

Food Active's 8-Point Policy Call

**FOOD
ACTIVE**

BACKGROUND

As a public health stakeholder working in the North of England, you will have seen the direct and indirect impact COVID-19 has had on the health and wellbeing of local populations during the pandemic. It is also likely that you will be aware of the disproportionate health and economic outcomes that have affected the North of England when compared to other areas of the UK, something that was highlighted at Food Active's recent [annual conference](#).

In their November 2020 report '[COVID-19 and the Northern Powerhouse: Tackling inequalities for health and productivity](#)', Professor Clare Bambra and colleagues argue that existing inequalities have left the North more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic, with both the economy and people's health suffering disproportionately when compared to other regions. The fact that these regional inequalities persist even after the researchers accounted for deprivation and other known social determinants, highlights other factors at play.

In '[Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review](#)', Professor Sir Michael Marmot warns that we have a generation of children and young people at risk of worsening health and having shorter lives following the COVID-19 pandemic, with lack of social cohesion and joined-up working likely to exacerbate the problem. Marmot supports the findings by Bambra and colleagues demonstrating that the more deprived the local authority, the higher the COVID-19 death rate, with North of England worst hit. This also mirrors the pre-pandemic widening of health and social inequalities between regions.

The UK Government's latest Obesity Strategy published in July 2020 can be seen as a direct response to the links between obesity and poor COVID outcomes. Whilst progressive policies are being driven forward nationally through the strategy, Food Active argues that there needs to be a set of specific policies promoting healthy weight for the North of England as a means to start levelling disparities between the North and South.

We have therefore launched a set of 8 ambitious policies (see overleaf) that focus specifically on healthy weight and inequalities in the North of England, and we are keen to gain support for these policies from stakeholders across the region, including those from: Local Authorities, NHS organisations, the voluntary and faith sectors, transport providers, business sector, local and regional media, academics and education settings.

Ahead of sharing this policy call with Metro Mayors and political leaders across the North of England, we are keen to engage organisations as 'named supporters' that will feature as part of an annex to the policy call's briefing document. As such, we will be in contact again with stakeholder organisations in the early part of Spring 2021 to determine levels of support. We hope you can join us in our ambition to reduce levels of overweight, obesity and health inequalities in the North of England through this programme of work.

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1. Healthy weight in all policy areas to be embedded across local authorities and combined authorities in Northern England.
2. Transport providers to ban high in fat, sugar and/or salt food and drink advertisements across all Northern transport network assets.
3. Promote access and purchase power for healthier foods, in particular fruit and vegetables, for the poorest areas of the North through subsidies.
4. Effective powers for local authorities to:
 - a) restrict less healthy food outlets;
 - b) improve the access and nutritional quality of food provided in educational settings (and to be held accountable on quality);
 - c) re-focus the school curriculum to include health and well-being as a core competency.
5. Metro Mayors to lead on the formation of combined authority food boards.
6. Commitment by local and regional media on taking a stigma-aware approach when reporting on overweight and obesity.
7. Increased spending on active transport infrastructure across the North of England with a minimum contribution of 3% of local budgets promoting active travel.
8. Review the local authority spending per head to proportionate support to reduce inequalities, supporting healthy weight through preventative policy and localised support (e.g. weight management services).