



**MAKE
SMOKING
HISTORY**

A GREATER MANCHESTER SMOKEFREE SPACE: BACK OF THE MOSS COMMUNITY CENTRE – ROCHDALE

1. About the organisation

Back of the Moss Community Centre is a community hub based in the heart of the Back of the Moss estate in Rochdale. The centre supports a wide range of local residents, including families, older adults, asylum seekers and people accessing health services.

Activities include a food pantry, over-55s luncheon club, community groups, and services delivered in partnership with organisations such as the NHS, including cardiac rehabilitation and diabetes prevention.

The centre is also evolving into a broader Live Well hub, focused on reducing isolation and improving health and wellbeing.

As Centre Manager, Gillian Hinsley explains:

"We are trying to become that focal point... the friend next door, where people can just come in for a brew, support, or help."



2. Why they chose to create a smokefree space

The decision to introduce a smoke and vape free space was driven by a desire to improve the overall experience of the centre, particularly as a welcoming community environment.

Gillian had already been working to improve the indoor environment, but recognised that the outdoor space also shaped first impressions:

"If that barrier was stopping people coming in because they were walking through a plume of smoke, I wanted to stop that and make it inviting outside as well as inside."

There was also a strong motivation to support healthier behaviours, particularly among younger people:

"The trends are becoming more popular that it's cool to smoke and vape... so it felt important to try and educate and address that."

Ultimately, the aim was to remove barriers and create a space that felt accessible and inclusive for everyone.

3. Their starting point

Before the policy was implemented, smoking around the centre had a noticeable impact on how the space looked and felt.

"It didn't look pleasant... overfilled ashtrays, cigarette ends on the floor; it's not nice, especially as a first impression."

While smoking was informally managed through designated areas, these still created issues around cleanliness and appearance.

"First impressions count, and if you're seeing cigarette ends and ashtrays outside, it just doesn't feel welcoming."

There was also recognition that smoking and people gathering outside could affect how comfortable others felt approaching or entering the building:

"Even though it could just be a group of adults, sometimes that can be an intimidating sort of vibe to come past."



4. How they used the Smokefree Spaces Toolkit

The Smokefree Spaces Toolkit played a crucial role in shaping both the approach and the confidence to implement it. One of the most valuable elements was the guidance on conversations and messaging:

"The wording of how to start conversations was so good... when I was explaining the reasons, the health implications and making it a cleaner space; it really helped."

The toolkit also supported communication materials and visibility:

"We used the posters from the guide, printed and laminated them, and placed them in lots of different areas so that as soon as people come in, they can see them."

Importantly, it reduced uncertainty and helped anticipate challenges:

"The toolkit had kind of done the pre-thinking ahead for any situation that might arise; that made it much easier."

Overall, the toolkit made the process straightforward:

"Honestly, it has felt like a breeze."

5. What they did

Implementation was gradual and focused on preparing people ahead of time, rather than introducing change suddenly.

"I started the conversations months before... so people already knew it was coming."

This phased approach helped reduce resistance and allowed expectations to settle over time.

Signage was introduced across the building and outdoor areas to reinforce the message:

"We put signs at eye level on doors and throughout the building, so people see them straight away."

Communication was also extended through social media:

"We shared a post saying we were going smokefree, and it reached a wide audience locally."

The team also worked with volunteers to lead by example, gradually shifting behaviour before the policy became official.

6. Community and staff reactions

Reactions to the smoke and vape free space were overwhelmingly positive, and in many cases more supportive than expected.

"The overall vibe was like 'you should have done that before'; it felt like people were waiting for it."

Because expectations had already been introduced gradually, the official change did not create disruption:

"I think because people knew it was coming, it made it much easier."

Notably, the change also encouraged positive shifts among staff and volunteers:

"One of our volunteers has actually stopped smoking and vaping altogether."

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— GILLIAN HINSLEY, CENTRE MANAGER

7. Impact and benefits

The introduction of the smoke and vape free space has led to clear improvements in both the environment and how people use the space.

A cleaner and more attractive environment:

"There's no cigarette debris anymore... it just looks cleaner outside and in."

Improved first impressions and accessibility:

"You're not walking through smoke or past groups — that barrier has gone, and it feels much less intimidating."

Reduced smoking behaviour among users and staff:

"Because the space isn't available, people just don't go out as much; it's lost that appeal."

Positive shifts in individual behaviour:

"We've had at least one person stop smoking completely."

A more welcoming and inclusive environment overall:

"It helps create a space that feels more open and accessible for everyone."

"IT JUST LOOKS A CLEANER ENVIRONMENT, OUTSIDE AND IN — THAT'S BEEN A HUGE POSITIVE."

— GILLIAN HINSLEY, CENTRE MANAGER

8. Challenges and what they learned

The implementation process was smoother than expected, with relatively few challenges.

"I probably expected it to be much harder... but it really hasn't been."

Initial concerns about resistance proved largely unfounded:

"I was a bit apprehensive at first... but it's been much easier than I thought."

One key learning was the importance of gradual communication:

"Having time to introduce it slowly made all the difference."

The toolkit and ongoing support also helped maintain momentum:

"The guidance and check-ins helped keep it current and made it easier to keep those conversations going."



9. What's next

The smoke and vape free space is part of a wider vision to strengthen the role of the centre within the community.

Gillian is focused on building greater community engagement and understanding local needs:

"I want to find out why people aren't coming in... and build something that the community really wants."

Plans include outreach work and expanding activities to make the centre more inclusive and accessible:

"I want it to be buzzing with the community; run for the community, by the community."

The smoke and vape free space will continue to support this ambition by removing barriers and creating a more welcoming environment.

10. Advice for other organisations

Gillian's advice is to approach the process with confidence and a positive mindset.

"Embrace it, embed it and believe in it."

She highlights the importance of taking time to introduce change properly:

"Give people time to digest it... rather than just imposing it all at once, bring it into everyday conversations."

And encourages others not to be put off by initial concerns:

"Don't be fearful of implementing something that's going to benefit everyone... it's much easier than you think."

"THE TOOLKIT GAVE ME CONFIDENCE TO KNOW WHAT TO SAY. IT USED POSITIVE LANGUAGE AND HAD STATS TO BACK THINGS UP THAT MADE CONVERSATIONS EASIER."

— GILLIAN HINSLEY, CENTRE MANAGER

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