

# Why partnering with district councils is essential to achieve better health outcomes

## Key findings

District councils deliver services across housing, planning, economic development, welfare, leisure and environmental health to 40 per cent of England's population. All these services affect people's health, making district councils essential partners in integrated care systems (ICSs).

Integrated care board (ICB) leaders should:

- work with district councils to ensure that prevention is a core purpose of integrated care systems
- create opportunities for district councils to act as leaders within systems, and for their priorities to be heard
- use district councils to trial new place-based preventive projects, enabling local innovation.

## What's the issue?

Integrated care systems (ICSs) have a responsibility to improve population health. District councils deliver services that affect the wider determinants of health and are therefore key partners for work on population health and prevention.

## Why partner with district councils?

District councils can bring a number of assets to work within ICSs.

First, district councils are able to **influence the wider determinants of health** in areas where they have formal roles and statutory powers:

- targeted leisure services and support to help manage long-term conditions, reduce health inequalities and tackle obesity
- initiatives to improve mental health and wellbeing, including groups to address social isolation and support recovery
- food and fuel poverty alleviation schemes, and support to improve personal financial wellbeing
- home adaptations to assist hospital discharge and support people to age well
- creating high-quality homes, green spaces and infrastructure to support active, healthy lifestyles
- safeguarding environmental health by ensuring air quality, food and workplace safety and tackling pollution.

Second, due to their highly localised scale in comparison to other ICS partners, district councils are often able to **act more quickly and be more agile** in their ways of working than other statutory organisations.

Third, **district councils have strong links into their local communities** because of the work they do. They also have close links with other local actors such as voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

## How can ICS leads work better with district councils?

To make the most of their relationships with district councils ICS leaders should:

- **ensure prevention is at the heart of the ICS's mission and purpose:** with a focus on the wider determinants of health, where district councils play a major role
- **create opportunities for district councils to lead:** it's vital that district councils take on leadership roles within ICSs and that their expertise is brought into decision-making and delivery
- **use district councils to trial new place-based projects:** this can help make the shift to a more preventive system
- **hold district councils to account for delivery:** there should be mechanisms for monitoring and supporting delivery that place clear goals and accountability on district councils, enabling them to demonstrate progress
- **bring together data:** combining data across integrated care boards, district councils and other partners, and analysing this together can be a powerful way of developing a shared understanding and purpose
- **aim to deepen integration over time:** with partners working towards creating joint roles, pooling resources and co-commissioning services

- **invest in building relationships:** strong relationships with district councils underpin everything. Actively building relationships and learning about partners in district councils is essential for the best outcomes.

### Working together in Suffolk and North-East Essex

In Suffolk and North-East Essex, joint roles have helped bring together partners within the ICS. Key people in the system have jobs split between district councils, the county and the integrated care board. Similarly, there are local government officers who have roles split between different district councils and one of the two county councils involved. This has helped break down barriers between these organisations, as have programmes of joint training that have been run between the NHS and local government.

### Further reading

Tiratelli L, Naylor C (2023). *Driving better health outcomes through integrated care systems: the role of district councils*. The King's Fund website.

Buck D, Dunn P (2015). *The district council contribution to public health*. The King's Fund website.

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### About this project

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