

Case Study:

HOW IS SURREY LEVELLING UP THROUGH INTRODUCING GREEN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING?

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ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

INTRODUCTION

Green social prescribing is the practice of supporting people to engage in nature-based interventions and activities to improve their mental health.

The Levelling Up White Paper noted the government's commitment to roll out social prescribing across the NHS in line with the Long-Term Plan commitment to have 1,000 new social prescribing link workers in place by 2020-21 with more to follow, so that *at least 900,000 people will be referred to social prescribing by 2023-24.*

In July 2020, the government announced a pilot project to explore the role of green social prescribing. The project would test how to embed the approach into communities in order to: improve mental health outcomes, reduce health inequalities, reduce demand on the health and social care system, and develop best practice.

In 2020, [Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership](#) put in a bid to become a green social prescribing test and learn site. Surrey County Council (SCC) was instrumental in forming the bid, helping to bring a network of c.100 people together, including officers from the environment and adult social care teams. Others in the network include charities and third sector organisations, NHS staff, and officers from district councils.

The bid was successful and Surrey Heartlands is one of seven test and learn sites as part of the national [Green Social Prescribing Programme](#). The programme is running for two years from April 2021-March 2023. It is supported by a cross-governmental partnership and a total fund of £5.77 million, with £500,000 allocated to Surrey.

SURREY TEST AND LEARN PILOT

The [Surrey test and learn pilot](#) focuses on communities most effected by Covid-19. This includes four geographic areas: Spelthorne, Reigate and Banstead, Woking and Guildford.

There are also four thematic communities dispersed across Surrey who are at an increased risk of health inequality and disadvantage as a result of Covid-19: people living with learning disabilities, people with dementia and their carers, people with mental health conditions and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

This reflects the connections between inequality in socioeconomic conditions and the impact of Covid-19 as set out in [Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review \(2020\)](#).

The scheme has funded four programme managers for two years who are based in the Council's adult social care and environment teams, and work closely with colleagues in public health and partners across the system.

The pilot has five objectives:

- to test how to embed green social prescribing into communities
- to improve mental health outcomes
- to reduce health inequalities
- to reduce demand on the health and social care system
- to develop best practice in making green social activities more resilient and accessible

Barriers to green social prescribing the pilot had identified include resources (funding, capacity, training), systemic connections between the green and health sectors, physical access barriers to nature (transport, toilets), social access barriers (including cultural, language, perceptions) and information on the needs, evidence and impact of green social prescribing.

The Surrey Heartlands pilot is helping to build capacity in the green sector through the [Nature Connection Fund](#). This £85K fund provides community grants for green activities that can be accessed through green social prescribing. Projects have included wild swimming, work with a group of Muslim women and girls to develop an ‘Eco Warrior Project, and a ‘Mindful Ninja’ nature-based mindfulness group for teenagers.

The pilot has also supported the green sector by providing peer support and training for community-based green providers and has developed a green health provider quality standard assurance for Surrey Heartlands.

A Dose of Nature is a new psychologist-led nature-based mental health pathway for primary care patients offering people a 10-week nature prescription. The innovative approach is part of the new [referral pathways](#) the pilot is helping to create. The project has also established a primary care network to embed green health into primary care pathways and GP Practices. The test and learn pilot also supports health professionals by providing nature-based training and wellbeing events.

The Surrey Heartlands Virtual Nature Project will offer a virtual reality experience of visiting some of Surrey’s most beautiful locations. The project will bring nature to people virtually, to improve the wellbeing of people who struggle to access green spaces. This will include people with disabilities, dementia, and mental health concerns.

Another work area will connect under-represented groups (including people from minority ethnic communities, young people with learning difficulties and adults with mental health issues who are accessing green social prescribing) with green volunteering opportunities. These have the potential to go on to further training or employment.



Image kindly supplied by Paul Mitchell.

All work areas are supported by data analysis and qualitative evaluation led by Exeter, Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam universities. This will build the evidence base on the impact of green social prescribing

The pilot has helped to form the Surrey Heartlands Green Health and Wellbeing Network, bringing together over 140 health professionals and community members with an interest in green social prescribing.

District councils in Surrey were engaged through the Parks and Countryside Forum, which includes parks and green space managers. Due to timing and workload pressures, some were able to be more involved than others and the connection between green social prescribing and improving local green spaces is an area for further development.

WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

Outcomes from across the pilot are being measured in four key areas: personal wellbeing (ONS4), physical activity levels, nature connectedness and social capital (using ripple effect mapping).

Feedback from people who have been referred to the green projects has been very positive. Examples of feedback from the Wild Swim project: *“It has helped me to gain clarity and peace of mind during an extremely challenging and difficult period in my life”*. *“The wild swim project has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life!”*

The project team are forming a new Green Health Strategic Steering Group to embed learning from the pilot across NHS and local government working in Surrey.

The long-term ambition is to build a system-wide approach to green social prescribing in Surrey with links between social prescribing commissioners and practitioners and green policy makers and commissioners. This will create new referral pathways, enabling clients to access green spaces and for existing green spaces’ users to access health and wellbeing support. It will also enable self-care so that Surrey residents are able to improve their own health and wellbeing through accessing nature.

The national Green Prescribing programme is also gathering feedback and learning from across the seven sites and this will feed into decisions about future funding and roll out by the government.



Image kindly supplied by Paul Mitchell.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Leadership:** Surrey County Council was instrumental in building the partnerships to progress green social prescribing and win funding, bringing together council teams, charities, NHS partners and professionals through the Green Health and Wellbeing Network.
- **Partnership working:** the test and learn pilot has brought colleagues together across service areas including NHS and Surrey County Council environment, adult social care, public health teams. The project team are forming a new Green Health Strategic Steering Group to embed learning across NHS and local government working.
- **Use of data:** the pilot focussed on areas of Surrey most impacted by Covid-19, including geographical areas and target groups, linked to risks of health inequality and disadvantage.

CONSTRAINTS

- **The impact of Covid-19:** at the start of the project some council teams were dealing with pandemic related issues, and the health sector has remained very stretched.
- **Capacity in green sector:** there is enthusiasm amongst the green sector to make links to local health needs and prevention services. However, some organisations and established charities have a greater capacity to engage. Some organisations, including district councils, lack capacity to bid for funding and to run projects.

LEARNING POINTS

- **The early outcomes of the pilot suggest significant community benefits from green social prescribing, and enabling more people to access nature:** there is strong scientific evidence that connecting with nature can improve people's mental health and wellbeing This 'test and learn' approach is helping to identify how to deliver solutions to build capacity in the green sector, including opportunities for skills development and employment.
- **Longevity:** the approach is being tested over two years (2021-23). There is an opportunity to do more to embed the learning and build a system-wide approach to green social prescribing, and to support a national roll out.

LINKS

Surrey Test and Learn Pilot: <https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/community-health/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing>

NHS England, Green Social Prescribing: [NHS England » Green social prescribing](#)

Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review (2021):

<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/build-back-fairer-the-covid-19-marmot-review>

Levelling Up the United Kingdom (Feb 2022), Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

During 2022, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport led a project to explore how local authorities are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains - public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.

This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association, recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.

This case study is one of a series of examples which look at how local authorities are levelling up, across service areas.

- ADEPT members are the place-making strategists and policy shapers across top tier local authority areas
- ADEPT members are specialists, delivering services and sharing best practice across key sectors including environment, planning, housing, transport and economy
- ADEPT members design strategies for the future, taking communities beyond 2035
- ADEPT members operate in networks, cutting through boundaries to work with partners across the political, public, private and community sectors
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