



**Options Appraisal for the Development of a
Joint Health and Wellbeing Unit for Cheshire
West and Chester**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Following the creation of the new unitary authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, on the 1st April 2009 and the subsequent appointment of a Joint Director for Public Health, the two organisations have committed to work together, with other partners, more effectively to improve the health of the local population. To ensure that this joint working is effective NHS Western Cheshire and Cheshire West and Chester Council have identified the potential to build an infrastructure that supports and develops health and wellbeing of the local population. To ensure this is managed effectively NHS Western Cheshire commissioned a feasibility study and options appraisal for the development of a Joint Health and Wellbeing Unit (JHWU).

Discussions concerning the development of a JHWU date back to 5th February 2009, with the start of a research project into the development of a Unit. A subsequent discussion document was circulated in July 2009 which recommended the creation of a JHWU and the direction of travel was approved by NHS Western Cheshire Board in September 2009.

Effective Joint Health and Wellbeing Units

To gain an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a JHWU the review examined in detail three Joint Health Units established in North West England; Liverpool, Lancashire and Manchester, and through literature searches considered one further Unit in Wakefield. The strengths of these Units were highlighted in their clear focus on integrating health knowledge across all public and third sector policies and services, strong support and intelligence for the commissioning of services and strong integration of public health within the local authority structures.

Stakeholder Insight

In order to obtain an understanding of the local support and requirements relating to existing delivery and the potential for a JHWU a range of semi-structured interviews were conducted with key senior local decision makers across the local authority, primary care and the housing trust. In total thirteen interviews and one focus group was conducted over a two month period between January and February 2010.

A variety of opinions and perceptions on existing delivery and support structures exist amongst those interviewed. Reassuringly however, there is strong support across

organisations for the development of a JHWU and there were a number of thematic clusters that emerged as to the vision for future delivery.

Options Appraisal

In reviewing the requirements of Cheshire West and Chester relating to delivery of public health promotion related services and in considering the various options available to meet this delivery, the following potential options have been considered:

1. A 'no action' scenario. Continue to operate within existing structure and governance
2. To establish a 'virtual' JHWU through working within existing partnerships
3. To establish formal JHWU as an independent organisation
4. To establish formal JHWU working from within NHS Western Cheshire
5. To establish formal JHWU working from within Cheshire West and Chester Council

The options were scored by preference on interviewees and through subjective scoring against the guiding principles for a JHWU. The options appraisal strongly supported the development of a **Formal Joint Health and Wellbeing Unit, working from within Cheshire West and Chester Council.**

The vision for the unit was generated by the interviewees as follows.

"The JHWU should give visibility to the importance of addressing health inequalities in the borough building on existing knowledge and expertise and pursuing a long-term focus."

Across the breadth of the study a number of conditions were made apparent that need to be fulfilled / addressed for the JHWU to operate effectively.

- The Unit needs a clear mandate, whereby duplication of activities and responsibilities is avoided
- The Unit should have sufficient financial and human resources in order to be effective
- The Unit must fit into the existing LSP structure to ensure representation across a broad spectrum of organisations at a senior level
- The Unit needs to have close relations with wide range of stakeholders

- The Unit requires strong political will and support from the local authority
- The Unit must be positioned to allow support for integrated commissioning
- The Unit must be able to support local intelligence

The review suggests that the Unit should focus its delivery in five distinct areas of work:

- Integrate health across the all council departments and policies
- Coordinate health promotion delivery across partners and offer strategic planning of activity at a local and wider level.
- Support commissioners with the provision of local intelligence and evidence of need and best practice.
- Provide a public health information, intelligence and research function to the NHS, the Council and other partner organisations.
- Support all partner organisations to improve / co-ordinate communications relating to health.

Unit Management and Structure

The review suggests that the Chief Executive's Department within Cheshire West and Chester Council would be the most appropriate 'home' due to its wide remit and influence. The Unit should remain small and flexible in terms of human resources, but be influential through the seniority of its staff and their positions of influence from their perspective employers. Both the PCT and Council have offered a commitment to place staff within the Unit. These positions require further investigation

Stakeholders felt that there is a need for a senior appointment (Unit Director), to provide professional credibility, co-ordinate the work of the Unit and represent the agenda. This role should report to the Joint Director of Public Health.

The Unit should position itself as directly servicing and reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Thematic Group of the LSP. The Thematic Group would ensure that the Unit carries out its missions and tasks, by adopting its annual work programme and financial regulations. This group would be intended to provide supervision of the activities of the Unit and at the same time ensure coherence with LSP policies and coordination with other strategy and thematic partnerships.

Financial Implications

It was not part of the scope of this review to perform an analysis of the budget for a JHWU or make a cost benefit analysis of the Unit. However there is a potential to minimise cost through the reallocation of existing resources (financial and human). It would be anticipated that the unit would support efficiency savings through; avoidance of duplication of investments across and within organisations, more effective commissioning and pooled budgets.

There will be costs incurred in setting up such a Unit and the main considerations within this would include; a post established to drive the work of the Unit, administration and office costs; and an operational budget to allow for development, implementation and dissemination of the strategy

Recommendations

1. The Option for the development of a JHWU based within the council be approved
2. The Unit should professionally report through the joint DPH and its governance should be through the health and wellbeing thematic group of the LSP
3. The Unit should have a light and service-oriented structure that supports effective commissioning of organisations
4. Developments should consider fully the management and staffing demands of the unit.
5. The proposed mandate and scope for a Unit should complement and not duplicate existing services
6. That the resources given to the Unit are in balance with its mandate.
7. The report should be presented to the LSP, Health and Wellbeing Partnership, the PCT and local authority boards. A workshop of key stakeholders should be hosted locally to keep the momentum of this work
8. A task and finish group should be formed from key senior people from the PCT, local authority and third sector, to provide an ongoing strategic overview and ensure that the recommendations are being taken forward - To work towards a formal launch in June 2010.