

# POSITION STATEMENT: TAKEAWAYS AND HEALTHY WEIGHT

## KEY MESSAGES

- Frequent consumption of food and drink high in fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS) has been identified as a key contributor to the obesity epidemic
- Takeaway food is generally associated with HFSS, and convenience, taste and accessibility are driving the UK to consume this type of food more than ever before
- In spite of a lack of national policy, local authorities across England have successfully utilised various levers to help tackle the issue including healthier catering awards and planning

**Definition:** Takeaway outlet: Take-out or takeout, carry-out, take-away, or parcel refers to prepared meals or other food items, purchased at a restaurant or food outlet, that the purchaser intends to eat elsewhere.

## Takeaways

Takeaway outlets play an increasingly important role in the UK population's dietary intake, as more and more of us purchase and consume foods outside the home on a daily basis. The UK has seen a 53% increase in the number of places to eat out-of-home (hereafter OOH – including takeaways, restaurants and cafes) between 2005-2015 [1] It is now estimated that one in four places to buy food are takeaway outlets in England – a 4% increase since June 2014 [2].

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey suggests that between 2008/09 and 2012/13, one quarter of adults and one fifth of children ate food from OOH outlets at least once a week [3]. The total estimated UK spend on OOH eating in 2015 was approximately £56bn and figures suggest that the UK takeaway spending alone accounts to £18.2bn annually, with home delivery food growing ten times faster than the rest of the OOH sector [4,5]. As such, the OOH sector is expected to contribute to around one quarter (20-25%) of our daily intake of calories [6,7]. Alongside increased availability of OOH retailers, factors such as lack of time, practical skills, resource, accessibility (i.e. JustEat, UberEATS and Deliveroo Apps) and the marketing and advertising (including effective pricing, discount codes and family meal deals) of the OOH offer also contribute to the increase in consumption of OOH foods and there is evidence to suggest that this may be contributing towards the obesogenic environment.

## What does the evidence say

- Density of fast food outlets in local authorities varies across England ranging from 24-199 outlets per 100,000 population [2].
- Meals eaten OOH tend to be associated with HFSS, especially when compared to the UK Dietary Reference Values [8,9,10].
- One in every four food retailers is now a takeaway in England, between June 2014 and December 2017, the number of takeaways in England rose 11%, from 52,120 to 57,929 [11].
- The proliferation of takeaway outlets has been far greater in areas of higher levels of deprivation, when compared to more affluent areas [12].
- Increasing numbers of takeaways are springing up close to schools in England, with pupils in the most socially deprived areas exposed to five times as many outlets as their richest peers [13].
- Increased access to takeaway outlets is linked to obesity. A study has found that more takeaways near the workplace resulted in an additional 5.3g of takeaway food consumed per day and increased BMI score by 0.92 [14].
- Placing a takeaway right next to a school produced a 5.2% increase in obesity among students. Researchers calculated that students' calorific intake at such schools increased by 30–100 calories per school day, roughly equivalent to one additional Big Mac every two weeks [15].
- An investigation by the Sunday Times found that third-party delivery company Deliveroo promotes less healthy deals in more deprived, obese-stricken areas [16].

## Policy context

There is a lack of national legislative action to support local authorities on tackling the issue of the growing number of takeaway outlets in England. Public Health England (PHE) have issued a series of briefings and toolkits including 'Regulating the growth of fast food outlets' [17], 'Strategies for encouraging healthier out of home provision' [18] that aim to support and prompt action by local authorities. PHE's 'whole systems' work with Leeds Beckett University, the LGA and ADPH was published in July 2019 [19], looking at new interventions and solutions including takeaway outlets.

A growing number of local authorities have taken it upon themselves to tackle the issue, including 'Healthier Catering Awards' (see Blackpool Council's award for successful example [20]) in a bid to help improve the food ingredients, preparation and cooking methods to create a healthier nutrient profile in the food served in OOH outlets, alongside providing more healthier options. In addition, more than 20 Local Authorities in the UK have introduced restrictions on takeaway outlets to curb the proliferation of fast food takeaways in a bid to reduce obesity levels and improve health, largely utilising planning or environmental health levers such as exclusion zones, restrictions on opening hours, traffic and noise and littering [21].

## Our position and what we will do

**Policy change:** We will continue to promote the Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight, which takes a whole systems approach to promote healthy weight and ensure it is everyone's business to tackle obesity. A total of 17 local authorities have now signed the declaration, and one of the 14 commitments includes considering supplementary guidance on hot food takeaways around schools and areas where healthier food options are limited.

**Knowledge share:** We supported the discovery phase for two local authorities/areas, Pennine Lancashire and Rochdale, following a successful first stage of the Government's Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme. In Pennine Lancashire, we consulted with elected members, planners from across the district and unitary councils, business owners, parents, children and community leaders to explore views around takeaway consumption, drivers, barriers and demand for healthier choices. We carried out a range of consultation methods such as focus groups, interviews and creative sessions with young people, as well as surveys. In Rochdale, we spoke to parents and business owners to understand the reasons for consuming takeaway food and what changes they would like to see. We are delighted to report that the application in Pennine Lancashire was successful and we look forward to learning from the project over the next three years.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Councils should adopt the Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight to ensure healthy weight is considered in all policies and by all departments, not just public health.
- Councils should consider launching a healthier catering award to encourage existing hot food outlets to provide healthier eating options and to reformulate their menus to reduce the sugar, salt and fat content of food, in a way that meets consumer expectations and does little to disrupt revenue to the outlets.
- Councils should consider how health and planning policies can be better integrated to reduce obesity and improve health and wellbeing in communities.

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