

Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Briefing paper on vaping, children and young people

1.0 Background & Introduction

1.1 This report gives an update of the local work and action that has been taken regarding vapes in relation to children and young people. Previous attendance at Children and Families Scrutiny Board in July 2023 provided a report covering youth vaping, legislation and regulation and vapes as smoking cessation tool. The previous report can be accessed [here](#).

The Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty has maintained the key message: “If you smoke, vaping is much safer; if you don’t smoke, don’t vape; marketing vapes to children is utterly unacceptable.” Chief Medical Officer statement [Chief Medical Officer for England on vaping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Vapes have a place in society to support those who currently smoke, to quit. Their success as a smoking cessation tool, when coupled with the appropriate behavioural support and treatment plan is evidenced by the Cochrane Collaboration Cochrane Collaboration (2024) [Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation - Hartmann-Boyce, J - 2022 | Cochrane Library](#)

Evidence continues to emerge regarding vapes and there is robust evidence to suggest that vapes are substantially less harmful than smoking. However, this does not mean they are completely harmless. Further detail can be found in this helpful briefing which gives a well broken down guide to key questions on vapes and their risks: [House of Commons – Vaping and Health 2024](#)

For children and young people, vape use continues to be an area of concern. This has been reflected in proposed legislation as part of the “Stopping the Start; Creating a Smokefree Generation” Bill which is currently going through the stages of parliament.

The Bill would give new powers to tackle youth vaping by:

- restricting flavours,
- regulating the way that vapes are sold and packaged to make them less appealing to children,
- banning disposable vapes,
- looking to close the industry loophole which allows free samples to children.

There will also be new powers given to Trading Standards to give on the spot fines for underage sales. Further detail of the proposals can be found here: [Stopping the start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Alongside this a proposed tax on vaping products, based on nicotine strength, has been announced in the 2024 Budget. This will help make vapes less affordable for children and young people and increase the duty on tobacco to ensure it remains expensive overall to deter uptake of smoking.

It is expected that even if the Bill is not passed ahead of a general election it will remain on the agenda due to the strong cross-party support it has had during its first and second readings in parliament, regardless of any changes to central government.

1.2 National Picture

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) have recently highlighted the need for further action on youth vaping:

The key things to note from the most recent data findings are:

- Youth vaping has stabilised but is still higher than pre-pandemic levels
- Exposure to marketing is at an all time high
- Accurate public perceptions of harm are also at an all time low, particularly among young people.

In response to this ASH have developed some key messages:

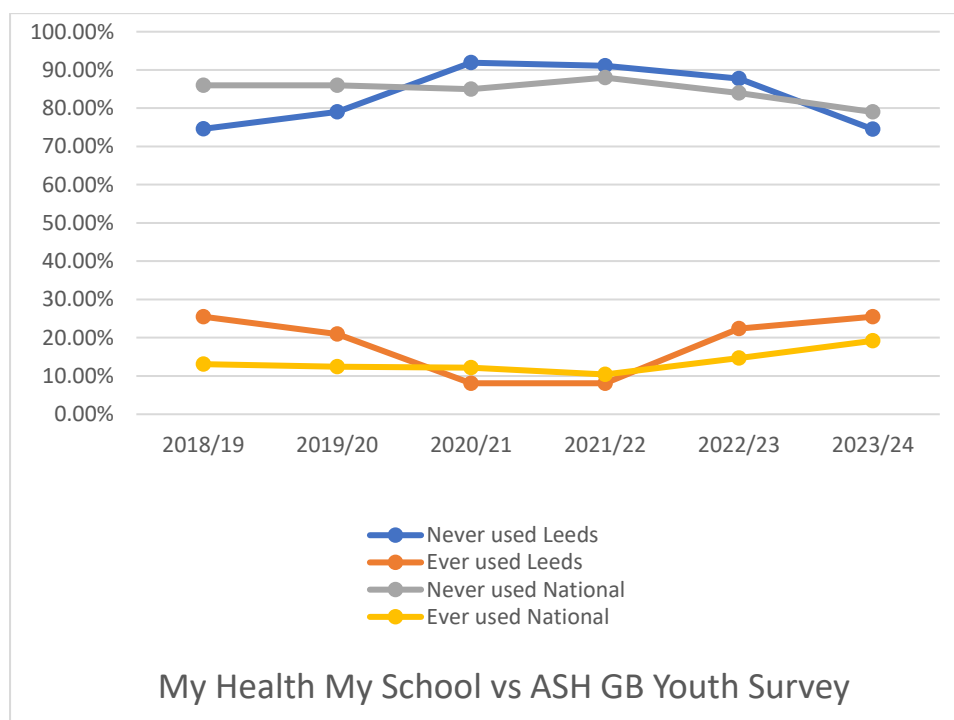
- Increased exposure to vape marketing demands immediate legislative action: with young people increasingly targeted by pervasive vape marketing and promotion, urgent enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill is imperative.
- Addressing public misconceptions: despite the evidence indicating vaping as a less harmful alternative to smoking and an effective tool to help adult smokers quit, a concerning lack of awareness persists.

