

# Local Government Association (LGA) Briefing House of Commons Backbench Business Committee Debate on the Childhood Obesity Strategy

21 January 2016



## Key messages

- England's young people have the highest consumption of sugary soft drinks in Europe. 9.3 per cent of children aged 4-5 years old are obese and a further 13 per cent are overweight. 18.9 per cent of children aged 10-11 are obese and a further 14.4 per cent overweight. This means that the number of obese children doubles while they are in primary schools.<sup>i</sup>
- The transfer of public health responsibilities from the NHS to local government and Public Health England (PHE) has allowed councils to support the needs of individual communities and set out a local approach to tackling obesity. Councils have focused on shifting the emphasis from treatment to prevention.
- The difficult reductions announced by the Government in the Spending Review, an annual real-term cut of 3.9 per cent (£331 million over five years) in councils' public health budgets over the next five years, on top of a £200 million in-year cut already announced this year, will have a major impact on the many prevention and early intervention services carried out by councils to combat child obesity.
- At a time when the Government has signalled its commitment to prevention in the NHS Five Year Forward View, it is counter-productive to cut the public health budget. Reducing childhood obesity and promoting health and wellbeing is a priority area for local government, and this agenda needs to have sustainable funding to ensure we can deliver.
- In a recent LGA survey, elected councillors were asked about their top priorities for public health in their area.<sup>ii</sup> Councils identified giving children the best start in life (83 per cent) as one their highest priorities. To achieve this, they thought councils should do more to prevent obesity and support mental health services.
- Despite the difficult financial climate, councils have been working innovatively to improve outcomes in their communities. This includes:
  - Introducing measures to tackle obesity through their planning, leisure and health promotion work to enable people to be more physically active.
  - Ensuring people have access to affordable nutritious food, and supported educational courses to teach people how to cook healthier meals.
  - Joining up the work of council planning and licensing teams to reduce the 'obesogenic environment'.

# Briefing

## **Further information**

### **Obesity**

Obesity is an increasing concern in society. More than half of all adults are overweight or obese. Obesity can reduce overall quality of life and lead to premature death. Being overweight or obese significantly raises the risk of developing diseases and health problems like diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. Excess weight can also make it more difficult for people to find and keep work, and it can affect self-esteem and mental health.

A study by McKinsey and Company in 2014 estimated that obesity was a greater burden on the UK's economy than armed violence, war and terrorism, costing the country nearly £47 billion a year.<sup>iii</sup> The report found that obesity has the second-largest economic impact on the UK behind smoking, generating an annual loss equivalent to 3 per cent of GDP.

In this case, prevention is far better than cure, so efforts need to be concentrated 'upstream', before the problem develops. Local government has a huge, central role to play in tackling this problem.

#### **The key facts on childhood obesity are:**

- While the number of children eating the recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables has increased in recent years, 80 per cent of children still do not eat the recommended '5-a-day'.
- One third of children leaving primary school are overweight or obese, and the most deprived children are twice as likely to be obese than the least deprived.
- By 2050, the prevalence of obesity is predicted to affect 60 per cent of adult men, 50 per cent of adult women.
- The prevalence of obesity has increased since 1995, when 11 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of girls aged 2 -15 were obese.

#### **The key facts on the cost of obesity are:**

- £5 billion is spent each year on health problems associated with obesity.
- The NHS is now spending more on bariatric surgery for obesity than on the intensive lifestyle intervention programmes that were shown to cut obesity and prevent diabetes over a decade ago.
- Diabetes UK estimates that type 2 diabetes which is highly correlated with obesity already costs the NHS around £9 billion a year.
- Estimates of the indirect costs each year (those costs arising from the impact of obesity on the wider economy such as loss of productivity) have ranged between £2.6 billion and £15.8 billion.
- In 2014/15, local authorities spent £110 million on child and adult weight management programmes. Local authorities spent an additional £63 million on NHS Healthchecks and £26 million on the National Child Measurement Programme.

## What could local councils do with more resources?

Councils have been introducing measures to tackle obesity and enable people to be more physically active into their planning, leisure and health services. For example, planning strategies now include policies to increase cycling and walking routes, and seek to introduce sustainable green spaces into new developments.

Councils have also taken steps to ensure that people have access both to affordable, nutritious food, for example by supporting farmers markets and allotments and innovative schemes to bring more fresh food to deprived areas. In doing this, they have supported courses and clubs teaching people to cook healthier affordable meals and to learn about and grow some of the food they eat. Further investment could allow them to expand these important schemes and create new ones.

