

## **Obesity update – Health and Well Being Board**

### **Background and Introduction**

Compared to other UK core-cities, Birmingham has one of the highest rates of childhood obesity. Our rates have been consistently above the national average since 2006/7. The most recent figures show that 23.6% of 5 year-olds, and 40.5% of 11 year-old children in Birmingham are classed as overweight or obese (National Child Measurement Programme, 2017-18).

However, these rates only tell part of the story. We know the risk of obesity is even greater in our most deprived communities and, more importantly, this gap has been widening over time.

The adoption of childhood obesity as a focus for the City Board and the Health and Well Being Board, as well as developments around regional initiatives from the West Midlands Combined Authority, has provided an opportunity to re-fresh our approach to addressing childhood obesity in Birmingham.

### **What works?**

The evidence has highlighted the complexity around effectively addressing obesity because of the range of factors involved, and that there is no single solution to deal with the problem.

However, whilst addressing obesity remains a challenge, there is some emerging international best practice (e.g. from Amsterdam and New York). In particular, the importance of political leadership and a joined up approach across key stakeholders has been identified to gain commitment to addressing the wide range of factors at an individual/family, social, and environmental level which impact on obesity. This reflects a whole system approach, based on the principle of stakeholder engagement and collaboration because it is 'everyone's responsibility'.

Paul Jennings (CEO Birmingham and Solihull CCG) provided strategic context and direction of travel at the December Health and Well Being Board

Key messages included:

- The importance of a whole systems approach and high level leadership buy-in, in line with emerging international evidence
- Addressing the environment - not just expecting children and families to change their behaviour

One of the five strategic elements, identified and proposed by the City Board (Task and Finish Group) to underpin the development of a Childhood Obesity Plan for the City, included reviewing what interventions the public sector are already offering across Birmingham. This paper describes, some examples of interventions already underway.

#### **Examples of interventions underway:**

##### **a) National Child Measurement Programme**

Every child in Reception and Year 6 have their height and weight measured as part of the NCMP. Letters are sent home to parents informing them of the weight status of their child.

##### **b) Startwell**

This is a service commissioned as part of 'Birmingham Forward Steps' by Birmingham City Council. Startwell works with providers of Early Years settings e.g. nurseries, to provide nutritional advice and opportunities for physical development. The aim is to enable provision of healthy environments for children in their care. The scheme is based on an awards system and may include cooking sessions with staff.

##### **c) HENRY**

**HENRY** is a nutritional support programme for families with preschool overweight children. It is delivered by Birmingham Forward Steps to individual families.

**d) Healthy Start Vouchers**

This is a government-led means tested initiative providing healthy food vouchers (milk, fruit and vegetables) to families receiving benefits with children aged 0-4 years.

Families are provided with vouchers to purchase these food items to the value of £3.10 per week, per child.

It is conservatively estimated that there is widespread underuse of the vouchers by eligible families resulting in an under-claim of £1.5 million in Birmingham. This results in a reduction in nutrition in these families and a loss of retail revenue in these communities.

Work is underway in Birmingham to increase the usage of Healthy Start vouchers by increasing registration for the vouchers, their use, and the retail spaces in which to use them. This will boost local retail income and provide healthy food to deprived families at no cost to the family, retailer, or Birmingham Public Services.

**e) The Daily Mile**

This aims to increase children's physical activity by 15 minutes every day. Birmingham is leading on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Daily Mile on children's fitness, body mass index (BMI), wellbeing, academic attainment and quality of life by working with the University of Birmingham to conduct a randomized controlled trial in 40 schools located in Longbridge. This research has been funded by Birmingham Council Section 106 money with support from the National Institute for Health Research fellowship scheme (University of Birmingham)

**f) Health For Life**

This is a partnership initiative to promote healthier lifestyle activities across primary schools. Funded by the Mondelez International and delivered through Services for Education. Focused on healthy eating, cooking, growing food and physical activity.

**g) Using 'Nudge' to Influence Food Choices in Schools**

Schools provide an opportunity to observe the impact of nudge interventions on children's choices.

Working with CityServe and academics at the University of Birmingham, opportunities are being explored to put in place a number of different experiments across schools in Birmingham to research what works to influence children's choices towards healthier alternatives in the school canteen.

#### **h) Work with retailers**

Work is progressing with a major supermarket chain to design and test interventions to promote the buying of vegetables in deprived areas of Birmingham. Working with the economics team at the University of Birmingham, research will identify barriers to purchasing vegetables and then the supermarket will run a series of trials on the impact of simple 'nudges' to influence buying behaviours.

#### **i) Nutrition Smart City**

The Food Foundation is facilitating a 'Nutrition Smart City' initiative which involves a learning partnership between Birmingham and the City of Pune in India. Birmingham is also signed up to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) and is an active member of the EUROCITIES food network.

#### **j) Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme Local Government Association – EOI**

Birmingham City Council and partners have recently successfully submitted an expression of interest to participate in the LGA's Trailblazer Programme Discovery phase around Childhood Obesity.

Our approach will draw on behavioural insights with a view to enabling communities to be able to more easily make healthier choices.

Birmingham has been a leading authority on developing and implementing the National TOMS framework (themes, outcomes,

measures and success) as a lever to realise social value. Our discovery phase will work directly with the communities to assess what matters in relation to the 5 themes underlying the framework, particularly creating healthier, safer more resilient communities and social innovation in terms of childhood wellbeing and obesity.

The key drivers we will focus on include: Access to unhealthy fast food, access to fruit and vegetables and early-years nutrition.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

There is an increased awareness among board members of some of the interventions currently in place in Birmingham to address childhood obesity; and the need to build on this with a multi-agency systems based approach.

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