

# UK HEALTHY CITIES AND TOWNS NETWORK (2026-2030)

## Political Briefing





## Our vision

To embed health, equity and sustainable development at the heart of policy and governance across cities and towns in the United Kingdom, continuously improving health and wellbeing and addressing the determinants of health.

## Our mission

The UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network is a designated National Network of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. It is a strategic public health network that:

- Seeks to put health high on the political and social agenda of cities and towns to build a strong movement for public health at the local level
- Builds collaboration across sectors and communities
- Facilitates innovation and knowledge exchange
- Advances WHO policy priorities on equity, health in all policies, and sustainable development
- Enhances cities and towns capacity to tackle health inequalities and determinants of health
- Requires innovative action addressing all aspects of health and living conditions, and extensive networking between cities and towns in the UK and across Europe
- Supports UK members to influence and benefit from European policy frameworks and research

**Belfast Healthy Cities currently holds the secretariat for the Network.**

# About the UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network

The UK Network brings together local authorities, political and public health leaders, community and voluntary sector organisations and partners committed to improving population health and reducing inequalities.

Phase VIII (2026–2030) of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network introduces an updated framework built around seven interconnected themes, known as the 7Ps

1. **People:** a human centred approach to development which prioritises ensuring equitable access to common goods and services, as well as building trust and relationships through investment in people.
2. **Participation:** putting community participation at the heart of all decisions and making decisions with the people for the people, especially within decisions that have an effect on where people live, and their goods and services, including health and wellbeing.
3. **Prosperity:** social progress, circular economies and social protection decisions that enhance community prosperity and strengthen assets.
4. **Planet:** working to ensure the health of both people and the planet are at the centre of cities internal and external policies.
5. **Place:** creating accessible social, cultural, and physical environments to facilitate health and wellbeing.
6. **Peace:** prioritise social justice, inclusive participation, and keeping peace, while promoting inclusion and tackling all forms of corruption and discrimination.
7. **Prepare** – strengthening resilience and readiness to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from health crises, climate risks and civil emergencies, ensuring communities and systems are equipped to withstand and adapt to future challenges.

At the heart of the 7P framework lies a commitment to health and wellbeing, equity, strong governance and cross-sector collaboration, forming an integrated approach to delivering healthier, fairer and more resilient places.



Through shared learning, political leadership and collective advocacy, the UK Network strengthens local action and amplifies national influence.

# We call on you to

## **1. Champion Health in All Policies**

Embed health, wellbeing and equity within planning, regeneration, transport, housing and economic development decisions using Health Impact Assessment.

## **2. Address the Commercial Determinants of Health**

Use the powers and influence of local government to shape healthier local economies and environments, through planning, licensing, housing, regeneration, transport and procurement.

## **3. Strengthen climate, place and health leadership**

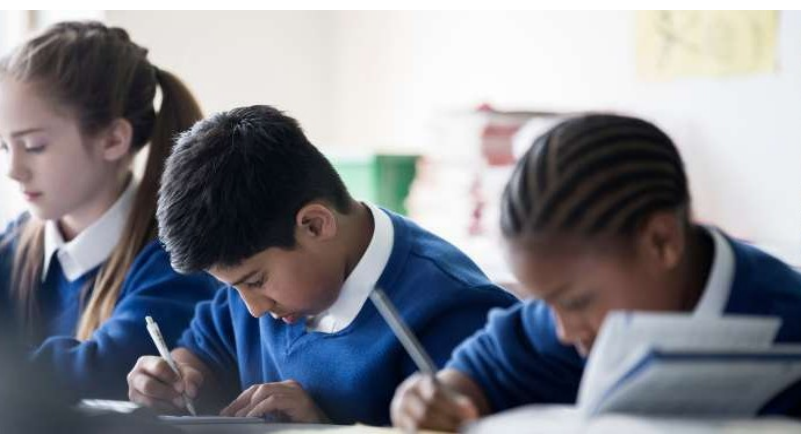
Promote safer, greener and more climate-resilient neighbourhoods that protect both people and planet by promoting the use of the Place Standard Tool to ensure the voice of people in planning.

## **4. Build prepared and resilient communities**

Support integrated approaches to public health, emergency planning and community resilience to prepare for climate risks, health crises and civil emergencies. Engage people in emergency planning to dispel myths and misinformation, developing plans and clear communication for emergencies.

## **5. Champion the healthy cities movement across the UK**

Demonstrate commitment to the Healthy Cities approach through active engagement in the UK Network and collaboration with partners across sectors.



