


<b>Cabinet</b>  27 November 2024	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Steve Reddy – Corporate Director Children’s Services	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Child Healthy Weight Scrutiny Challenge Session: Action Plan</b>  <b>In response to the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee: Child Healthy Weight – Challenge Session, November 2023.</b>	

<b>Lead Member</b>	<b>Mohammed Maium Miah Talukdar, Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning</b>
<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Matthew Quin, Acting Associate Director of Public Health Phoebe Kalungi, Public Health Programme Lead
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes
<b>Reason for Key Decision</b>	Significant impact on wards
<b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>	21 October 2024
<b>Exempt information</b>	None
<b>Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome</b>	Priority 5 – Invest in public services (We will implement a borough-wide healthy child weight programme).

### **Executive Summary**

Child obesity is a complex, multi-faceted problem that disproportionately affects deprived areas like Tower Hamlets. Data from the National Child Measurement Programme in 2022/2023 shows that 18.5% of children in Reception and 42.7% in Year 6 are overweight or obese in the borough. As part of the ongoing efforts to address the issue, the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CESSC) published a report on Child Healthy Weight in May 2024, following a Challenge Session held in November 2023. The report made eight recommendations focused on food, physical activity, and the psychological and cultural aspects of healthy living. These recommendations include improving Free School Meal access, engaging youth services, and addressing the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Public Health has taken the lead in coordinating a response through a Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, developed in partnership with various council departments. Tower Hamlets has a strong history of addressing child obesity, with ongoing initiatives such as the Food for Health programme and Universal Free School Meals. The action plan is reviewed annually and incorporates innovative approaches like outdoor play programmes and pathways to support children with excess weight. By fostering collaboration and addressing inequalities, the borough aims to improve access to healthy food, physical activity, and the overall well-being of all children.

## **Recommendations:**

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Children and Education Scrutiny Subgroup Committee Child Healthy Weight Recommendations and Action Plan.
2. Note the specific equalities considerations as set out in Paragraph 4 of the report.

## **1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 To consider and approve the Children and Education Scrutiny Subcommittee Child Healthy Weight Recommendations and Action Plan

## **2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 None.

## **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

### **3.1 Background**

In May 2024, the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CESSC) published a report on Child Healthy Weight following the Challenge Session held in November 2023 (Appendix 1). The CESSC made the following eight recommendations across three themes: Food, Physical Activity, and Psychology and Culture.

Number	Recommendation
1	Monitor the uptake of Free School Meals to identify and remove barriers and ensure <i>all children</i> can access these.
2	Ensure that youth services meet our aims around healthy eating, including through their food offer, inclusion of physical activity and training for youth workers.
3	Ensure children are engaged in food production from growing to cooking to eating, for example by co-ordinating work across schools and sharing best practice from the Healthy Families Programme.
4	Work in partnership across the council and externally i.e., with schools to maximise children's access to green spaces, exercise and sports facilities. Consider any opportunities which may arise through the in-sourcing of leisure services.

5	Consider using food ambassadors to promote healthy eating and provide information on recipes which are culturally relevant. Understand that food and eating are individually and culturally specific and sensitive.
6	Review existing social spaces for young people in the borough and investigate any levers the council has to provide or encourage the provision of social spaces for young people that are not fast-food outlets. Continue efforts to make fast food outlets healthier.
7	Ensure that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can benefit from healthy food provision and access sports and exercise where there are additional barriers. Utilising tools such as EIAs to identify potential risks and barriers to this group.
8	Research the needs of underweight children and those who may have eating disorders, especially being conscious of the potential impact of messaging on these groups.

Public Health has taken ownership of coordinating a response against these recommendations in partnership with colleagues across the Council. A Child Healthy Weight Scrutiny Challenge Session Action Plan has been developed to outline what activity will take place and by when to deliver against these recommendations. The action plan can be found in Appendix 2.

### 3.2 What is the issue

Child obesity is a complex problem with multiple causes. Achieving change on such an issue requires a long-term commitment from a range of partners, with actions across the short-, medium- and long-term.

Urban, deprived Boroughs like Tower Hamlets have seen increases in child healthy weight greater than the national average, and inequalities have widened with the most deprived children being most affected, compounded by the cost of living crisis and high rates of child poverty.

Being overweight and obese during childhood has long-term implications for physical and mental health, and these negatively affect the poorest children the worst. National Child Measurement Programme data for 2022/2023 shows that:

- 1 in 5 (18.5%) children in Reception have excess weight
- Over 2 in 5 (42.7%) children in Year 6 have excess weight

### 3.3 What have we done

There is a long history of action in Tower Hamlets seeking to address Child Excess Weight. In 2021, the foundations of the current programme were informed by a series of five 'Healthy Weight for Tower Hamlets' (HWTH) meetings. These were senior-level strategic discussions/brainstorms, focused on different aspects of the 'whole system' that shapes child excess weight. They brought together over 40 system leaders from across the Council, NHS, Voluntary sector, Businesses and other partners to identify and progress actions. Following the five HWTH meetings, we undertook a prioritisation exercise to identify priorities that should be the focus of work going forward.

