Outlook

**Fw: Update from Sarah Perman, October 2026**

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**October 2026**

## Welcome

***Welcome to the latest edition of my monthly newsletter, which aims to keep professionals who have an interest in Public Health up to date with what's going on locally.***




This month, I'm delighted to share my **Director of Public Health annual report 2026**. The report explores how 'play' can improve physical, mental and social health for people of all ages.

Browse the report to find out why play matters, how we can all help to create environments that encourage more of it and what partners are already doing around the county to promote play. It also introduces 'Play Your Herts Out', Hertfordshire's first play pledge.

***Sarah Perman, Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council***

## Highlights

- **Encouraging safer digital lives for children and young people**
  At our recent World Suicide Prevention Day conference, partners from across Hertfordshire explored how we can help children and young people stay safe online and access support when they need it. Building on these conversations, we are encouraging schools to sign up to our Bricks for 26: smartphone-free schools initiative, a countywide pledge that goes beyond current requirements for schools to be phone-free spaces during the day by promoting brick phones only for primary pupils and Year 7 students. Schools will receive practical resources, communications support and guidance to help implement the change, alongside information for parents and carers to support safer digital habits and healthier childhoods.

- **Improving food standards with Nourish Hertfordshire**
  Good food at school plays an important role in children's health, wellbeing and readiness to learn. From September 2027, updated School Food Standards will increase the focus on fibre, fruit and vegetables, limit foods high in fat, sugar and salt, and introduce new breakfast nutrition standards. We are well on track to support this direction locally through our Nourish Hertfordshire initiative. Led by School Food Matters, in partnership with Chefs in Schools and the University of Hertfordshire, the programme will work with 40 primary, secondary and SEND

schools to help them create healthier food environments. Check out this interesting blog about access to school food

- **Co-occurring mental health and substance use programme**
  Hertfordshire's co-occurring mental health and substance use (COMHSU) programme has brought together over 25 organisations and people with lived experience to improve support for those with both mental health and substance use needs. Achievements include a shared countywide vision, stronger service pathways, a comprehensive service directory, embedded drug and alcohol workers in community mental health teams, and improved joint working arrangements across organisations. As the programme moves into business as usual, partners are encouraged to build on this progress to ensure timely, joined-up support. A range of COMHSU resources are available on our website, including the service directory, myth-busting information and harm reduction training videos. The latest drug and alcohol e-newsletter is now available.

- **Age Friendly: Live Better Strategy launched**
  1 October was International Day of Older Persons, themed 'What's on your doorstep?' Hertfordshire's new Age Friendly: Live Better in Hertfordshire Strategy 2026-2029, sets out a shared vision for helping people age well by promoting connection, independence, inclusion and active participation in community life.

- **Lifesaving skills programme supports GRT communities**

  Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across Hertfordshire recently took part in a Public Health funded multi-agency outreach programme offering health advice, CPR training, bleed management awareness, blood pressure checks and fire safety advice. Led by Hearts for Herts Charity, the programme also provided defibrillators and bleed control kits at all Hertfordshire-owned or commissioned Traveller sites. Strong community engagement at the event has prompted partners to explore annual events and further training opportunities for Traveller communities.

- **Children receiving supervised toothbrushing**

  Tooth decay is the most common oral disease affecting children and young people in England. To help children develop healthy oral health habits from an early age, Hertfordshire County Council and Herts Special Care Dental Service have been delivering the government funded supervised toothbrushing programme across the county. Sixteen early years settings have signed up to the programme, with more expected to join in the coming school year. Nearly 500 children have received a toothbrush and toothpaste and are encouraged to brush regularly both in their setting and at home. Families have also been provided with take-home packs containing oral health information, a toothbrush and toothpaste to support continued brushing at home.

## News from our partners



I was very pleased to visit the **St Albans and District Foodbank** recently, and was impressed to see first-hand the impact of its work.

I could really see the value of the strong relationships that staff and volunteers build with residents, and the focus on helping people find long-term solutions.

As Kath from the service explained: *"We want people to not need the foodbank anymore, which is why we offer so much more than just emergency food."* From a public health perspective, it was also great to see fresh fruit and vegetables included in food parcels. Thank you to everyone involved

## Opportunities

- We would like to understand public perceptions of defibrillators and bleed control kits, so that we can improve information about these life-saving tools and help residents feel more confident in using them. We've launched a short public survey so that people can give us their views - please do share the link through your networks: Awareness and confidence in using publicly accessible defibrillators and bleed control kits

## And finally...

- **Roll out of home HPV testing kits**

Women who have not attended cervical screening appointments will now be invited to order HPV self-testing kits, thanks to a new initiative being rolled out by the NHS. It is hoped that this will provide a more discreet and convenient option to encourage more women to complete the potentially lifesaving screening. Find out more

- **Stoptober 2026**
  Stoptober is the annual NHS quit-smoking campaign encouraging smokers across England to stop for 28 days in October. We've created a range of localised digital assets to help promote the campaign, including content focused on mental health, multiple quit attempts and the impact of quitting on loved ones. If you would like the campaign toolkit sent to you, please contact Smokefree.Hertfordshire@hertfordshire.gov.uk. We will also be attending a number of Better Health Bus community engagement events during the month, with dates and locations available to view here Better Health Bus | Hertfordshire County Council

- **Winter vaccinations campaigns**
  NHS colleagues have pulled together local and national campaign assets to promote the free flu vaccine and other vaccinations to eligible residents, including the details of local walk-in clinics (to be added soon). Please share the resources through your channels.

- **UK landlines are going digital**
  Most customers will be contacted by their telecoms provider when it's time to switch to digital, but if someone you work with uses telecare equipment, a personal alarm, a healthcare monitor, or relies on a landline in an emergency, please encourage them to check whether they need to take any action and signpost them to sources of support. Find out more

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