



## Media Release

15 January 2020

### **Cervical Cancer Prevention Week: Initiatives to improve cervical screening uptake rates in Leeds**

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January – Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January is dedicated to the prevention of cervical cancer and the importance of taking up screening invitations. Led by Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, the week aims to see cervical cancer prevented and reduce the impact for everyone affected by cervical cell abnormalities and cervical cancer.

In Leeds, there are a variety of ambitious strategies being implemented to increase cervical screening and diagnose cervical cancer earlier. Our Cancer Prevention, Awareness and Increasing screening uptake work is led by Public Health within Leeds City Council, as part of the Leeds Cancer Programme. Leeds Cancer Programme is a partnership between Leeds City Council, the NHS in Leeds and Macmillan Cancer Support.

**Dr Sarah Forbes, Associate Medical Director of Leeds NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and Co-Chair of Leeds Cancer Programme** said:

“In Leeds we are acutely aware of the work we need to do to prevent and diagnose cervical cancer earlier through screening and awareness initiatives. Working city-wide with partner organisations we are delivering a range of targeted interventions with some of our most vulnerable populations where screening uptake up is lower.”

Cervical screening rates in Leeds of women aged 25 to 64 have dipped in recent years, yet the good news is that in October 2019, we saw a slight increase of almost 1% over the last year. However, screening uptake rates in Leeds are lower than the national target of 80%, achieving 73.3% in October 2019, with younger women aged 25 to 49 less likely to present for screening than the older age range of 50 to 64.

In some of Leeds' most deprived communities screening uptake is lower than more affluent areas. Our work will draw on a highly targeted approach to encourage specific populations to attend cervical cancer screening and reduce health inequalities across the city.

To help address this, three major initiatives are now being implemented across Leeds:

**Primary Care Cancer Screening Champions:** Following the receipt of funding through **Leeds NHS Clinical Commissioning Group** in April 2019, with the support of **Cancer Research UK**, forty-eight GP practices in Leeds' most deprived areas have identified a staff member to take on the role of 'Cervical Screening Champion'. Champions have attended quarterly workshops which provided education and peer group support to help increase knowledge and confidence to be able to promote cervical screening and help remove barriers to attending. This focus on peer group support and sharing of good practice and knowledge will continue in 2020.

**Cancer Wise Leeds:** Funding from **Yorkshire Cancer Research** is enabling a city-wide infrastructure to be put in place to ensure that people who do not take up their screening invitation for breast, bowel and cervical cancers are identified and followed-up to support and encourage attendance. Managed by Public Health within Leeds City Council, recruitment is underway of up to 18 'Screening and Awareness Coordinators' working as part of the Primary Care Networks and often in community settings. An initial focus will be on working with the most deprived areas of Leeds. The programme will also ensure people are aware of the signs and symptoms of cancer and lifestyle factors that can increase the risk of cancer.

**Leeds Cancer Awareness Service:** This is a community-based service funded and supported by Public Health and Leeds City Council. Leeds Cancer Awareness aims to reduce inequalities in cancer by increasing screening awareness and uptake through outreach in areas or communities with poorer cancer outcomes. Activities include advice sessions at community groups or events and in 2019 the service engaged a total of 5,291 people. During **Cervical Cancer Screening Awareness Week**, the team will be handing out 'Public Cervix Announcement' - small envelopes containing a Jo's Trust Cervical screening facts leaflet and a Leeds Cancer Awareness keyring. The team will also post daily on Facebook and Twitter about different aspects of cervical cancer, the smear test, cancer symptoms, HPV and the risks relating to not attending screening uptake.

**ENDS**

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