of Public Health as a public health specialist will be responsible for all the new public health functions of local authorities, including any conferred on local authorities by regulation. The Health and Social Care Bill will in addition make it a statutory requirement for the Director of Public Health to produce an annual report on the health of the local population, and for the local authority to publish it. Directors of Public Health will also be statutory members of health and wellbeing boards, and will wish to use the boards as the key formal mechanism for promoting integrated, effective delivery of services.

What these legal responsibilities should translate into is the Director of Public Health acting as the lead officer in a local authority for health and championing health across the whole of the authority's business. Thus the Director of Public Health will be the person elected members and other senior officers will consult on a range of issues, from emergency preparedness to concerns around access to local health services. Often the Director of Public Health will not be personally responsible for the problem, but he/she will know how to resolve it through engaging with the right people in the new system. He/she will be able to promote opportunities for action across the "life course", working together with local authority colleagues such as the Director





of Children's Services and the Director of Adult Social Services, and with NHS colleagues.

The Director of Public Health will work with local criminal justice partners and the new Police and Crime Commissioners to promote safer communities. And he/she will engage with wider civil society to enlist them in fostering health and wellbeing. In short, the Director of Public Health will be a critical player in ensuring there are integrated health and wellbeing services across the locality.

With regard to the ring-fenced grant, formal accountability rests with the Chief Executive of the local authority, but we would expect day-to-day responsibility for the grant to be delegated to the Director of Public Health.

Core skills

To deliver its new public health functions the local authority will need a specialist trained Director of Public Health and public health support with the full range of appropriate skills to deliver the functions we have described. That means we will need to ensure that job descriptions reflect the highest possible standards as set out by the Faculty of Public Health.

It is important to reaffirm that the Government believes the multidisciplinary nature of public health is a key strength of the profession. We believe that the transfer of new public health responsibilities to local authorities

in no way changes this, and indeed reaffirms the importance of attracting to public health high-quality individuals from a wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to, medicine.

We will publish a Public Health Workforce Strategy, accompanied by a formal public consultation. The strategy will seek to ensure the development and supply of a professional public health workforce, set out proposals for how learning and development will be taken forward in the reformed health system, and outline options for how public health knowledge can best be embedded across the wider workforce.

The new arrangements will provide opportunities and challenges for employers, including the wider local authority workforce.

Professional appraisal and support, and capacity building

Continuing professional development is a professional obligation for all public health professionals, both medical and non-medical. It ensures that public health professionals develop and maintain the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes to practise effectively and work towards improving the health of communities. Local authorities will wish to support this professional development.

Way forward

The Director of Public Health's new role offers a great opportunity to build healthier communities. But to make the





most of these Directors of Public Health will need to:

- be fully engaged in the redesign of services that address the coming challenges
- influence and support colleagues who have a key role in creating better health, such as planning officers and housing officers
- facilitate innovation and new approaches to promoting and protecting health, while bringing a rigorous approach to evaluating what works, using the resources of Public Health England
- contribute to the work of NHS commissioners, thus ensuring a whole public sector approach.



Produced: December 2011

Gateway reference: 16747

© Crown copyright 2011
Produced by the Department of Health
www.dh.gov.uk/publications