2.0 Vaping Prevalence in Young People

Data on vaping have been collected in Leeds since 2018 via the My Health My School (MHMS) survey. It should be noted that the MHMS data set for 23/24 is incomplete due to the survey being open until the end of the academic year. Therefore data for MHMS 23/24 represents responses from 1st September 2023- 8th May 2024 and is therefore subject to change over the final weeks of term.

Generally, Leeds has followed a similar trend to the national dataset from ASH on youth vaping since 2020, however Leeds tends to identify higher rates of vape use overall as seen in figure 1.

Figure 1: Comparison of 'ever vaped' and 'never vaped' amongst young people in Leeds Years 7,9,11 combined (My Health My School) with ASH GB Youth Survey

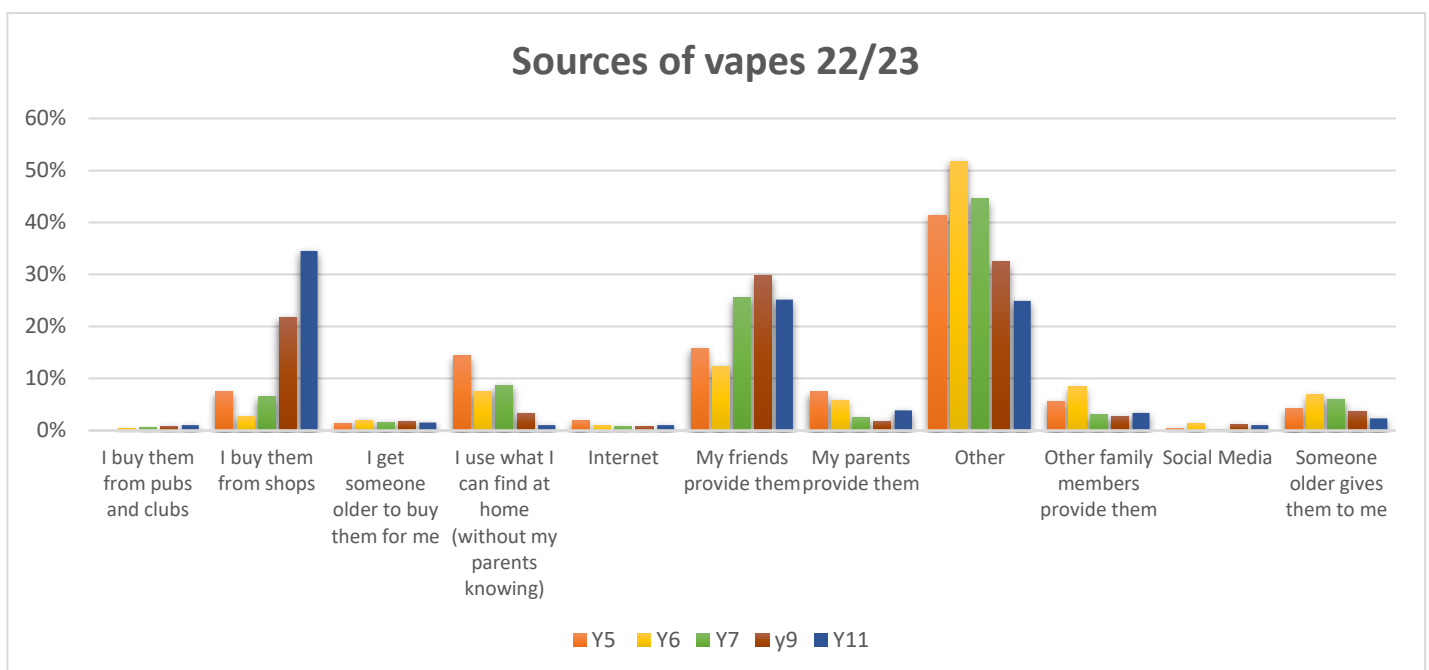


A further breakdown of Leeds vaping behaviour shows an increase in experimental vaping from 9.2% in 21/22 to 17% for 23/24 (year to date), and daily vaping at 2% in 21/22 to 6.5% for 23/24 (year to date).

Figure 2 shows responses to ‘Where do you get your vapes from?’ across each year group, with ‘Other’, ‘my friends provide them’ and ‘I buy them from shops’ being the most common answers overall. A larger proportion of responses from years 9 and 11 indicate that they are able to purchase them from shops illegally.

There was a higher number of responses stating ‘I use what I can find at home without my parents knowing’ coming from younger year groups (years 5-7). Work has been undertaken with trading standards and Leeds City Council communications team to begin to address these indicators detailed later in this report.