# Key facts: health and inequality in the UK

Health outcomes are shaped by planning, housing, education, employment, environment and local economic conditions. Local government leadership is critical.



**The population aged over 65 continues to rise (up to +2% in a single year in some UK nations)**

Increasing demand for accessible housing, transport, social care and age-friendly neighbourhood design.



**Population change varies significantly across UK regions and age groups**

Affecting spatial planning, service demand and local economic resilience.



**Healthy life expectancy varies by area, with people in the most deprived areas living shorter lives than those in least deprived areas**

Highlighting deep and persistent inequalities that require fair, inclusive, cross-sector policy responses.



**COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) prevalence ranges from 2.0%–2.4% across the four nations: equating to around 1.4 million people**

Highlighting the impact of air quality, housing quality and deprivation on respiratory health.



**Cardiovascular disease, cancer and respiratory illness remain the leading causes of premature mortality across the UK**

Reinforcing the importance of prevention, healthy environments and cross-sector action on the wider determinants of health.



**The proportion of adults classified as overweight or obese continues to rise**

Emphasising the influence of commercial determinants on food environments, planning decisions and active travel infrastructure on population health.



**COVID-19 under-vaccination disproportionately affected younger, more deprived and minority communities**

Demonstrating the need for trusted community engagement, health literacy and equitable access to services.



**Climate change, flooding and air pollution present escalating public health risks**

Reinforcing the need for a just transition to low-carbon, healthy, prepared, resilient and inclusive local communities.



## Our priority programmes (2026-2030)

As part of Phase VIII of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, the UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network is prioritising four interconnected areas:



### **Health in All Policies & Health Impact Assessment**

Health is shaped by decisions taken across planning, regeneration, transport, housing and economic development. This theme supports embedding health and equity within local governance and strengthening the practical application of Health Impact Assessment in major policies and developments.



### **Commercial Determinants of Health**

Commercial activity influences the environments in which people live, work and learn. This theme focuses on how local authorities can use their powers and influence to promote healthier local economies and address the wider drivers of inequality.



### **Climate, Place and Health**

The design and governance of places directly affect both health outcomes and climate resilience. This theme promotes safer, greener and more inclusive neighbourhoods, recognising that climate transition must also deliver health and equity benefits.

### **PREPARE – Climate, Health and Civil Emergencies**

Cities and towns must be equipped to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from health crises, climate-related shocks and civil emergencies. This theme strengthens integration between public health, emergency planning and community resilience.

Together, these four themes provide a structured framework for political leadership on health, equity and sustainable development across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



# Supporting current policy priorities in England

The UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network supports local authorities in aligning health, equity and sustainability with major national policy priorities. Through collaboration, shared learning and practical tools, the Network helps cities and towns strengthen delivery across a range of strategic agendas, including:

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

Local government reform provides an opportunity to embed health and wellbeing within new governance structures, ensuring persistent and emerging public health challenges are addressed, with equity and community resilience central to future service design. Cities and towns are uniquely placed to lead by placing health high on the political agenda, and integrated across all aspects of governance and community wellbeing.

## **Healthy New Towns**

Planning and regeneration decisions have long-term impacts on population health. The Healthy Cities approach supports the design of communities that promote active travel, access to green space, healthy food environments and social connection. The UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network framework facilitates healthy development and growth through participation, Health in All Policies and collaborative learning across the UK.

## **Ten Year Health Plan for England**

The UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network promotes health for all, equity and cross-sector collaboration, helping local authorities contribute to national ambitions to improve population health and reduce pressure on health services. Influencing European policy, shaped by the learning and experience for UK cities and towns.

## **Pride in Place**

Creating safe, attractive and inclusive neighbourhoods strengthens community wellbeing, civic pride and local economic resilience. The Healthy Cities and Towns approach supports place-based approaches that connect environmental quality, community participation and health outcomes.



## Join the UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network for:

- Access to WHO expertise and international collaboration
- Strategic peer learning and cross-nation working groups
- Stronger public health leadership and political commitment
- Practical tools to address health inequalities and determinants of health
- Coordinated national advocacy and policy influence
- A shared evidence base supported by expert scientific oversight

Cities and towns are at the forefront of tackling health inequalities, climate risks and economic transition.

We invite elected representatives to work with the UK Healthy Cities and Towns Network to advance health, wellbeing and sustainable development for all.



Find out more:

