

Sexual and Reproductive Health – Health Needs Assessment, December 2023

Report of the Director of Public Health, Communities & Prosperity

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Board be asked to note the release of the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) health needs assessment (HNA) and Sexual Health Dashboard. The previous Sexual Health rapid HNA was published in 2017.

2) Background / Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform the Devon Health and Wellbeing Board of:

- local sexual and reproductive health indicators from existing national and local data sources
- local insights from key populations and service users

The key issues and findings will inform the development of future Sexual Health strategies and sexual and reproductive health commissioning intentions for 2023-2025.

3) Main Body / Proposal

Sexual health outcomes in Devon are generally good with better outcomes than either the England average and nearest neighbours¹ for the following indicators:

- The rank for gonorrhoea diagnoses (which can be used as an indicator of local burden of Sexually Transmitted Infections in general) in Devon was 104th highest (out of 147 UTLAs/UAs) in 2022 – with a rate of 78 per 100,00 compared to the rate of 146 per 100,00 in England.
- The rank for HIV prevalence in Devon was 138th highest (out of 147 UTLAs/UAs) with Devon classed as a low HIV prevalence local authority. In 2022, the HIV diagnosed prevalence rate per 1,000 population aged 15 to 59 in Devon was 0.9, lower (better) than the nearest neighbour average of 1.2
- In 2021 the Under 18's conception rate in Devon was 10.0 per 1,000 females aged 15-17, this is lower (better) than the nearest neighbour average.

However, the good overall picture can mask inequalities within an area which need to be addressed. For this reason, the 'Variation in outcomes in sexual and reproductive health in

¹ [Nearest Neighbour Model \(cipfa.org\)](https://www.cipfa.org)

England' toolkit² was utilised to gain an understanding of inequalities at a local level across Devon. The purpose of this toolkit is to identify the principal causes and underlying factors and inform ways to target and reduce sexual and reproductive health inequality and improve outcomes.

Findings from national and local data sources are presented as a Sexual Health Dashboard for Devon. [Sexual Health - Devon Health and Wellbeing](#).

The Health Needs Assessment explores this dashboard data in more detail and provides a narrative to explain the findings. The wider sexual health system is also described and mapped, to highlight any gaps in provision. [Sexual-and-Reproductive-Health-Health-Needs-Assessment-2023.docx \(live.com\)](#)

An important section within the report are the local insights from key populations and service users. Insights and qualitative data have been gathered by providers, Devon's public health team and through commissioned work. These have been compiled using interviews, surveys and focus groups with frontline staff, key populations, and service users.

The findings from the 'Variation in outcomes in sexual and reproductive health in England' toolkit and local insights have highlighted some particular areas of focus. These are:

- **Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and diagnosis.** Testing rates and diagnosis rates are closely linked. Our below average positivity rate, with a higher than average testing rate, needs further exploration to ensure that the right people are being tested and all services are delivered to BASHH standards.
- **Access to services for most at-risk or vulnerable groups.** The responses received from key frontline staff, highlighted the need for more proactive pathways to effectively reach at risk and vulnerable populations. Currently, some access to the sexual health system is dependent on frontline staff facilitating or advocating on behalf of people they support.
- **Lower reach and awareness of services to the most deprived areas – particularly in areas of rurality.** The expected higher number of service users from areas of increased deprivation were not always evident, which may indicate access issues. This was particularly true in the North of the county and needs further exploration. North Devon and Torridge also had the lowest levels of long-acting reversible contraception provision when mapped by primary care networks.
- **Awareness raising with at risk groups.** The insight work undertaken by Social Insight and Social Change highlighted a lack of knowledge of sexually transmitted infections and understanding of the available sexual health services. Any awareness raising needs to challenge perceptions of risk and fear of stigma.
- **Decreasing rate of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) prescribing.** Access to LARC varies across Devon, with some of the lowest levels of provision in areas with the highest levels of deprivation. Difficulties accessing LARC was

² [Variation in outcomes in sexual and reproductive health in England 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

highlighted as a key theme from the contraceptive services survey. There is a need to continue joint working between local authority commissioners, Integrated Care Board and primary care, private providers and Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare directors to improve access to LARC with a focus on the areas with highest deprivation as a priority.

- **Increasing abortion rate for over 25s.** This national trend is also being seen in Devon. Further exploration is needed to understand and learn from the experiences of over 25s accessing abortions and ensuring equitable access to contraception.
- **High rate of late diagnosis of HIV.** Although numbers are low, Devon continues to have a high rate of late HIV diagnosis. Further exploration is needed to learn from missed opportunities in sexual health screening, testing and prevention.
- **Gaps in provision.** While there are currently many touch points for sexual health information, advice and services across Devon, there are opportunities to improve these interactions for service users. There is a need to further innovate and embed digital technologies to services and prevention to address challenges in provision across Devon's large geographical footprint.
- **Future insight work.** Further insight is required for other key groups such as people in the criminal justice system, black and minority ethnic communities, migrants including Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

The key issues and findings included in the health needs assessment will shape the work of local sexual and reproductive health partners with the aim of improving outcomes of the local population in Devon, reducing inequalities and inform commissioning intentions for 2023-2025.

4) Options / Alternatives

Nil

5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

Nil

6) Strategic Plan

The findings of the sexual and reproductive health needs assessment align to the Devon County Council Plan 2021 – 2025: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan/> In particular, promoting health equity and reducing health inequities between different areas of Devon.

7) Financial Considerations

Nil

8) Legal Considerations

Nil

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

Nil

10) Equality Considerations

The purpose of this health needs assessment is to use existing data about sexual and reproductive health indicators between and within local authority areas to understand where variation occurs, identify the principal causes and underlying factors and inform ways to target and reduce sexual and reproductive health inequality and improve outcomes.

11) Risk Management Considerations

Nil

12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

Nil

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