There are several other areas of work that also contribute to achieving healthy weight in the Borough. Several of these are 'business as usual' activities such

as delivery of the Food For Health programme and the work of the Healthy Lives team to deliver the Healthy Schools London awards programme. Some of the activities are new and innovative, such as the development of a new pathway for children with excess weight and our play programmes to encourage children and their families/caregivers to participate in outdoor play activities. The overarching Child Healthy Weight Action Plan can be found in Appendix 3. We review and update these priority actions annually, taking into account local context (incl. local political priorities) and insight, capacity, evidence of impact, etc.

### 3.4 Child Healthy Weight Scrutiny Action Plan

#### Theme 1: Food

**Recommendation 1:** Food: Monitor the uptake of Free School Meals to identify and remove barriers and ensure all children can access these.

As part of the Secondary School Universal Free School Meal programme, an opt-out (auto-enrolment) project was introduced to identify additional pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) in both primary and secondary schools. This initiative is being evaluated by the University of York's "FixOurFood" programme, which includes Tower Hamlets as a site.

A paper was taken to Children's DLT in September 2024, showcasing the great work of the Fantastic Food in Schools (FFiS) programme, whilst also recognising the challenges we face to engage some schools to work collaboratively to improve the school food environment as well as to ensure all staff receive the London Living Wage. We propose to work with senior officials across the Council to champion this agenda and to enable positive engagement with schools on this agenda.

In primary schools, around 70% are catered by the council's Contract Catering Services, which holds information on the schools' FSM uptake data. For the remaining 30% of schools, accessing FSM uptake data is more complex. However, ongoing discussions between public health and school finance are focused on improving data recording across all schools.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure that youth services meet our aims around healthy eating, including through their food offer, inclusion of physical activity and training for youth workers.

Adolescence is a critical period for developing lifelong habits, as young people begin to gain independence from their parents and make their own choices. Ensuring that youth services support healthy eating and physical activity is essential in fostering these positive behaviours. By offering nutritious food options, promoting physical activity, and providing training for youth workers on healthy lifestyles, youth services can play a key role in guiding young people towards better health. This approach not only addresses immediate health needs but also equips adolescents with the knowledge and skills to maintain a healthy lifestyle into adulthood.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure children are engaged in food production from growing to cooking to eating, for example by co-ordinating work across schools and sharing best practice from the Healthy Families Programme.

In a Fantastic Food in Schools (FFiS) survey completed in January 2024, 12 primary schools expressed a need for support specifically around food growing. Follow-up meetings were arranged with each of these schools, and relevant resources available on the Tower Hamlets Educational Partnership (THEP) website were shared.

The FFiS programme encourages schools to engage in food education initiatives and has collaborated with various partners, including Spitalfields Farm, Trees for Cities, Eat Them to Defeat Them, and TastEd, to run food education sessions in schools.

A key challenge in food growing and education is resourcing. While many schools offer some level of food growing or cooking lessons, these are often self-funded and can be both time- and cost-intensive. In several instances, the Fantastic Food in Schools Programme has helped schools access garden funding by connecting them with grant opportunities.

#### Theme 2: Physical Activity

**Recommendation 4:** Work in partnership across the council and externally i.e., with schools to maximise children's access to green spaces, exercise and sports facilities. Consider any opportunities which may arise through the in-sourcing of leisure services.

As Tower Hamlets embarks on the process of writing a new Local Plan, we want to capitalise on the opportunity to influence its design in order to help guide what can be built where, shaping infrastructure investments and determining the future pattern of development in the borough, including the provision on social spaces. Opportunities are being considered to further promote sport and physical activity for Children and Young People, we are currently undertaking a Health Needs Assessment on Physical Activity to inform the most appropriate action to take.

#### Theme 3: Psychology and Culture.

**Recommendation 5:** Consider using food ambassadors to promote healthy eating and provide information on recipes which are culturally relevant. Understand that food and eating are individually and culturally specific and sensitive.

Utilising food ambassadors to promote healthy eating is an insightful approach to addressing dietary needs within diverse communities, we plan to capitalise on existing opportunities, specifically, the Healthy Families Parents ambassadors network that already promote healthy eating in culturally appropriate ways, as well as explore opportunities through the emerging community champions network, which is currently in development. Food and

eating practices are deeply rooted in cultural and individual preferences, so food ambassadors can effectively bridge the gap between standard nutritional guidance and culturally relevant practices. By tailoring recipe information and dietary advice to reflect these specific cultural contexts, it ensures that healthy eating messages are received more personally and effectively.

