

In a department: policy is king, delivery is not. Everyone looks to their ambitions through policy.”²⁴⁸

108. Functioning of the new local and national English public health structures was compromised by austerity politics. At the local level, the abolition of PCTs meant that overall public health performance was strongly dependent on local authority capabilities to commission and deliver effective services. Ministers had promised to ring-fence the public health budget for local authorities. However, an in-year cut of £200 million in 2015 was followed by further reductions over the next 5 years. According to the Local Government Association, this amounted to a real term reduction of the public health grant from over £3.5 billion in 2015–16 to just over £3 billion in 2020–21 (- 14 percent).²⁴⁹ Other estimates by the Institute for Public Policy Research spoke of an even more dramatic reduction of £850 million in net expenditure between 2014/2015 and 2019/2020 with the poorest areas in England experiencing disproportionately high cuts of almost 15 percent.²⁵⁰ Resulting pressures on local public health were exacerbated by an overall 49 percent real term cut in central government funding for local authorities between 2010/11 and 2016/17 and a resulting practice of ‘top slicing’ whereby authorities reallocated ring-fenced public health budgets to other services broadly impacting health and wellbeing such as trading standards or parks and green spaces.²⁵¹ In 2010, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People* had promised to give “local government the freedom, responsibility and funding to innovate and develop their own ways of improving

²⁴⁸ ‘Statement by Peter Borriello’, *The History of the Health Protection Agency*, 107.

²⁴⁹ Local Government Association, *Health and Local Public Health Cuts, House of Commons Briefing 14 May 2019* (London, 2019), 2.

²⁵⁰ Thomas, Chris, *Hitting the Poorest Worst? How Public Health Cuts Have Been Experienced in England’s Most Deprived Communities* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research (IPRR), 2019), <https://www.ippr.org/blog/public-health-cuts#anounce-of-prevention-is-worth-a-pound-of-cure> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²⁵¹ Buck, David, *The English local government public health reforms. An independent assessment* (The King’s Fund, January 2020), 6; Iacobucci, Gareth, ‘Raiding the public health budget’, *BMJ* 348 (2014), g2274.