Figure 2: Sources of Vapes by Year Group



3.0 Summary of Local Action

3.1 West Yorkshire Trading Standards

Public Health undertook a piece of work with West Yorkshire Trading Standards (WYTS) focused on illicit vapes and underage sales. The tables below provide an overview of what was achieved:

	Oct-Dec 2023	Jan-March 2024
Number of warning letters sent - underage sales. (A warning letter is issued when a complaint is received that a business is selling to underage children)	14	17
Number of warning letters sent - oversized e-cigarette (A warning letter is issued when a complaint is received that a business is selling non-compliant e-cigarette)	23	45
Number of Infringement Reports issued. (An Infringement Report is issued to the business when officers find a non-compliance during an inspection visit)	26 (72% of premises visited were not compliant)	3 (100% of premises visited were not compliant)
Number of test purchases - underage sales to minors	0	5 out of 30 attempts resulted in an underage sale (17% sale rate)
Number of test purchases - oversize product	0	3
Number of non-compliant e-cigarettes seized and a proportionate overview of the common themes from seizures e.g. child appealing, above permitted tank size		18,519 (3 premises) Child appealing = 391 (All seized e-cigs are greater than 2ml volume. Only seized if non-compliant. Greatest 6 19/04/24 final volume seized = 2x12ml (15,000 puffs))
Number of retailer education packs/materials distributed	35	

Complaints:

Source	Oct – Dec 23 (Q1)	Jan – Mar 24 (Q2)	Total no. complaints/referrals
Citizen’s Advice Consumer Helpline	6	13	19
West Yorkshire Police	3	2	5
Intelligence database	7	12	19
Total	16	27	43

West Yorkshire Trading Standards saw an increase in complaints and reporting in Q2 which is likely to be as a result of successful comms campaigns which ran alongside the regulation work (detail and stats detailed later in this report).

Seizure:

The above enforcement work was carried out in Leeds City Centre and the LS10/LS11 areas which had been identified as hotspot areas based on intelligence from WYTS reporting and MHMS data. A seizure was carried out in January across 2 city centre premises, which resulted in the confiscation of

approximately 15,700 illicit vapes, worth a retail value of around £150,000. Legal proceedings from this seizure are still currently ongoing and will be shared when complete.

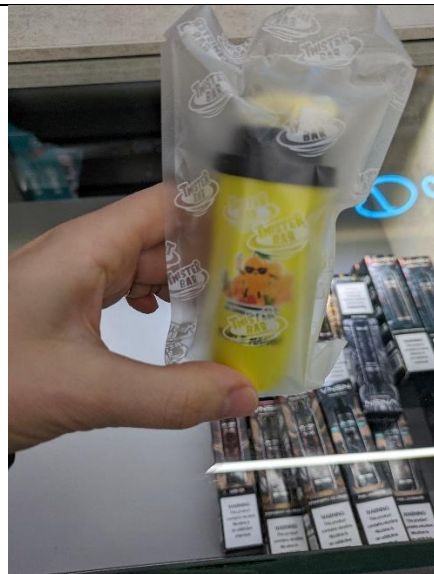
Images from seizure:



Illicit vapes clearly on display for customers in glass cabinet



Illicit vapes clearly on display for customers in glass cabinet



Child appealing illicit vape



Seizure of vapes from Leeds premises

In addition to this a further 21,988 illicit vapes have been picked up by the Cheap and Illicit Tobacco (CIT) team between Oct23-Mar24 when on outings regarding tobacco related work, note this is at a West Yorkshire level.

3.2 Communications work

Public Health and LCC Comms have worked together to develop social media campaigns to encourage reporting of illicit vape sales to compliment work from WYTS. Three paid campaigns were developed and run on social media platforms with excellent engagement as follows:

	Enforcement paid campaign 13/12/23 - 13/02/2024	Keep vapes out of reach campaign (07/03/24 - 07/04/2024)	Can you spot an illegal vape campaign (07/03/24 - 07/04/2024)	Total
Impressions	60,000	87,955	47,904	195,859
Reach	28,000	31,767	28,111	87,878
Link clicks (talk to frank)	542	402		944
link clicks (citizens advice reporting)	72			72
link clicks: E-cigarette regulations			1,089	1089
Click through rate		0.5%	2.3%	
Cost per click		£0.32	£0.12	

The paid advert which performed particularly well was the ‘how to spot an illegal vape’ and it was the third best performing advert (equal with the flu vaccine) based on click through rate. It came ahead of Tropical World easter activities, women’s safety, air quality, Christmas 2023, voter ID applications and primary school admissions. In terms of cost per click, it was fifth best performing and came ahead of Morley Town Deal, women’s safety, voter ID, Tropical World February events, flu vaccine and air quality, amongst others.

