fresh Making Smoking History BULLETIN

Edition 6 | October 2026

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Welcome to the October edition of the Fresh e-Bulletin.

As we approach the introduction of the Smokefree Generation law on 1 January 2027, this month's e-bulletin highlights how partners across the North East are helping turn ambition into reality. From record-low smoking rates and preparation for the new legislation, to inspiring quit stories and practical support through FreshQuit, there is plenty to celebrate as we continue working towards a smokefree future.

The Month Ahead

SSA SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF ADDICTION

Fresh invited to speak at national addiction conference

We are delighted to have been invited to take part in the Society for the Study of Addiction's Annual Conference this November.

Fresh Director Ailsa Rutter OBE will join Sue Mountain, one of our Smoking Survivors and a passionate advocate for a smokefree future, alongside Dr Sarah Jackson and Nathan Davies in the opening plenary session.

The opening session will focus on the Smokefree Generation law which comes in on 1st January 2027- this will make it illegal to sell lethal tobacco products to anyone born after 1st January 2009. Find out more here.

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New Developments

The Tobacco and Vapes Act will prevent the legal sale of lethal tobacco products including cigarettes to the next generation, and it will also curb youth vaping. With strong backing from both the public and the health community, this Act represents a significant step toward a smokefree generation.

As part of this, other tobacco legislation also came into effect on 29th October 2026: Key changes at the end of October included

• A minimum age of sale of 18 will apply to all consumer nicotine products, including nicotine pouches and additionally zero nicotine vapes. The free distribution of vapes and other consumer nicotine products will be prohibited.

• Vending machines selling vapes or other consumer nicotine products will be prohibited. Guidance here.

All the relevant links for Government guidance are here ▼

Selling tobacco, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers. Click here.

Selling vaping and nicotine products. Click here.

Tobacco, vaping and nicotine products: fixed penalty notices. Click here.

Tobacco and vaping product vending machine ban. Click here.

Smokefree Generation Planning

We were delighted to spend time with colleagues from across the North of England at a Smokefree Generation planning session organised by ASH (UK) on 6th October

in York. In the afternoon we ran a workshop with OHID and it was excellent to have attendees from across our local authorities at this.

On the 1st November it will be two months to go to the Smokefree Generation law coming in on 1st January 2027. We are looking forward to supporting the Department of Health plans to promote awareness of this new law.



You can sign up to the Campaign Resource Centre here to get these campaign resources when they are available.



At this stage we are planning a big PR push in the North East for 1st December- one month to go- and to demonstrate all the support for this across our region.

Illicit tobacco:

In October, ASH released a new report on the illicit tobacco trade:

Beyond the headlines: the reality of illicit tobacco in the UK - ASH.

The report, endorsed by the Fresh-led Illicit Tobacco Partnership and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute found that:



- The UK's consumption of illegal cigarettes has fallen by 90% since the year 2000. Official figures from HMRC's 2026 "Measuring Tax Gaps" now show that annual illicit cigarette consumption declined from a staggering 15.1 billion in 2000–01 down to 1.9 billion in 2024–25. Illegal hand-rolling tobacco consumption also fell from 5.9 million kg to 1.1 million kg over the same period.
- Tobacco manufacturers exaggerate the size of the UK illicit tobacco market threefold to help them lobby against tobacco taxes and new laws designed to create a smokefree generation.
- The number of illicit cigarettes consumed annually has fallen by almost 90% since 2000, despite cigarette prices more than tripling.
- Tougher action is needed against criminal retailers and organised crime, alongside continued efforts to reduce smoking rates.

- The best way to tackle the illicit tobacco trade is to reduce demand by supporting the 4.9 million UK smokers to quit.

The report provides a detailed overview of the UK illicit tobacco market and enforcement response; sets out recommendations to strengthen the UK's enforcement efforts; scrutinises tobacco industry claims about the illicit market and explains how manufacturers exploit concerns about illicit sales and equips partners to rebut industry misinformation about the illicit trade.

