

Conclusions and Recommendations

Engagement with money advice settings illustrated that there is support for raising the issue of smoking with clients. However, the view from staff was that the issue should only be raised when the circumstances are right. The best way to engage with the issue is dependent on the type of service delivery, individual needs of clients, organisational values and specific funding and partner expectations.

Staff initially indicated concerns over bringing discussion of smoking into their work, but were more willing to do so when the right information, guidance and support were available.

Client responses to the packs, and to having conversations about tobacco use with their Adviser were also on the whole positive. Clients often enquired about the packs, and talked about their own smoking costs, and were happy to take information away on stop smoking support. Some positive health behavioural changes came about as a result, with several clients and staff cutting down on smoking or quitting.

Recommendation 1: Management in money advice, debt advice or financial support services should view discussion on smoking with clients as a legitimate element of their support for clients, to be taken forward if the client shows interest.

Recommendation 2: Provision of effective information and support materials makes a big difference to staff and should be mainstreamed across services. These need to be light touch and flexible, allowing staff to determine when it is appropriate to make use of them, and address staff concerns over lack of time available with each client, lack of knowledge amongst staff and hesitancy over raising what might be seen as a contentious issue.

Staff placed great emphasis on the limited extent of the intervention that they felt qualified to deliver, even with training and support. This was often to do with already feeling over-stretched, or awareness of the limited time available to speak with any individual client. Nevertheless both staff and clients did respond very positively to the materials and to the briefing and support provided, with substantial indications of conversations taking place and clients taking away materials for consideration. A limitation of this light-touch engagement is that we have been unable to collect information on how or whether this intervention resulted in changes once clients had left the service.

Recommendation 3: Expectations on staff to take on additional roles of duties should be limited, and should focus on raising the issue of smoking as part of financial assessments or other existing conversations, with no expectation of providing expert stop smoking support themselves and only to highlight where such support is available.

Recommendation 4: Research should be commissioned to further explore the ongoing impact of this intervention, through following up with clients after they leave the money advice setting, to measure the ongoing life changes achieved.

Most Advisers felt that a lack of familiarity with the issue could hold them back, and hence that training opportunities would better enable them to discuss smoking with clients. There was recognition that there is limited time or resource available for training, and any provision would need to reflect this reality.

Recommendation 5: Free, accessible, brief training should be made available to staff, and service managers should commit to enabling and encouraging staff to access it. This should focus on generating the confidence to engage in brief conversations and referral on to more specialist support.

It was clear that many services see themselves as fully stretched in delivering on existing commitments, and this makes it difficult for them to consider taking on any additional considerations. There is currently little in the way of formal drivers to engaging with clients on smoking, and national or strategic direction could help to address this.

Recommendation 6: Engagement and support for clients who wish to save money by stopping smoking should be explicitly included in government strategies (such as the Fairer Scotland Action Plan), sectoral guidance (such as financial review questionnaires) and local Service Level Agreements (such as those commissioning local advice services), so that interventions and signposting around tobacco should be integrated into organisational objectives and reporting requirements.

There was interest in partnership with stop smoking services, and we already saw some positive initiatives underway in the lifetime of this project. However services reported that it would be difficult to identify resources for more formal working e.g. stop smoking support available in debt advice settings

Recommendation 7: Money advice and stop smoking services should make connections at local level, and have arrangements in place for mutual referrals.

Recommendation 8: Where resources allow, a useful follow-up to this project would be to provide specialist stop smoking support within a money advice setting, and to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of such a model.