Social media assets have also been developed by Leeds Rhinos Foundation and shared on social media platforms using same key messages as LCC campaigns to help compound collective messaging to wider audiences. Vaping posters and resources have also been shared with Leeds Rhinos Foundation to incorporate into education sessions and include in match day booklets. Some wider work with Leeds Rhinos Foundation is being carried out to work towards becoming a healthy stadium and messaging on tobacco and vaping is being incorporated into that work.

Press coverage:

Various press releases have been published and produced some excellent local coverage:

- Leeds City Magazine [Leeds Steps Up Campaign Against Underage Vaping - Leeds City Magazine](#)
- Bradford Zone: [Leeds launches campaign to curb underage vaping, retailers face fines | Bradford Zone](#)



In particular, a press release was published on the city centre seizure which had excellent interest and was picked up in various outlets listed below, including BBC Leeds:



- [Warning of the dangers of illegal vapes as thousands seized in city crackdown \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/news/warning-of-the-dangers-of-illegal-vapes-as-thousands-seized-in-city-crackdown)
- [Leeds: Thousands of illegal vapes seized from two shops in city crackdown - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61888888)
- [Warning of the Dangers of Illegal Vapes as Thousands Seized in City Crackdown - Leeds City Magazine](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/news/warning-of-the-dangers-of-illegal-vapes-as-thousands-seized-in-city-crackdown)
- [Massive vape seizure: 16,000 illicit products worth £160,000 nabbed in Leeds crackdown | Bradford Zone](https://www.bradfordzone.co.uk/news/massive-vape-seizure-16000-illicit-products-worth-160000-nabbed-in-leeds-crackdown)
- [Ground News - Leeds: Thousands of illegal vapes seized from two shops in city crackdown](https://www.groundnews.co.uk/news/leeds-thousands-of-illegal-vapes-seized-from-two-shops-in-city-crackdown)
- [Warning of the dangers of illegal vapes as thousands seized in city crackdown * Leeds Star](https://www.leedsstar.co.uk/news/leeds-thousands-of-illegal-vapes-seized-from-two-shops-in-city-crackdown)

3.3 Public Health Work with Schools

- Want to Know More About (WTKMA) sessions are public health topic-based learning opportunities to develop professionals' awareness and practice around the subjects covered. A WTKMA Vaping awareness session was delivered on 23/01/2024. 85 individuals signed up

to the session with 47 attendees from across a range of organisations including schools, youth services, 0-19 Public Health Integrated Nursing Service and Forward Leeds. This WTKMA session had the highest number of bookings of all WTKMA sessions run between Apr 23-Mar 24 and had the highest number of feedback responses. 100% of those respondents rated the session as good or excellent. Comments included: *“It managed to be thoroughly informative without giving information overload and gave me lots of important factual & practical elements that I can use in practice and share with colleagues”*.. And *“Session was absolutely brilliant - was really informative and engaging”*

- Digital light bites session delivered with 6 schools in attendance with 100% saying session was good or excellent.
- Work with Healthy Schools team to share most up to date/new resources on vaping and ensure that content is accurate.
- Insight gathered with children and young people to understand attitudes towards vapes and vape use – this was used to inform social media campaigns. Findings varied across age groups and identified that a young person specific campaign would be challenging due to the maturity levels across a small age span i.e. what primary age children found scary/worrying secondary age (y7-9) saw it as ‘cool’. As a result social media campaigns were developed to be focused on parents and carers and looking at helping people (including young people) to spot illegal vapes.
- Development of a ‘How to spot an illegal vape’ poster which is available in the Public Health Resource Centre alongside youth vaping posters from ASH. These have been shared with schools and wider partners including WYTS, West Yorkshire Police and Hospitals to continue to raise awareness of illicit vapes and encourage reporting.

4.0 Future work and next steps

- The proposed legislative changes mean that the vaping landscape is likely to change, further training is planned for June to look at smoke and vape free homes training for some children’s centre staff to address MHMS data indicating that younger age children are finding vapes at home. An additional vapes training session for up to 20 PSHE leads is also planned for December 2024.
- The tobacco and nicotine team are reviewing approaches to workforce development to ensure that training includes vaping and other novel nicotine products to align with the changing dynamics of tobacco and nicotine.
- Discussions being held with commissioning managers for West Yorkshire Cheap Illicit Tobacco (CIT) contract to look at ways to source more sustainable funding from wider partners and organisations to allow CIT work to continue and broaden to cover illicit vapes and underage sales and other nicotine containing products.
- The Healthy Schools Team will continue to gather annual data on the purchase and use of vapes and cigarettes among young people via My Health My School survey.
- Working with Reading and Leeds Festival to prevent and reduce any sponsorship or promotion of vapes and other nicotine containing products to the festival audiences.
- Improving data collection on vaping at GP practice level to offer more in depth insight into vape use across the life course.