

Core Strategy

Health Impact Assessment - Executive Summary



Executive Summary Health Impact Assessment Core Strategy Submission Draft April 2010

Introduction

There is no statutory requirement to undertake Health Impact Assessments on strategic policy documents like the Core Strategy. However the Government has clearly expressed a commitment to promoting Health Impact Assessments at a policy level and use of these assessments is seen as best practice.

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) is a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, programme or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population¹.

Methodology

There are several different types of HIA: the one carried out on the Core Strategy Submission Draft is a prospective HIA. As with the initial HIA this has been conducted before any policies have been implemented. The main benefit of carrying out a prospective HIA is that if any negative health issues are identified there is still a chance to amend the policy approach. This will maximise the beneficial effects of a policy and minimise any harmful effects on health. This HIA was prepared using Westminster's established methodology for Health Impact Assessments used by Westminster City Council and Westminster NHS/PCT.

To ensure the initial / final HIA documents have fully considered the health impacts we asked our colleagues in Westminster's PCT to carry out a critical independent review of both HIA.

On reviewing this final HIA, the Public Health Coordinator considered that this final HIA was comprehensive. Comments made by Westminster NHS highlighted the importance of working together with other partners deliver policies. This approach will ensure that health and well-being is part of the overall aim of any development and that adequate services and facilities are provided to meet the needs of communities. The comments raised highlighted the role of good design and how the careful consideration of health issues can create sustainable healthier developments. It was felt the policies contained in Core Strategy will assist in tackling a range of health inequalities and promote a healthier Westminster.

Comments on the initial prospective Health Impact Assessment

The HIA was published at the same time as Preferred Options document in July 2009. The only response on the document was from Healthy Urban Delivery Unit (HUDU). In the comments made they supported the issues raised and hoped that these would be translated into policies. The Publication Draft Core Strategy published in November 2009 introduced more detailed policies this has ensured that issues relating to health and well-being were included within the policies and supporting text.

During the period when policies were developed for the Publication Draft Core Strategy work started on this HIA. By using this HIA in developing policies we have tried to secure a range of benefits for all groups.

¹ World Health Organisation

Outcomes of the final Health Impact Assessment

The following issues have emerged from this assessment and represent the significant health challenges which face the delivery of policy over the lifetime of the plan. If these policies can be implemented successfully they will have a significant impact on addressing health inequalities in Westminster.

(i) Income and Deprivation

Westminster contains a mix of uses and activities which are unique to London and the world. The Local Spatial Policies in Part 3 of the Core Strategy seek to encourage economic activity throughout different areas in Westminster: the Opportunity Areas, North Westminster Economic Development, Core Central Activities Zone, West End Special Retail Policy Area and in other areas. Other City wide policies support the development of commercial uses as well. This approach seeks to maintain the economic strength and resilience of Westminster. This approach has a number of positive health impacts as income is a key determinant of health. Unemployment and low incomes can lead to poor physical and mental health. The Core Strategy has a significant impact on health by encouraging a mix of uses and promoting a range of employment opportunities for all groups.

(ii) Housing

The Core Strategy's policy approach towards housing seeks to optimise the amount of housing available, delivering a mix of housing and secure affordable housing. Poor housing can have a considerable impact on physical and mental health as well as well-being more broadly. For example overcrowding can have a negative impact on children and adults as lack of space to study can limit learning and people's ability to develop new skills. Housing in poor condition can exacerbate respiratory disease while poorly designed housing can lead to safety risks. All new development will be expected to consider and where possible improve residential amenity. This will be achieved by addressing issues of privacy, overlooking, natural light and air pollution. Protecting residential amenity ensures people can sleep and rest, which is important for people's health.

Delivering more housing will help to meet growth and the existing backlog of housing needs continue to be a challenge for the Core Strategy over the plan period. The quality and provision of housing has a significant impact on health and well-being. For housing to be successful and sustainable in the longer term policies in plan recognise the need to provide good quality open space for residents in as part of housing developments or in the vicinity. This approach should encourage more physical activity.