## Case Studies

Councils are responsible for a number of mandatory public health services such as the NHS Healthcheck, the Child Measurement Programme, Sexual Health and Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services and Health Protection. In some areas, local authorities have used innovative projects to emphasise the importance of prevention and tackling obesity. These include the following case studies:

- After being approached by head teachers, **Leicester City Council** introduced a new street trading policy to prevent burger vans trading outside school gates
- **Guildford City Council** introduced a street trading policy which requires at least one healthier meal option to be provided on the menus of street food vendors.
- **Blackburn with Darwen Council** and the local NHS have make all leisure activities free – everything from gyms and squash courts to swimming. Physical activity rates have risen by more than 50 per cent.
- **Kirklees Council** and the local NHS started a social marketing project aimed at students. One in four students increased their fruit and vegetable consumption and one in five did more exercise after exposure to the programme, which has now been adopted by the local higher and further education institutions.
- **Broxtowe Borough Council** are working with and encouraging businesses to provide healthier food options on their menus and help customers manage their weight. The council implemented a Healthier Options Takeaway (HOT) Merit scheme in conjunction with Nottinghamshire County Council and the other district council's within Nottinghamshire, where you can apply for a Merit award if you are a take away business that has a food hygiene rating of three or above. The HOT Merit aims to increase accessibility and awareness of healthier options in takeaway outlets and forms part of our approach to reduce obesity within Nottinghamshire.
- **Bristol City Council** and NHS Bristol started a scheme in 2007 teaching people in disadvantaged areas how to cook simple, healthy food on a budget. The scheme evolved into training community workers to make healthy meals – including staff working in day centres for older people, early year's centres, youth clubs and youth offending teams. The approach has created a legacy that is still having an impact today.

- **Wigan Council** is determined to reduce the overweight and obesity levels of its local population. 'Lose Weight Feel Great' is a comprehensive weight management programme for adults across Wigan Borough. It incorporates a number of services to support the particular needs of people who are overweight or obese. These include a specialist weight management service, group sessions in local communities and the 'Trim Down Shape Up' service designed specifically for men. Since the launch of 'Lose Weight Feel Great' in 2009, over 16,700 people have taken up the community weight management group sessions, losing a combined total of over 72,000kg.

### **Local government: regulation and planning functions**

Many local areas are now developing important synergies between public health and councils' planning and regulatory functions, building on relationships that have been fostered over the past decade or so.

The rise in obesity means councils are combining their planning and licensing functions to try to reduce the 'obesogenic environment'. One of the ways they are doing this is by controlling the number of fast food outlets.

Councils have tried a variety of ways to work with and provide incentives to fast food outlets to provide healthier menus. We have worked with outlets to help reduce portion size, regulate the temperature of oil and stop double and triple frying food.

The need for action at all levels of government and society has been recognised by the newly-announced partnership between Public Health England, the LGA, the Association of Directors of Public Health and Leeds Beckett University to support councils in designing a whole-system approach to reducing obesity. NHS England is also developing a programme of support to councils in developing healthy towns and communities.

It should be noted that school food standards apply to all maintained schools, and academies that were founded before 2010 and after June 2014. All academies established prior to 2010 already have clauses in their funding agreement that require them to comply with the national standards for school food. Academies created from June 2014 onwards will also have to follow the new school food standards, according to their revised funding agreements.

### **Tipping the Scales**

At the start of February the LGA will publish 'Tipping the Scales' case studies on the use of planning powers to restrict hot food takeaways. The document contains case studies of six local authorities which have developed policies and supplementary planning documents to address this issue of the saturation of hot takeaway food.

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<sup>i</sup> LGA Report 2014 'Tackling the Causes of Obesity' available:  
<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6341755/100+Days+Obesity+publication/b650d6cb-289b-4f8c-a823-3c10380d75ff>

<sup>ii</sup> LGA councillor survey available:  
[http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/Public+Health+Opinion+Survey\\_Final+Report.pdf/feb6199e-d1b4-4e37-894e-3ec7a198e408](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/Public+Health+Opinion+Survey_Final+Report.pdf/feb6199e-d1b4-4e37-894e-3ec7a198e408)

<sup>iii</sup> Mckinsey and Company Report on Obesity, 2014, available:

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[http://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/dotcom/Insights/Economic%20Studies/How%20the%20world%20could%20better%20fight%20obesity/MGI%20Obesity\\_Full%20report\\_November%202014.ashx](http://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/dotcom/Insights/Economic%20Studies/How%20the%20world%20could%20better%20fight%20obesity/MGI%20Obesity_Full%20report_November%202014.ashx)