

Health and Wellbeing Board - 24 September 2025

Questions from Councillors

Question 1, submitted by Cllr Carole Jones

- The South West Regional Health Conference focusing on children and young people.
- The Government's Ambition is for this to be the healthiest generation.
- Over-arching aim for the NHS to move from treatment to prevention.
- Justin Varney-Bennett, SW Regional Director Public Health and Senior Policy Advisor to the Department of Health, talked about the South West being THE region for teenagers. He said if you ask teenagers how they feel, their response isn't great. He believes there needs to be more physical activity and improved diets and nutrition.

In the Minehead area the PCN is working with the local secondary schools to target school absences. They are taking a health based approach, so that when a young person starts being absent from school (they didn't actually give a threshold but persistent absenteeism is 10% or more of sessions missed) the first intervention is by health. A GP appointment is made in order to explore any medical/health reason as to why the young person isn't attending school. Out of 15 pupils seen by this process 7 are back in full-time education, 1 has been provided a place in specialist education and the others are continuing to be supported.

This was a new approach and has only been running for about a year but is clearly having some success. It also goes to show GP surgeries working in a multi-disciplinary way in partnership with other agencies in the community.

Can we in Dorset please look at replicating this in our area?

Transcript of the response from Deputy Director of Place and Modernisation, NHS Dorset

I managed to get hold of the GP in Somerset and she shared the presentation with me, and she'd be happy for us to follow up with a conversation, but I also reached out to our Primary Care Network (PCN) colleagues. I was really pleasantly surprised to hear that there's an awful lot of work going on, particularly from a social prescribing perspective. So, for children and young people there are social prescribers going into schools, supporting children and young people. That's happening in a number of PCN areas. They aren't necessarily focussing on those young people that are absent. However, those kids that are kind of in and out of

school, they are focusing on. But I think it's something we can absolutely pick up in terms of a follow up conversation, both in terms of hearing more from what's going on, but also pulling a few willing people around the table to have a conversation about how we might develop something similar.