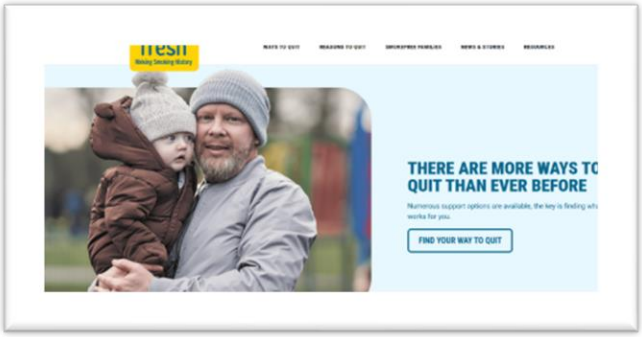
New research published in the last month from the University of Bath suggests that British American Tobacco (BAT) may have been complicit in cigarette smuggling, despite the company's public claims to combat the trade.

You can read more here.

Illicit tobacco survey: Fresh is preparing for our next (10th) wave of the North East illicit tobacco survey in 2027 which is a key source of independent data on the illicit tobacco market. We are also working with partners across the North to explore a refresh of the Keep It Out campaign in 2027.

Making it easier to find support to quit: www.freshquit.co.uk

We have given the FreshQuit website a refresh to make it even easier for people to find the right support to quit smoking. Navigation has been simplified, the different ways to quit are easier to find and the mobile experience has been improved, reflecting how most people now access the site.



A key improvement is the new direct referral form to local stop smoking services, creating a much smoother journey from Fresh campaigns into support. Alongside easier access to the Smoke Free App, this means people can move more easily from thinking about quitting to finding and accessing the support that's right for them.

And we're already seeing people use the new route, with 90 direct referrals received through Freshquit.co.uk from across the North East in the first month since launch.

It's an encouraging early sign that making the journey simpler can help more people take that next step towards quitting.

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In The News

Stoptober 2026: A Regional Team Effort

A huge thank you to all our partners across the North East for their incredible support throughout Stoptober. From local stop smoking services and NHS teams to council partners and community organisations, your hard work, enthusiasm and commitment have helped amplify the campaign and encourage even more people to quit smoking.

We're also grateful to everyone who shared the fantastic photos featured in this montage, showcasing the creativity, passion and collective effort that makes Stoptober such a success across our region. Together, we're helping more people find the hope and help they need to quit for good.



North East smoking rates reach record low:

New Annual Population Survey figures show that smoking prevalence in the North East has fallen again, with 9.7% of adults now smoking, down from 10.2% in 2024 and close to the England rate of 9.5%.

The North East has seen the largest overall reduction of any English region since 2005, when 29% of adults smoked. Prevalence has fallen by 66.6% over the past two decades.

The figures are an important milestone and reflect the sustained work of partners across the region. Encouragingly, the North East now also has the lowest smoking prevalence among people in routine and manual occupations of any English region, at 18% compared with 19.5% nationally.



However, significant inequalities remain, reinforcing the need to maintain our focus on supporting people and communities with the highest smoking rates as we work towards a smokefree future where no one is left behind.

Alcohol Alert Podcast: The Tobacco and Vapes Act – and how alcohol is being left behind.

In October, the Institute of Alcohol Studies podcast featured Ailsa Rutter OBE sharing the deeply personal story behind her career and reflecting on the history of tobacco control, from the 1962 Royal College of Physicians report to today's Tobacco and Vapes Act.



With the 'smokefree generation' law edging closer, they discussed why regulation on tobacco has moved so much further than on alcohol, the risk that alcohol harm gets overshadowed as attention turns to the Act, and the impact of the powerful campaigns running to encourage quitting in the North East

Listen back here.