**Recommendation 6:** Review existing social spaces for young people in the borough and investigate any levers the council has to provide or encourage the provision of social spaces for young people that are not fast-food outlets. Continue efforts to make fast food outlets healthier.

As Tower Hamlets embarks on the process of writing a new Local Plan, we want to capitalise on the opportunity to influence its design in order to help guide what can be built where, shaping infrastructure investments and determining the future pattern of development in the borough, including the provision on social spaces.

We are committed to working with Hot Food Takeaways, through our Food For Health Programme. We recognise that cafes, takeaways, restaurants, staff canteens and market traders can all make changes to the way that they source, prepare, cook and present their food to make it healthier for their customers – therefore making healthy choices easier.

**Recommendation 7:** Ensure that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can benefit from healthy food provision and access sports and exercise where there are additional barriers. Utilising tools such as EIAs to identify potential risks and barriers to this group.

Ensuring that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have access to healthy food and opportunities for sports and exercise is vital for their overall well-being and development. Children with SEND frequently encounter specific challenges that can limit their ability to benefit from standard provisions. Implementing tailored strategies to address these challenges will help create a more inclusive environment, supporting their physical health and improving their quality of life. Opportunities are being considered to further promote sport and physical activity for Children and Young People. We are currently undertaking a Health Needs Assessment on Physical Activity to inform the most appropriate action to take and Children with SEND will be a priority group considered.

**Recommendation 8:** Research the needs of underweight children and those who may have eating disorders, especially being conscious of the potential impact of messaging on these groups.

The NCMP results for the year 2022/23 show a slight decrease in the proportion of children with excess weight, a trend observed at both national and regional levels. However, the number of underweight children increased during the same period. Public Health is keen to investigate the factors contributing to the decrease in excess weight and the rise in underweight cases locally, particularly to assess whether the cost of living and poverty are influencing these NCMP

results. Public Health has already started to capture relevant insights and ongoing work to support children identified as being underweight in Tower Hamlets.

### 3.5 **Conclusion**

Tower Hamlets continues to take proactive steps to address child obesity while supporting underweight children and those with special needs. Through collaboration and strategic planning, the borough is working to improve access to healthy food, physical activity, and opportunities that support the overall well-being of all children. The recommendations from the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee, along with the accompanying Action Plan, further strengthen the borough's efforts to achieve these goals. These actions have been embedded into the borough's wider *Child Healthy Weight Action Plan*, which is annually reviewed and updated as new challenges and opportunities arise.

## 4 **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

Children and young people from certain minority ethnic groups, from low socioeconomic status (SES) families, or with intellectual and/or physical disabilities are at greater risk of developing excess weight.

Childhood obesity and excess weight are significant health issues for children and their families. There can be serious implications for a child's physical and mental health, which can continue into adulthood.

Data collected through the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) (2024) reveals inequalities nationally, regionally and in Tower Hamlets; some groups of children are more likely to experience overweight compared to others.

In Tower Hamlets, the highest rates of overweight and obesity are reported for Bangladeshi boys in Year 6. According to national data, children living in areas characterised by high levels of deprivation are significantly more likely to be overweight. Levels of child poverty are higher in Tower Hamlets than most other London boroughs, and this is reflected in high levels of excess weight. It has also been reported that children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) are more likely to experience overweight.

As such, our approach to addressing healthy weight inequalities in Tower Hamlets will focus specifically on promoting and supporting healthy weight for children with SEND, Bangladeshi boys in Year 6, and children in low-income families.

## **5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
  - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 The action plan was developed in response to the CESSC Report on Child Healthy Weight.
- 5.3 The action plan was developed in partnership with numerous services across the Council and wider health and care partners, including public health, GP Care Group, Planning, Poverty Team, Healthy Lives Team, Contract Services and Leisure.

## **6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 This report asks for the above recommendations to be agreed.
- 6.2 Costing regarding the implementation of the recommendations have not been provided. These will need to be met from existing resources or where unable to do so, gain approval for existing funding through the appropriate governance arrangements.

## **7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 Section 2B of the National Health Service Act 2006 requires each local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. These steps may include providing information and advice, and providing services or facilities designed to promote healthy living.
- 7.2 The Public Sector Duty, set out at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires local authorities to have due regard in the exercise of their functions to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
- 7.3 The matters set out in this report comply with the above legislation.



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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Challenge Session Report – Child Healthy Weight (Appendix 1)

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Challenge Session Report – Child Healthy Weight
- Appendix 2: Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Challenge Session Action Plan

### **Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012**

- NONE

### **Officer contact details for documents:**

N/A