

Dear Feedback Team,

Reference- Fresh and Balance funding

We are writing in response to the recently published Borough Council budget proposals and specifically in relation to the potential cancellation of all funding to Fresh and Balance in 2017-18. We understand that there will be a meeting in relation to the budget proposals tomorrow. We absolutely sympathise with the Council, which we know is facing incredibly hard decisions with regards to public health and many other areas of business, due to wider local government funding cuts. We also of course appreciate all of the support you have given to Fresh and Balance over the years.

However, it is important to stress that Darlington and the North East as a whole, suffers an appalling burden as a result of alcohol and smoking, with massive costs to local authorities, the NHS, the police, workplaces, families and communities. Alcohol and tobacco are also the leading causes of preventable illness and mortality in Darlington, representing the most immediate public health challenges facing not just adults, but also future generations, in the town.

From a Darlington perspective:

- Alcohol costs £41.09m per annum, in costs to the NHS, crime & licensing, social services and the workplace
- Alcohol is a factor in an estimated 10,969 recorded and unrecorded crimes in Darlington every year
- There were 2430 alcohol-related hospital admissions in 2013-14
- 198 people prematurely die from smoking every year
- Tobacco use generates 18,000 GP appointments and 3,900 hospital admissions and outpatient visits per annum
- The tobacco burden equates to a £3.6m cost to the NHS and an extra £1.3m to the council spent on social care costs – not to mention the cost to local people.

In addition, alcohol and tobacco also drive health inequalities: people from more deprived groups suffer far greater harm from than people in higher socio-economic groups and this is particularly clear in communities across Darlington and the wider North East.

Taking this huge burden into account, it is clear that continued investment in Balance and Fresh offers the most efficient and cost effective option for tackling tobacco and alcohol related harms in Darlington. Evidence shows that the most impactful way of tackling smoking and alcohol harm is to take action at a population level: since the two programmes were introduced (Fresh 2005 and Balance 2009) key impacts have been made on tobacco and alcohol:

- Smoking has declined by more than a third from 2005 to 2014, with the **biggest decline of any region** in England from 1 in 3 adults regularly smoking in 2005, it is now down to **1 in 5 (19.9%)**. This is **165,000** fewer smokers. The North East approach of working together has been commended by the World Health Organisation, England's former Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson, the NHS Leadership Academy, and in two government strategies. The North East "locally together" approach has been recently praised by Public Health England as the model for the rest of the country.
- **Smoking related mortality** in the NE is declining faster than the national average.

- The North East is the only region in the country to experience a **decrease in the rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions** and it has significantly narrowed the gap with the rest of England.
- **Leadership, expertise and advocacy** on both tobacco and alcohol creating a social movement and some of the highest levels of public support nationally.

In addition, **Darlington would continue to generate significant efficiencies through commissioning regional programmes.** For example, hugely impressive economies of scale are achieved across the North East, particularly around PR, where the annual returns on investment have regularly exceeded 30:1 achieving unpaid media coverage of over £3million per year; and through award winning mass media campaigns, where buying power is substantially cheaper at a regional rather than local level.

Taken as a proportion of Balance and Fresh's budgets, Darlington has as one example benefitted from two world class alcohol and tobacco media campaigns per year – in four separate bursts of activity - reaching significant numbers of the target population, for approximately nine pence per capita of the local population. **That simply would not be possible through isolated investment at the local level.**

As noted earlier, we appreciate the difficult choices facing the council, in the light of unprecedented funding cuts. However, we genuinely believe that working together as a region makes us stronger and more cost effective for the people of Darlington. In the absence of investment in evidence-based programmes, which have been shown to deliver excellent results for the local authority, the concern is that we will see rates of smoking and risky drinking creep up again, with more lives lost, more illness, more pressure on local services and greater costs in the long-term.

Finally, if Darlington Council does withdraw all funding from Fresh and Balance the whole future of the model is potentially at stake as for a decade now it has covered the whole region.

We would ask you to consider whether continuing to fund the two programmes, even at a substantially reduced level, would be possible in order to maintain the significant progress made in addressing the two most important public health issues for the people of Darlington.

Thank you,
Ailsa Rutter Director of Fresh
Colin Shevills Director of Balance.



Recipients of
Gold Medal Chief Medical Officer's Inaugural Public Health Awards
Irish Cancer Society Charles Cully Memorial Medal
World Health Organisation World No Tobacco Day Medal



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