

## National Food Strategy Consultation

### FOOD ACTIVE RESPONSE

Deadline 25<sup>th</sup> October: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/agri-food-chain-directorate/national-food-strategy-call-for-evidence/>

*[No more than 1,000 words long. Option to upload supporting evidence if required]*

England is facing a major public health crisis. The country, its people and public services are grappling with the burden of diet-related disease, including overweight and obesity. The situation is a significant concern given that:

- **The prevalence and growth trajectory:** Whilst the prevalence of obesity in 10-11-year olds has remained similar to that seen in 2017/18 (20.2%), in 4-5 year olds the prevalence has increased from 9.5% in 2017/18 to 9.7% in 2018/19<sup>1</sup>. The same pattern can be viewed in adulthood.
- **Impacts on children and adult's health:** Obesity can harm people's prospects in life, their self-esteem and their underlying mental health. Furthermore, obesity increases the risk of other non-communicable diseases, including; cancer, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes<sup>2</sup>.
- **The cost:** The annual cost to the NHS is staggering, estimated at around £6.1bn annually. However, given that obesity can have serious impact on economic development, it is estimated that the wider cost to society is around £27bn<sup>3</sup>.
- **Exacerbating health inequalities:** There is a strong relationship between deprivation and obesity, with obesity prevalence in reception and year 6 aged children doubling from the least deprived to the most deprived areas<sup>4</sup>.

The Government can no longer place the responsibility of obesity at the door of the individual, when there are many drivers linked to health inequalities, and both social and commercial determinants of health<sup>5</sup>.

It is crucial that the National Food Strategy helps to create an environment that is conducive to a healthy diet and lifestyle. This means;

- helping to remove barriers to healthy food such as access, availability and affordability

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<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2018-19-school-year>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>

<sup>4</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet-england-2019/part-4-childhood-obesity>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Psychological%20Perspectives%20on%20Obesity%20-%20Addressing%20Policy%2C%20Practice%2C%20and%20Research%20Priorities.pdf>

- removing cues to consume less healthy food (advertising and marketing across all platforms; TV, online, outdoor, sponsorship),
- providing safe routes to support active travel around cities and urban areas.

It is crucial that those with the power to make this happen, both at a local, regional and national level, action it.

In 2015, Food Active launched the Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight (hereafter LGDHW) to support local authorities in exercising their responsibility to develop and implement policies promoting healthy weight and taking a whole systems approach to addressing the obesity crisis. The rationale for developing such a document is based on the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control. The LGDHW requires senior level local authority commitment and encapsulates a bold vision to promote healthy weight and improve the health and well-being of the local population. The declaration is underpinned by 14 standard commitments, including: considering commercial partnerships, provision of food and drink in public buildings, facilities and providers, supplementary guidance for hot food takeaways and infrastructure to influence active travel. Please see Supporting Evidence 1 attached to this response for further details of the commitments.

However, no two local authorities are the same. The LGDHW therefore offers the opportunity for local authorities to commit to local priorities that are specific to the needs of their local population. Examples include considering weighted/financial support for 'healthier' retail (e.g. greengrocers, co-operatives) in deprived areas, and training for all frontline health and social care staff to have training in brief advice so can provide consistent messages about healthy weight.

Blackpool Council were the first local authority to sign the LGDHW in 2016. Since then, Blackpool has been recognised as pioneers, and council representatives (both elected and executive) are often invited to speak in order areas about their experience, including at the Amsterdam Embassy's Tackling Childhood Obesity Seminar in January 2019<sup>6</sup>. Momentum continues to grow with 19 local authorities now signed up to the LGDHW in the North of England, with many more currently working towards adoption in the North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West.

The LGDHW has been recognised as an effective tool for tackling obesity locally, referenced in the Childhood Obesity Plan Chapter 2 case studies (p.24)<sup>7</sup>, the World Cancer Research Fund's NOURISHING database<sup>8</sup>, the Local Government Association tackling childhood obesity case studies (p.8)<sup>9</sup> and Public Health England's 'promoting healthy weight in children, young people and families'

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.foodactive.org.uk/blackpool-council-shares-experience-at-dutch-embassy-childhood-obesity-summit/>

<sup>7</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718903/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718903/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-database>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.16%20-%20Health%20weight%2C%20healthy%20futures\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.16%20-%20Health%20weight%2C%20healthy%20futures_WEB.pdf)

resource for local authorities<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, qualitative evaluation of the LGDHW has shown that it can be a useful tool to help with the following:<sup>11</sup>

- **Strategic leadership:** creates an opportunity for senior officers and politicians to affirm their commitment to an issue
- **Local awareness:** shines a light on importance of key activities internally and externally
- **Driving activity:** a tool for staff to use to create opportunities for local working

Owing to the success of taking a whole-council approach to promoting healthy weight, NHS England in the South West region has commissioned Food Active to co-create an NHS Declaration on Healthy Weight, and this is currently being pilot tested over a 12 month period in South West England, with potential for a scaled-up model to be launched to other regions from summer 2020 onwards.

There is no silver bullet to tackle the obesity crisis and the rise of diet-related diseases. If the causes are multifactorial, so must be the solutions and efforts are required by a wide range of stakeholders in order to make change happen. Food Active and the 54 local authorities who commission Food Active (13 in the North West, 16 in the South West, 21 in Yorkshire and Humber, plus 4 in the North East) support this whole-council approach to tackling obesity.

Emerging evidence on the health outcomes associated with adopting the LGDHW demonstrate that this is a useful tool and resource for a forthcoming National Food Strategy. The declaration can play a key role in helping to transform the food system at a local level, supporting local authorities to implement policies helping citizens to make informed decisions about the food they eat, decrease access and availability of less healthy food and drinks, and ultimately, contribute towards reducing and preventing diet-related disease in the local population. Not only could the LAHWD assist this at a local level, but perhaps there is scope to implement this on a national scale too. If national government departments from housing, to education, to transport are part of a national declaration on healthy weight, then healthy weight can truly start to be everyone's business.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/750679/promoting\\_healthy\\_weight\\_in\\_children\\_young\\_people\\_and\\_families\\_resource.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750679/promoting_healthy_weight_in_children_young_people_and_families_resource.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.foodactive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Food-Active-Blackpool-Report.pdf>