

Health and wellbeing of West Sussex coastal communities: A framework for action to reduce coastal health inequalities

Summary document



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Acknowledgements

The framework was developed by a project team with membership from West Sussex County Council Public Health, Public Health and Social Research Unit, and Communities teams.

With grateful thanks to all who contributed to this piece of work.

Introduction

Nationally and locally, our coastal communities live with poorer health than their non-coastal neighbours. Coastal areas in West Sussex have older populations, and a higher proportion of the population live in deprived areas. Our coastal towns each have a unique history and character, and their own strengths and assets which are resources for improving health and wellbeing.

This framework aims to provide an insight into health and wellbeing and its wider determinants in our coastal West Sussex towns: Bognor Regis, East Wittering, Littlehampton, Selsey, Shoreham-by-Sea (including Lancing)¹, Southwick and Worthing. The framework presents intelligence on physical and mental health outcomes across the life course, and the building blocks of health such as economic activity and housing.

We propose a collaborative, place-based public health approach to reducing health inequalities in coastal West Sussex, building on the assets of local people, communities and the wider system. We highlight four areas of focus for future work, outlined below. The framework offers a foundation for working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners, including coastal communities, to take action to reduce coastal health inequalities. The aim is to inform system partners and guide their future service priorities and commissioning plans.

The framework is a working document which will be updated to reflect additional data analyses, insight and learning. This

¹ Our analysis used the ONS coastal towns definition which defines Shoreham-by-Sea and Lancing as one Built Up Area.

summary version is accompanied by a full framework document, infographic and data pack, available on the [West Sussex JSNA website](#).

Our coastal West Sussex population

Over a third (37.6%) of the usual resident population of West Sussex live in a coastal town. Coastal communities in West Sussex vary in size from around 7,000 in East Wittering to over 115,000 in Worthing. Coastal areas generally have higher proportions of older residents and fewer working age adults and children than the national average. Population growth in coastal West Sussex is largely driven by increases in the 65+ age group.

12.5% of the West Sussex coastal population identify as a minority ethnicity, a slightly smaller proportion than non-coastal areas of the county (13.8%, excluding Crawley²) but higher than English coastal towns (9.8%). Bognor Regis has a greater proportion of residents who identify as a White minority ethnicity, whereas Shoreham-by-Sea, Southwick and Worthing have more diversity within their minority ethnic populations.

² Crawley is by far the most ethnically diverse town in West Sussex. As the ethnic profile differs so substantially, Crawley is excluded from this figure for comparative purposes.

Wider determinants of health and wellbeing: West Sussex coastal towns

The social and economic context of coastal communities, including household income, good jobs, quality homes, and affordable food, have a significant impact on people's health and wellbeing. Our analysis of key indicators for the wider determinants of health in coastal towns shows that there is greater deprivation in West Sussex coastal communities, with challenges such as the increase in cost of living and affordable housing.

1. Deprivation

Coastal towns in West Sussex have a higher proportion of their population living in the most deprived areas than non-coastal towns according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation³. Variation exists across coastal towns, with none of the population of Selsey or East Wittering living in areas among the 30% most deprived nationally, compared to 38% of Southwick.

2. Economic activity

At the 2021 census, coastal West Sussex towns had lower levels of employment than non-coastal towns. This is likely due to the older age profile of coastal towns, which had a higher proportion of retired residents, rather than due to unemployment. 3.8% of the population aged 16+ years in coastal West Sussex said they

were long-term sick or disabled, which is slightly higher than non-coastal towns (2.8%).

3. Free School Meals eligibility

A higher proportion of pupils attending coastal schools were eligible for free school meals (17.4%), compared with pupils attending non-coastal schools (14.7%).

4. West Sussex County Council community hub support

More Household Support Fund⁴ supermarket vouchers have been distributed to coastal than non-coastal households by the WSCC community hub, with households in Littlehampton receiving the greatest number of supermarket vouchers.

5. Housing

Coastal West Sussex generally has a higher proportion of home ownership and privately rented accommodation, and a lower proportion of households in the social rented sector when compared to non-coastal areas of the county.

A greater proportion of households live in part of a converted or shared house (including bedsits) or in a temporary structure (such as a caravan) than in non-coastal areas of the county.

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. English Indices of Deprivation 2019. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils>

6. Care home and nursing home beds

In coastal areas, the availability of care home beds has fallen from 2016, despite older and ageing populations in these areas. Coastal areas have fewer nursing home beds per 100 people aged 75+ than non-coastal areas of the county.

Community performance space 'Stage by the Sea', by the beach in Littlehampton



Physical and mental health and wellbeing

The Chief Medical Officer's 2021 report, *Health in coastal communities*, found that coastal areas have some of the worst health outcomes in England, with low life expectancy and high rates of major diseases, such as cardiovascular disease⁵. Our analysis of West Sussex data for a core set of indicators demonstrates that health and wellbeing in coastal towns locally is worse than in non-coastal towns.

1. General health

A significantly higher proportion of people living in West Sussex coastal towns are not in good health compared to non-coastal towns. In the 2021 census, 18.1% of people living in our coastal towns reported that they were not in good health, compared to 15.5% of people in non-coastal towns.

2. Potential Years of Life Lost

During 2018 to 2022, over 5,400 premature deaths (under 75 years) were registered in coastal West Sussex, equating to more than 66,000 potential years of life lost. Of those, 1,730 premature deaths were due to causes considered amenable to timely and effective healthcare. Rates of potential years of life lost due to any cause, and due to causes considered amenable to healthcare were higher in coastal than non-coastal towns.

