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Dear Colleague

RE: Moving towards a Smokefree Generation

The Government has announced new measures to stop children turning 14 this year or younger from ever being legally sold cigarettes in England, in a bid to create the first 'smokefree generation'. This will be one of the most significant public health interventions, saving tens of thousands of lives and saving the NHS billions of pounds.

A Smokefree Generation

Smoking is the biggest preventable killer in the UK – causing around 1 in 4 cancer deaths and leading to 64,000 deaths per year in England. It puts huge pressure on the NHS, almost every minute of every day someone is admitted to hospital because of smoking, and up to 75,000 GP appointments could be attributed to smoking each month - equivalent to over 100 appointments every hour.

Each year, 233 people die from smoking in Swindon, around four deaths each week and smoking in Swindon costs the community approximately £69.2 million annually. This includes the costs of NHS care, social care, passive smoking, household fires, litter and lost productivity. Tobacco addiction costs the average smoker in Swindon around £2000 a year, plunging nearly 4,000 households into poverty, impacting on 3,500 children. Smoking is

independently associated with every indicator of disadvantage, which can be seen within the rates of smoking across Swindon's population. Currently, 9.5% of the adult population in smoke, rising to 14.1% for those in routine and manual occupations and 40% for those in social housing. Smoking in pregnancy remains an important issue with 8.1% of pregnant people smoking at the time of delivery, as well as prevention of young people starting smoking, with national data suggesting that two thirds start before the age of 18.

Reducing smoking rates is one of the biggest single health interventions you can do to improve health and tackle inequality. If we do not act, the Independent Review, published in 2022, estimated that nearly half a million people will die from smoking by 2030. Smoking is one of the biggest drivers of health inequalities across the country – deaths from smoking are more than two times higher in the most deprived local authorities, where more people smoke, compared to the most affluent. Smoking rates in pregnancy also vary hugely, with as many as 20% of pregnant women smoking in some parts of the country – increasing the chance of stillbirth by almost 50%.

The difference between tobacco and other legal products is that there is no safe level of smoking. Smoking cannot be part of a balanced lifestyle or diet in the way sugar, salt or alcohol can. The proposed new legislation will make it an offence for anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 to be sold tobacco products in England – effectively raising the smoking age by a year each year until it applies to the whole population. This has the potential to phase out smoking in young people almost completely as early as 2040.

Helping current smokers to quit

To support existing smokers to quit, the government are doubling the funding available for stop smoking services, investing an additional £70 million a year over the next five years (2024/25-2028/29) to expand locally delivered and cost-effective services. In total, our

funding will support around 360,000 people to quit smoking a year. The Government are also providing an additional £5 million this year and then £15 million a year thereafter to fund national anti-smoking marketing campaigns to explain the changes, the benefits of quitting and support available.

In Swindon stop smoking services are currently commissioned through Community, GP, Pharmacy and Maternity settings. This gives accessibility and choice for people who need support to quit smoking across Swindon. A successful smoking in pregnancy service is embedded within the local maternity pathway at the Great Western Hospital, where all pregnant people who smoke are referred to the smoking in pregnancy team for support.

Enforcement

The Government are also taking action UK-wide to ensure that illegal supply does not serve as a dangerous alternative. Enforcement activity will also be strengthened, with an investment of £30 million per year over the next five years (2024/25-2028/29) to support agencies including local Trading Standards, HMRC and Border Force to take action to stop underage sales and tackle the import of illicit tobacco and vaping products at the border. On-the-spot fines in England will also be introduced for rogue retailers who commit underage sales, and take further steps to enhance online age verification so that age of sale law is enforced across both online and face-to-face sales.

Protecting children from vaping

The government has also announced a further major crackdown on youth vaping in England. Whilst ensuring that vapes continue to be available to current adult smokers is vital to reducing smoking rates, the number of children using vapes has tripled in the past 3 years and a staggering 20.5% of children had tried vaping in 2023. Due to the nicotine content and the

unknown long-term harms, vaping carries risk of harm and addiction for children. The health advice is clear: young people and those who have never smoked should not vape.

Consultation – a call to action

Many of the proposals will require legislative change, and the government is committed to introducing necessary legislation as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows. The Government have launched a consultation on measures to create a smokefree generation and tackle youth vaping which will close at 11.59pm on 6th December 2023. This consultation is now live and you can find out more [here](#). I encourage all organisations and individuals to respond positively to the consultation to show the Government how much support there is for these measures.

I look forward to working with you to make Swindon a smokefree place of the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Maddern', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Steve Maddern

Director of Public Health