Reviewer's report

Title: Planning ahead in public health? A qualitative study of the time horizons used in public health decision-making

Version: 2 Date: 7 November 2008

Reviewer: David J Hunter

Reviewer's report:

This is a revised version of a paper I originally commented on. The authors appear to have taken account of the various comments and concerns I raised and have done so with great diligence and attention to detail. With one exception, I am satisfied that all my requested revisions have been adequately addressed and, part from a few minor corrections to the odd reference (see below), in my view the paper should be accepted for publication.

The exception concerns my earlier comment that in a paper focused on the UK, no mention is made of the differences in public health policies and structures across the 3 countries making up mainland Britain. The authors acknowledge the significance of devolution in their response to my review but do not make any reference to it in the text. I suggest they need to perhaps in a footnote and/or by making reference to the separate paper they mention. My reason for being a bit pedantic about this is that terms like 'commissioning' and 'commissioners' are 'anglo-centric' and have no meaning in the rest of Britain or, indeed, the UK if Northern Ireland is included. Also, it might be best to avoid language like 'UK region' (p.3, 7 lines from bottom of page) since Wales and Scotland do not regard themselves as 'regions' unless the term is being used to mean regions within each of the 3 countries.

P.12, 7 lines from top of page. The reference to Hunter and King is incorrect. It should read 'Hunter and Marks'.

P.12, 8 lines from bottom of page. 'Local governmental staff' looks odd. Should just read: 'local government...'.


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.