

Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Task Force

Monday 16th September 2019

Health Impact Assessment Briefing Paper

1. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is the technical name for a process that considers the wider effects of projects and developments and how they, in turn, may affect people's health and wellbeing. Some of these may be positive while others could be detrimental and require mitigation.
2. The idea is to ensure that a proposed project or development of significant size (ranging from a housing development to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) such as the LTC, can be adjusted to maximise benefits to local health and minimise any harm by addressing existing health inequalities as well as avoiding the creation of new ones. An HIA is an ideal tool for integrating the promotion of health and wellbeing into a wide range of policies, projects and services.

The European Centre for Health Policy defines Health Impact Assessment as:

'A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, programme or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population'

3. An HIA is a systematic, objective and practical tool to support decision making; it can inform decision makers and communities of the potential health and wellbeing impacts and consequences of a development. An HIA is not in itself the means of making a decision on whether a development should proceed; instead it is a way of organizing a range of evidence and assessing its relevance and application to the health of a particular local or regional context. As an HIA is **not a statutory requirement** of the planning process, its power to influence is limited to recommendations and material guidance.
4. Development decisions may have a profound effect on people's health and quality of life; therefore, there is a need to ensure that the processes for assessing evidence are robust, inclusive and transparent. Wherever possible, HIAs should be conducted in partnership with stakeholder groups, as well as consulting national standards documents such as *Active By Design*, *Secured By Design* and the *National Planning Policy Framework* for robust guidance on positive design principles. Making use of relevant evidence and expertise ensures HIAs are mechanisms to support evidence-based decision making.
5. An HIA looks at health in its broadest sense, using the wider determinants of health as a framework. The environment, income, employment, transport, the design and condition of housing, crime and the social and physical condition of neighbourhoods all contribute to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. An HIA identifies how a particular decision will alter these 'social determinants' of health and assesses the likely impact on the health of different groups in a population.

6. The benefits of an HIA can include:

- promotion of greater equity in health
- action to maximise health and wellbeing benefits and minimise health and wellbeing risks
- increased awareness amongst policy and decision makers across sectors of how decisions may affect health
- identifying the connections between health and wellbeing and other policy areas
- promotion of evidence-based planning and decision making potential to reduce demand on NHS and social care services by investing in healthy policies, projects and developments that may prevent ill health