⁵ Whitty CJM. *Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2021: Health in Coastal Communities*. July 2021. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-medical-officer-annual-report-2021>.

3. Excess burden of ill-health

Coastal West Sussex has a higher burden of disease than non-coastal areas. The estimated prevalence of health conditions recorded by GPs in the Quality and Outcomes Framework is higher in coastal than non-coastal areas, and also exceeds the county and national averages. For example, the proportion of patients in West Sussex coastal towns on GP disease registers for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is 50.5% higher than in non-coastal towns⁶.

4. Healthy weight and overweight among 10-11 year olds

The prevalence of healthy weight among 10-11 year olds is lower in coastal West Sussex towns compared with non-coastal towns. One in five 10-11 year olds were very overweight in coastal West Sussex, significantly exceeding non-coastal areas.

5. Emergency hospital admissions for self-harm

Rates of emergency hospital admissions for self-harm are significantly higher in coastal towns in West Sussex than non-coastal towns, for all ages (236.1 compared to 196.2 per 100,000) and for 10-24 year olds (709.8 compared to 539.4 per 100,000).

⁶ This is an 'unadjusted coastal effect' because it does not consider differences in the age or sex of each area.

A Public Health approach to reducing health inequalities in West Sussex coastal communities

The Public Health approach to improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities in our coastal communities is system-wide, collaborative, and reflective of our unique coastal places. The starting point is to recognise and build on the strengths and assets within local coastal areas, with strong communities and a sense of place at its centre.

1. Support and strengthen place-based working, including with communities

Each of our coastal towns has its own unique character, with differences in size and demographics, community and culture, and socioeconomic factors which influence health. Place-based interventions are effective at improving physical health, health behaviours and social determinants of health. Public Health England's guidance *Place-based approaches for reducing health inequalities* provides the basis for this approach⁷.

2. Harness the power of local anchor institutions to improve the social determinants of health in coastal communities

The NHS, local authorities and other major employers in coastal West Sussex can use their influence to improve the social determinants of health in their local communities. There are

⁷ Public Health England. *Place-based approaches for reducing health inequalities: main report*. 2021. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-inequalities->

existing foundations to build on, such as West Sussex County Council's social value framework for procurement and Shoreham Port's good work and community focus.

3. Work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and other partners to deliver our shared objectives

The voluntary and community sector (VCS), working in partnership with others including through Local Community Networks, is a significant asset for improving health and wellbeing in coastal West Sussex. Local networks and organisations continue to work collaboratively with the VCS and other partners, recognising the challenges organisations are experiencing resulting from the pandemic and the increased cost of living.

4. Recognise the impact of creativity and the arts on health and wellbeing, and support creative and cultural activities in our coastal communities

West Sussex coastal communities have a thriving arts and culture scene which provides benefits for health and wellbeing for people of all ages. Creative health is both an asset and an opportunity and could play a key role in our community and

[place-based-approaches-to-reduce-inequalities/place-based-approaches-for-reducing-health-inequalities-main-report](#).

place-based approaches to reducing health inequalities in coastal towns.

5. Undertake further analysis, research and community engagement which supports a better understanding of our coastal communities, including health outcomes and the determinants of health

Research exploring the specific health needs of coastal communities is hindered by a lack of data availability for small areas, including coastal towns. The indicators included in this framework provide a good foundation for understanding the health of our coastal communities.

Public Health will collaborate with internal and external partners to continue to build this shared understanding through further analysis, for example through including coastal geographies in needs assessments, joint discussion of data findings, consultation on this framework, and exploring opportunities for research on coastal health inequalities through academic collaborations such as the [Brighton and Sussex Health Research Partnership](#).



Worthing beach and pier

Areas of focus

1. Develop and deliver a system-wide approach to improving Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) and reducing the HLE gap

Improving HLE and reducing the HLE gap are national and local strategic priorities. The higher burden of disease and greater proportion of people reporting that they are not in good health in coastal West Sussex towns highlight the importance of taking action to improve HLE. Our system-wide approach will include a focus on musculoskeletal conditions and mental ill-health as significant causes of morbidity and disability, and physical activity which is consistently associated with self-reported health.

2. Reduce barriers to education and learning for children and young people living in poverty

Our finding that the proportion of pupils attending coastal schools eligible for free school meals is higher in coastal than non-coastal West Sussex suggests a higher proportion of children and young people living in poverty. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to have poorer health outcomes throughout their lives, and can experience barriers to participating fully in education⁸. We will build on existing action across the system through supporting trauma-informed approaches in health and education settings, and exploring action to mitigate the impact of poverty on children in school.

⁸ McKinney, S. The relationship of child poverty to school education. *Improving schools*. 2014, 17:3. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1365480214553742>.

3. Create healthy coastal environments to support healthier lives

West Sussex coastal towns have a lower prevalence of healthy weight among 10-11 year olds. Further analysis is needed to better understand health risk factors such as smoking and alcohol use. However health behaviours are socioeconomically patterned and everyone does not have the same opportunity to be healthy. Key components of the environment impacting on health behaviours include neighbourhood design, housing, food, natural environment, and transport. Creating healthy environments will enable people living in coastal communities in West Sussex to lead healthier lives.

4. Ensure our coastal communities are a good place to grow old

West Sussex coastal towns have an older population than non-coastal towns, most notably in Selsey and East Wittering. Coastal areas have a higher prevalence of many health conditions, and people living in coastal towns provide more unpaid care. Our focus is on improving quality of life for as long as possible through extending HLE, and ensuring our coastal towns support people to age well through appropriate housing, an enabling physical environment, and initiatives such as age-friendly communities.