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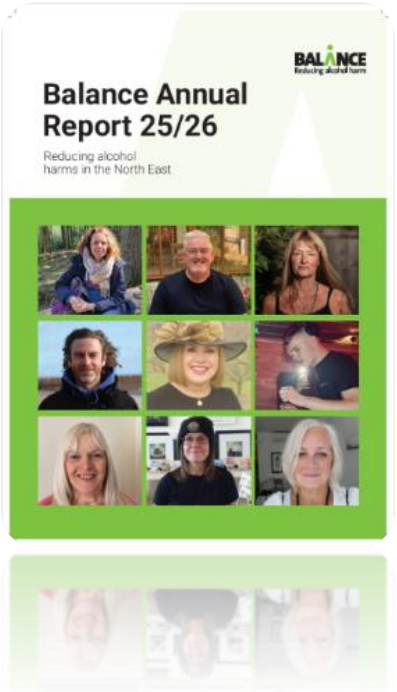
Lestryne's Story

After smoking on and off for more than 50 years, County Durham grandmother Lestryne has quit for good, with support from Smokefree County Durham. Now nearly two years of smokefree, she says giving up smoking is one of the best decisions she's ever made.



From breathing easier and feeling healthier to saving money and gaining freedom from thinking about cigarettes every day, Lestryne's story is a powerful reminder that it's never too late to quit. Read her inspiring story and discover why she says: "If I can do it after 50 years, anyone can." You can read Lestryne's story here.

We are delighted to share the link to the Balance 2025/26 Annual Highlights Report.Balance is our sister programme which focusses on alcohol harms and over the past year, the team has worked tirelessly with a wide range partners across the region, nationally and internationally to raise awareness of alcohol harm, challenge the normalisation of alcohol, support evidence-based policy, and help address the multiple harms from alcohol.



Highlights from 2025/26 include

✅ Delivering impactful public awareness campaigns, including Alcohol is Toxic and What's the Harm?

✅ Sharing lived experience stories to raise awareness that alcohol causes cancer and other serious health conditions

✅ Supporting partners with evidence, insight and communications expertise

✅ Amplifying the voices of healthcare professionals, communities and people with lived experience

✅ Advocating and working with national partners for policies that can reduce alcohol-related harm and improve public health outcomes

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Upcoming Events

The Smoking Cessation and Health Community of Practice is hosting an online webinar on 4th November 12-1pm. People living with Neurodivergence are often overlooked in smoking cessation research and service design, despite evidence that smoking rates and experiences of nicotine dependence may differ significantly, particularly for people with ADHD. In this engaging session, Dr Sarah Milne, a leading researcher in smoking and neurodiversity, will explore the latest evidence on smoking, ADHD and autism, and discuss what this means for stop smoking services. Register here.



Join Fresh and the Smokefree NHS Taskforce on 5 November, 12.30-1.30pm for our next Quarterly lunchtime webinar, featuring Noah Traill from ASH (UK) and their excellent new report on Ending smoking inequality: An action plan to reduce poverty and improve health. The report sets out a comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking-related inequalities and ensure disadvantaged communities are not left behind in the transition to a smokefree society. The session is for anyone with an interest in tackling health inequalities and reducing poverty, as well as colleagues working directly in tobacco control, smoking cessation and wider public health. Register here.

North East Stop Smoking Community: The next North East Stop Smoking Community of Interest will be held on 17 November, 2-3.30pm on MS Teams.

Open to colleagues involved in delivering or commissioning stop smoking support across the region, the COI provides an opportunity to connect, share learning and hear about the latest developments and good practice. The session will feature a focused discussion on the new MECC Gateway, led by Chantelle Hughe from Northumbria Healthcare FT, as well as updates, locality sharing and quarterly recognition awards.

Congratulations to last quarter's winners



Team of the Quarter; First Contact Clinical, South Tyneside,



Advisor of the Quarter; Siobhan Maclennan from North Cumbria Integrated Care FT,



Quitter of the Quarter; Amy Bird, supported by Sharon Robinson, Maternity Tobacco Dependency Advisor at South Tees Hospital FT.

Help us recognise more of the fantastic work taking place across the region - nominations for Team of the Quarter, Advisor of the Quarter and Quitter of the Quarter can be made here.

Behavioural Research UK webinar: The interplay between science and policy: A case study of the Tobacco and Vapes Act – 19th November at 12 noon: Register here: Webinar Registration - Zoom

The webinar offers a unique opportunity to learn from those directly involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of a major public health policy and to consider what this case study can teach us about strengthening the relationship between science and policymaking more generally.

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