

Minutes: Joint Event with CPG on Cancer and the CPG on Smoking and Health on Age of Sale Legislation. (23/05/2024)

Key details

- **What:** Cross Party Group on Cancer and Cross-Party Group on Smoking and Health – Session on Age of Sale legislation
- **When:** 9:30am – 10:30am, Thursday 23rd of May 2024.
- **Where:** Teams meeting.
- **Purpose of the session:** To present evidence to support the rise in age of sale on Tobacco.

Topic

This session focussed on the Tobacco and Vapes bill in Westminster and was framed around the benefits of Wales adopting this legislation via a Legislative Consent Motion. During the session we heard from Prof Ann McNeil at King's College London on the harms of tobacco. Julie Bishop Director of Health Improvement at Public Health Wales to provide Wales data on smoking and disease. Lastly, we heard from Suzanne Cass CEO of ASH Wales around the most recent Smokefree Survey conducted by the organisation.

Agenda

1. **Opening of the session – John Griffiths**
 - a. Talk by Ann McNeil on tobacco harms.
 - b. Talk by Julie Bishop on Wales specific smoking stats.
 - c. Talk by Suzanne Cass on ASH's latest smokefree survey.
 - d. Talk by Simon Scheeres CRUK about the benefits of the legislation.
 - e. Q&A
 - f. End of session/AOB

Attendees

1. Megan Cole
2. Simon Scheeres
3. Louise Elliott
4. Suzanne Cass
5. Prof Ann McNeil
6. Dr Julie Bishop
7. John Griffiths MS
8. David Rees MS
9. Emily Hearne
10. Andrew Bettridge
11. Chris Coslett
12. Ryland Doyle
13. Chris Emmerson
14. Steven Hay
15. Lyndsey Haffenden
16. Hilary Webb
17. Gareth Popham
18. Rebecca Miller
19. Tete Champion
20. Julie Thomas
21. Greg Pycroft
22. Susan Evans
23. Amy Lewis
24. Tracey Burke
25. Delyth Jones

26. Haleema Khan
27. Janet Joyce
28. Tessa Marshall
29. Suzanne Williams
30. Ian Millington
31. Glenn Page
32. Natasha Bowen
33. Gemma Roberts

Introduction

John Griffiths begins by introducing the joint session between the CPG on Cancer and CPG on Smoking and Health. John outlines importance of the session and the rationale for the rise in Age of Sale, citing how important this legislation is for reaching the Smokefree Wales goal and addressing health inequalities.

John Griffiths then introduces the first speaker Prof Ann McNeil.

Prof Ann McNeil presentation

Ann outlines how tobacco contributes to a significant number of deaths including from second hand smoke.

She goes on to describe the harms of tobacco in relation to the economy, mental health and the wider society.

Ann then highlights that what makes tobacco so uniquely dangerous is the burning of tobacco which produces over 7000 chemicals, with 250 of these being known as harmful.

Ann then discusses that people are addicted to the nicotine in tobacco but ultimately die from the tar. So many academics have been working to find alternatives that provide nicotine for cessation but do not have the tar and other harmful carcinogens.

Then she discusses the addictiveness of differing nicotine products and how the way it is consumed effects how quickly you receive the dopamine hit from this.

Ann highlights some academic research that says, "Over 2/3s of people who try one cigarette become at least temporarily daily smokers".

Prof McNeil continues by discussing how most smokers start young and there is an importance in not only stopping children from smoking but helping adults quit smoking.

Ann then concludes by reiterating her points from throughout the presentation.

John Griffiths thanks Ann for her presentation and introduces the next speaker Dr Julie Bishop.

Dr Julie Bishop presentation

Dr Bishop begins her presentation by discussing the Welsh context in relation to the wider rate of death and disability in Wales and the links to smoking.

Highlighting that “tobacco is the no.1 contributor of death and disability in Wales” through its links to lung cancer and respiratory conditions.

Dr Bishop continues by outlining that while smoking has impacts on cancer, other prominent chronic conditions and diseases are smoking attributable.

She then highlights the rates of smoking among school children across all Local Authorities in Wales. Showing significant regional variation and linking this to regional inequalities.

She concludes by emphasising that smoking is still the leading cause of death in Wales linking to over 5000 deaths a year and that tobacco links to over half of the inequality in life expectancy outcomes in Wales.

John Griffiths thanks Julie and introduces the next speaker Suzanne Cass and also hands over to David Rees MS who will chair the second half of the session.

Suzanne Cass Presentation

Suzanne introduces her presentation on the benefits of raising the age of sale.

Suzanne begins by highlighting stats that show the smoking rates over the decades, with 82% of men having smoked in 1948 compared to 13% of adults smoking in 2024.

Suzanne also discusses how the latest data from 2021/22 shows that 7.5% of 15–16-year-olds are still smoking, while 3% year 7-11s still smoke.

She then highlights ASH Wales’ surveys they conduct to understand public opinion on smoking in Wales. Whereby they conduct an annual opinion poll which is now entering its 10th year.

These surveys look to explore all the key questions around smoking including prevalence, perceptions, interventions and usage.

Suzanne continues by highlighting the impact of tobacco control policies on smoking rates. From 40 years ago the first national no smoking day to the 2007 rise in age of sale from 16-18.

She then discusses the growth in public support for interventions on tobacco. With an increasing number of individuals supporting smokefree public spaces, plain packaging, smokefree hospitals and schools.

ASH Wales’ most recent survey results show 79% of people surveyed support a smokefree generation policy.

With most recent data from ASH Wales on the age of sale showing in 2023 62% of people supporting a rise in the age of sale, and 2024 data showing a further increase to 67% supporting this legislation.

David Rees thanks Suzanne for her presentation and introduces Simon Scheeres.

Simon Scheeres – discusses and highlights how important it is for third sector, NHS and politicians to rally together to push this legislation through and how the biggest cause of cancer has no place in our future.

David Rees opens the Q&A

Simon Scheeres – Begins by asking a question to Ann McNeil about the mental health harms of tobacco.

Prof Ann McNeil – Says smoking rates are higher with those living with mental health conditions so reducing smoking and reaching smokefree will have a major contribution on health inequalities. She also outlines how stopping smoking can improve mental health once smokers are past the withdrawal period.

David Rees – Asks the speakers about whether young people are deterred from smoking from seeing the harms generationally.

Suzanne Cass – Says that often young people are less receptive to the harms of smoking as it doesn't feel relevant is often seen as a very long-term side effect. Instead, we need to find new ways to communicate with younger generations about how smoking will impact them long term.

David Rees – mentions vaping due to the bill being focused on tobacco and vapes, he asks Ann whether there is a causal link between the transfer from vaping to smoking.

Prof Ann McNeil – says that it works both ways with young people who vape will try smoking and young people who smoke will try vaping. She says this links to common liability rather than a causal link. As such, our messages need to be clear about the links between tobacco and addiction and long-term harms.

Andrew Betteridge – Mentions that recently there has been an increase in vaping companies sponsoring sports clubs. Highlighting how this is similar to the prevalence of tobacco in Formula 1.

Simon Scheeres – discusses how they are two very different products with differing harms, and they must be treated as such.

Prof Ann McNeil – echoes Simon's comments and that we must monitor the long-term effects of this on youth vaping.

David Rees concludes the meeting and closes the session.