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HEALTHY LIVES, HEALTHY PEOPLE - RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER CONSULTATIONS

At ¹Sanctum Consultants, we deal daily with the real life problems, of real life people, let down by real life departments and agencies run by real life politicians from all parties.

At this time of sweeping public funding cuts we are concerned that the battle between central and local government will create an inequality charter. Despite the positive rhetoric, reports and policies of successive governments; the divide in health equalities has continued to grow as confirmed in the report of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2008).

Although individual lifestyle choices, such as smoking and drinking, play some part in health inequalities. Environmental factors beyond the immediate control of individuals are the single most significant aspect of health inequalities. At Sanctum Consultants our independent public health professionals are all too aware of the impact these factors have on the ability of ordinary individuals to lead healthy lives. And, even though it may seem like a good idea on paper to devolve more power to local communities or local politicians; for the disenfranchised, who do not feel part of, or involved in a local community, these proposals will make little or no tangible difference to their lives.

Sanctum Consultants are however encouraged that the government is adopting the key findings of the Marmot Review, Fair Society, Healthy Lives (2010). However we firmly believe that real tangible and measureable improvements in health inequalities can only be achieved through a raft of positive measures which include:

- A pledge to ring fence government funding to enable Environmental Health Departments to expeditiously carry out statutory functions under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Housing Act 2004.

¹ Sanctum Consultants is an independent Environmental Health Consultancy providing a range of Environmental Health consultancy services including housing, food safety, healthy & safety, pollution, noise nuisance, noise impact studies, preparation of expert advice for planning and public enquiries and attendance at Court as expert witness. Sanctum Consultants also provide a variety of services to public sector and corporate clients which include Planning, Licensing, Trading Standards, Building Control, and Housing and ASB services. Sanctum Consultants provides two low cost advice lines Advice Direct and Noisedirect- National Noise Advice Line, where callers can obtain low cost fixed fee advice on noise and a range of public health related issues.

- Excluding housing benefit and income support when calculating fuel poverty payments for low income households. Any calculation should be based on the actual disposable income of a household, minus housing costs or other means tested benefits.
- Prohibit energy companies from charging low income households or those on pre payment meters higher tariffs. Require energy companies to produce a social tariff for households in receipt of income support and housing benefit.
- Require water companies to produce a social tariff for households in receipt of income support and housing benefit.
- Implement a National Food Access strategy² to address the issue of healthy, affordable food for all members of society. A central component of such a strategy would include using planning and licensing powers to restrict unhealthy food and drink outlets in town centers, near schools, parks and leisure centers, banning all advertising of unhealthy food to children, the reintroduction of free school meals for all school children; whether in state, independent or public schools. A prohibition on all public sector institutions, hospitals schools etc to sell or provide high fat, high sugar or salt laden food. And a requirement for all establishments, public or private, which care for children, to provide food in accordance with national nutritional guidelines.
- Require every single landlord, whether private or social, to produce at the beginning of every tenancy a certificate to give to prospective tenants; confirming that the dwelling will provide a safe and healthy environment for the occupants and any visitors. And is free from Category 1 Hazards under the Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- Amend the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 to allow any person aggrieved by a Category 1 Hazard within their dwelling, to apply to the local Magistrates Court for the abatement of the Hazard.
- Introduce legislation to allow individuals to appoint and authorise independent Environmental Health Practitioners (registered with the Chartered Institute of

² Kayani N (2009) Chapter 18, 'Food, Health, and Wellbeing'. 'Professional Practice in Public Health, Stewart, J. and Cornish Y. Reflect Press Ltd. Available at: www.reflectpress.co.uk

Environmental Health) to act on their behalf to help improve the health of individuals and communities by serving Hazard Awareness and Nuisance Notices, on behalf of individuals, where issues affecting public health exist.

- Require all Licensed premises where a Review (called by a Responsible Authority or Interested Party) has been successful, to make annual Licence applications with full Licence fees payable. And that all premises Licence conditions should also apply to TENs events, to safeguard the amenity of those living and working nearby.
- Stop the postcode lottery for investigating noise complaints. Where local authorities fail to carry out inspections in accordance with their statutory duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Housing Act 2004, then the Local Government Ombudsman should be granted powers to impose a £25 fixed penalty victim fine payable by Councils to complainants.
- Require anyone carrying out repairs or improvements to private homes, such as builders, decorators, plumbers, double glazing companies etc. to be registered with their local Council, with an initial registration fee of £70 and £20 annually thereafter. Local Councils should be required to use the proceeds of the registration fees to keep and maintain a public register (available online) which records the trading name and address of the company or person providing the service, details of any consumer complaints, any prosecutions or County Court judgments against the company, or individual providing services to private homes.

Sanctum Consultants believe that these practical ideas for real change will make a difference to the real problems in real people's lives and help to deliver social justice in health. We believe that these ideas will help to deliver chances and opportunities for ordinary people to improve their health and wellbeing, and enable them to take positive action to address health inequalities. And help ordinary people feel that they live in a society, which not only cares about them, but empowers them to directly improve their health and environment.

SANCTUM CONSULTANTS

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