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Bid to raise smoking age heading for States debate

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Members of the Health & Social Care Committee have backed health advisors' calls to raise the minimum age for buying tobacco from 18.

Details about how the law will be extended are yet to be released, but HSC told the Guernsey Press that the proposal would form part of the committee's work plan for the political term, which is due to be published in the next few weeks.

That means it will be debated and voted on by the Assembly before the next general election in 2029.

HSC president George Oswald said that banning young adults was the next logical step in the drive to reduce tobacco use further.

'We should continue to endeavour to reduce the risk of harm from smoking to all adults, particularly to those of an age where establishing a smoking habit will be increasingly difficult to reverse once established,' said Deputy Oswald.

'We should also keep in step on this matter with actions taken by our neighbouring jurisdictions.'

The UK parliament recently approved legislation that will make it illegal from next year to sell tobacco to anyone born on 1 January 2009 or after, but the law does not apply to the Bailiwick.

It has been widely reported that the change will leave the UK with the toughest anti-smoking measures in the world, after New Zealand repealed a similar law in 2022.

Raising the minimum smoking age is likely to be just one part of a package of tobacco control initiatives included in HSC's policy letter to the States.

A survey of public opinion recently organised by the Health Improvement Commission recently found strong support for further tobacco control measures locally. There was backing from more than half of respondents for 11 potential measures polled, with 64% supporting the

idea of raising the legal age of tobacco sales by one year, each year, to create a smoke-free generation and phase out smoking entirely in the decades ahead.

About 10% of adults in Guernsey smoke regularly – down from 30% in the 1980s – and the commission said it was determined to see the figure reduce further.

‘Despite this progress, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable ill health and premature death in Guernsey, causing around 10% of deaths among people aged 35 and over,’ said a commission spokesman.

‘Smoking rates also remain disproportionately high among certain groups, with 20% of people living in affordable housing smoking, contributing to health inequalities across the community.’

The medical officer of health, Dr Nicola Brink, said the commission’s findings contributed to HSC’s decision to take further tobacco control measures to the States.

‘The findings of the commission’s Clearing the Air report, which gauged public attitudes towards further tobacco control measures, were considered by the Combined Substance Use Technical Team,’ said Dr Brink.

‘Following discussion of the report and its recommendations, the team supported progressing an age-related smoking ban.

‘This recommendation was subsequently considered and agreed in principle by the HSC Committee and will be included within the committee’s work plan for this political term.’

The Bailiwick has a track record of being at the forefront of smoking controls.

In 1977 Aurigny was the first airline in the world to ban smoking on all services. In 1996 the States became the first parliament in the British Isles to ban tobacco advertising. And in 2005 Guernsey was the second place in the British Isles, after the Republic of Ireland, to ban smoking in public spaces indoors.

However, more recently, there has been a period of several years during which smoking laws locally have remained unchanged.