(iii) Pedestrian Movement and Sustainable Transport

The group of policies relating to transport and public realm infrastructure will bring significant health benefits. The approach to prioritise the pedestrian movement will create a safer and better quality public realm which encourages safer pedestrian movement. This should encourage physical activity. Supporting cycling will improve people's opportunity to cycle around Westminster and encourage physical activity. Support for walking and cycling will increase safety for more vulnerable road users and over the longer term better pedestrian routes and less traffic may create a safer environment. Supporting the use of alternative fuel vehicles will contribute to creating a less polluted environment. These will over time bring significant health benefits.

(iv) Green Infrastructure

Several policies within the plan support the provision of green infrastructure. These policies protect and enhance existing open spaces and provide local communities with the space

they need for leisure, recreation and education. These attractive local environments may also help people to enjoy the areas in which they live. Promoting physical activity, providing spaces away from noise and air pollution, this will contribute to health and mental well being.

(v) Air and Noise Pollution

Air pollution damages health and Westminster has some of the worst air quality in the UK. Nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter results in an increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, an increased risk of cancer and exacerbates asthma. The elderly, children and those who have a pre-existing cardiovascular and respiratory illness are particularly at risk from air pollution. Each year respiratory illnesses place a huge burden on the National Health Service. Each year respiratory illness places a huge burden on the National Health Service. Noise pollution associated with commercial uses, activity, traffic and development can cause irritation and annoyance and has a negative impact on sleep, learning, communication, mental health and relationships.

Tackling these types of pollution is a significant challenge. The growth predicted within the Core Strategy will bring negative health impacts if appropriate controls are not implemented. Pollution will be both short term, related to the construction of the scheme. In some cases levels of pollution continue over the medium to longer term as new commercial schemes generate an influx of people, more traffic and general activity resulting in more air and noise pollution.

The nature of the Westminster means these types of pollution are to be expected. Air and Noise pollution have been a constant factor throughout this assessment. To address this, the Core Strategy has a strong policy approach which requires a reduction in Air and Noise pollution and suggests measures to minimise the impact of poor air quality, noise and vibration on occupants through the design of the buildings and appropriate technology. These policies will be supported further by detailed policies in the City Management Plan which will seek to set criteria for control air and noise pollution and suggested design requirements.

(vi) Addressing Alcohol consumption, access to fresh produce and healthy diet

The HIA assesses policies on their ability to reduce alcohol consumption, access to fresh produce and healthy diet. Only a few policies can have a direct impact on these elements in the assessment. The key policies which influence these elements are CS23 Entertainment which reflects the desire for 'appropriate' entertainment uses, this includes a shift towards, food and drink premises rather than 'alcohol – led' venues. CS20 Retail which offers the potential to increase the availability of fresh produce, although this will be controlled mainly by individual retailers. Some area bases policies also support access to fresh produce through the protection and support for existing of street markets. The street markets protected in the Core Strategy include Strutton Ground Market (as detailed in CS4 Victoria Opportunity Area), Berwick Street Market, the council and support for a specialist seasonal market at Rupert Street (as detailed in CS6 Core Central Activities Zone) and Tachbrook Street Market supported by as protected in (CS10 Pimlico) and Madia Hill Market as detailed (in CS12 North Westminster Economic Development Area). A crosscutting policy has been included in the Core Strategy which seeks to ensure that all development contributes to creating a healthy and safe environment. The policy would encourage those uses that create health benefits and could be used to refuse planning applications which would comprise health and well-being. Further policies will be developed within the City Management Plan which will seek to improve health benefits.

Conclusion

Overall, the policies in the Core Strategy could influence and deliver some positive impacts on health and well-being of all groups. The Core Strategy aims to deliver balanced and sustainable communities with a range of health benefits.

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