



Autumn Budget 2025
Submission from Fresh (Making Smoking History)
October 2025

[Fresh](#) is the comprehensive tobacco control programme in the North East of England, launched in 2005 to deliver an evidence-based multi component strategy designed to reduce smoking rates. Our programme delivery is based on the key principles of motivating and supporting people to stop smoking, preventing uptake, and protecting people from tobacco-related harm.

Fresh is collaboratively commissioned and jointly funded by all 12 of the North East's local authorities and the North East and North Cumbria NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), signalling a clear commitment to prevention from partners in the region. Together with the ICB and the North East Directors of Public Health we have developed a shared [North East Declaration for a Smokefree Future](#) which clearly states the regional vision that:

“A smokefree future, free of the death and disease from tobacco, is needed, wanted and workable. This would improve the health and wealth of our region's most disadvantaged communities more than any other measure.”

Recognising the role of price as the number one policy lever to reduce smoking rates and how this is undermined by the availability of illicit tobacco, Fresh also co-ordinates the [Illicit Tobacco Partnership](#) which exists to provide national leadership, to provide strategic advice and guidance, to influence policy development and to advocate for effective tobacco regulation.

Fresh works closely with key national partners including Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and we are a core member of the Smokefree Action Coalition.

We have no direct or indirect links to, nor do we receive funding from, the tobacco industry or its affiliates. We recommend that any individual or organisation making a Budget submission to HM Treasury that covers the topic of tobacco should be required to include declaration of any such links to ensure compliance with Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which exists to protect policy development from the vested interests of the tobacco industry and their affiliates.

As well as providing our own submission, we endorse the submission from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) with more detailed proposals for consideration by HM Treasury. We are also grateful to ASH and colleagues for their support as we developed this submission.

We also want to draw HMT's attention to the submission from Balance, our sister programme in the North East of England, whose work is focused on reducing alcohol harm. Not only does alcohol use place a significant burden on society but action to reduce smoking will be limited without action to reduce the harms caused by alcohol, including measures to reduce affordability.

We welcome the Government's commitment to a smokefree country and the Autumn Budget will be a key opportunity to confirm commitment to this ambition. There are many ways in which improving public health as a whole and reducing smoking rates in particular will help the Government to achieve its missions to rebuild Britain, most notably around kick-starting economic growth as well as building an NHS that is fit for the future. Reducing smoking rates would improve national productivity, reduce demand on public resources, build resilience among communities and lessen the impact of economic hardship.

There is strong support for further action on tobacco, not only from the public but also across the political spectrum. Findings from a 2025 YouGov survey, including over 600 people in the North East, show 69% of North East adults back the Smokefree Generation policy and even among smokers nationally, more than half (52%) support the move. Support is also strong in the North East for other measures:

1. 67% of people in the North East want to live in a country where no one smokes, with support spanning ages and incomes.
2. Only 11% believe the Government is doing too much to tackle smoking and 47% believe the Government is not doing enough.
3. 80% support a levy placed on the profits of Big Tobacco to fund quitting support and prevention.

The economic and health burden of smoking can't be ignored

In 2024, smoking cost English public finances £9.7bn net and the wider economy £43.7bn, mainly through lost productivity¹. In the North East, this translates as a cost of £1.99 billion a year- far more than the £306 million raised through tobacco taxes. This includes £1.23 billion in lost economic productivity, £82.3 million to the NHS, £661 million in social care costs and £15 million in fire related costs.

Nationally, about six million adults still smoke in the UK – in the North East, this equates to around 240,000 people. And while there is a national ambition to reduce health inequalities, half the gap in healthy life expectancy between rich and poor is due to smoking. Reducing smoking rates would deliver major public finance and productivity benefits, alongside reducing inequality².

We need the Government to create a strategy to maximise the impact of the Tobacco & Vapes Bill and invest in tobacco control. This includes the following recommendations from ASH which we support:

¹ Reed H. [Cost Benefit and Public Finance Model of Smoking in the UK, Version 2.3](#). A report commissioned by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) from Landman Economics. Jan 2025.

² APPG on Smoking and Health. [A Roadmap to a Smokefree Country: No one starts, everyone stops, no profit in tobacco](#). April 2025.

1. Reset national targets for smoking prevalence. The Smokefree 2030 goal, with aim of reducing prevalence to 5% or less, is unlikely to be achieved. ASH is calling for a new target of two million fewer smokers in this Parliament, aiming for 5% by 2032.
2. Publish a roadmap for a Smokefree country: while the measures in the Bill are much needed, it is essential that there is co-ordinated action on tobacco across government to build on these measures.
3. Sustain existing funding and expand investment in tobacco control to £310m annually, ensuring that quit services and media campaigns are protected. Fresh runs evidence-based, insight-led media [campaigns](#) in the North East which have been used nationally by DHSC and we would be happy to discuss further national use of our campaigns.
4. Develop a vape strategy to be jointly led by DHSC and HM Treasury, clarifying objectives relating to regulation, excise policy, and youth protection and ensuring coherence across policy areas, noting that for existing adult smokers, vapes can play an important role in their quitting journey.

Taxation Proposals

We support the following key recommendations from ASH in relation to tobacco taxation:

- The tobacco tax escalator needs to be strengthened by raising the annual increases from 2% above inflation to 5% above inflation to maintain pressure on the affordability of tobacco.
- Gaps in the existing system need to be closed, including:
 - For hand-rolling tobacco, applying a tax escalator at 10% above factory-made cigarettes until an equivalent tax per stick is achieved.
 - Extend Minimum Excise Tax to limit the likelihood of ultra-cheap sales and apply it to both factory made cigarettes and hand-rolling tobacco.
 - Redefine cigarillos as cigarettes, removing their tax advantage.
 - For other tobacco products, raise excise duty to narrow the gap between cigarettes, hand-rolling tobacco, heated tobacco and other smokeless tobacco products.
 - Abolish duty-free allowances entirely, or as a minimum align hand-rolling tobacco limits with cigarette limits
- Ensure the Vaping Products Duty scheme which comes into force in 2026 is implemented in such a way that discourages youth use while preserving incentives for tobacco smokers to switch.
- Implement a 'Polluter Pays' levy on tobacco manufacturers, capping wholesale prices and excess profits while maintaining retail prices via tax through a price cap model, which is projected to raise around £700m annually.

We would be happy to discuss any element of this submission further.