

## Action Plan: Child Healthy Weight Scrutiny Challenge Session

### Theme 1: Food

#### Recommendation 1

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

Comments from Service: 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. In 2024, 824 new FSM-eligible pupils were identified, with approximately two-thirds in primary schools, resulting in over £1 million in pupil premium funding for schools.

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.

Action	Owner(s)	Completion date
1.1 Review the process for monitoring free school meal uptake within the local authority to address the recommendation.	Healthy Lives / Contract Services	Jul – 2025
1.2 Support the implementation of the Secondary School Free School Meal policy, collaborating with partners to enhance the quality of school meals and improve lunchtime.		
1.3 Continue delivering the Fantastic Food in School (FFiS) programme to improve the quality of school food provision across primary schools in the		

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borough.		
<b>Recommendation 2</b> Ensure that youth services meet our aims around healthy eating, including through their food offer, inclusion of physical activity and training for youth workers.		
<b>Comments from Service:</b> 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.		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Completion date</b>
2.1. Engage with the Young Tower Hamlets (youth service) to support the development of a young people's strategy and health offer, ensuring that health and wellbeing are prominently featured.	Public Health	TBC
2.2. Promote the "Be Well Junior" leisure service, which offers all-inclusive access to six leisure centres, including unlimited junior gym, swimming, and fitness classes for children aged 11-17 years, subsidised by 50%.	Leisure Service	Ongoing
2.3. Provide training for the youth service workforce on young people's nutritional health, to increase their understanding of key issues affecting healthy weight and equipping them to help young people access appropriate support.	Child Healthy Weight Team – GPCG	Mar – 2025
<b>Recommendation 3</b> 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.		
<b>Comments from Service:</b> In the Fantastic Food in Schools survey, 12 primary schools expressed a need for support specifically around food		

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<p>growing. Follow-up meetings were arranged with each of these schools, and relevant resources available on the THEP website were shared.</p> <p>The 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.</p> <p>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 activities like food growing 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.</p>		
Action	Owner(s)	Completion date
3.1 Audit the number of schools with growing schemes on their premises to gain an understanding of the number of children accessing food growing opportunities at school.	Healthy Lives	May – 2025
Theme 2: Physical Activity		
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Comments from Service: 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.</p>		
Action	Owner(s)	Completion date
<p>4.1 Actively contribute to the development of the Local Plan, focusing on the key areas outlined in the recommendation. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chapter 19: Biodiversity and Open Space, supporting policies related to green spaces, the green grid, urban greening, and play spaces to promote health and well-being.</li> <li>- Chapter 13: Homes for the Community, the team will advocate for the</li> </ul>	Public Health / Planning	Completed but subject to planning inspectorate approval of the new Local Plan.

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<p>implementation of policy HF9 to ensure new housing developments meet minimum amenity and play space standards.</p> <p>For both statements - the Healthy Community policies, particularly Policy DV3, will ensure the needs of local residents, especially vulnerable groups, are addressed. This will include advocating for the inclusion of social spaces and ensuring equitable access to green spaces, exercise opportunities, and other relevant facilities in new developments.</p>		
<p>Theme 3: Psychology and Culture</p>		
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>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.</p>		
<p>Comments from Service: 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.</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Action</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Owner(s)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Completion date</b></p>
<p>5.1 Scope community programs that enable residents to access healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food during the cost of living crisis. This may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessing partnerships with local food banks to improve access to nutritious food by purchasing fruit and vegetable for dissemination through food aid organisations as well as cultural appro food items, such as spices</li> <li>- Continue to deliver fruit and vegetable voucher schemes via markets, through children centres and general practice.</li> </ul>	<p>Tackling Poverty / Public Health</p>	<p>Jul – 2025</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider how to influence emerging community champions network and existing healthy families parents ambassadors network to promote healthy eating in culturally appropriate ways</li> </ul> <p>5.2 Explore funding resources to promote the South Asian Cookbook, developed by local families for the NEON project, which encourages appropriate complementary feeding for children under the age of two.</p>	Public Health	Jul - 2025
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>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.</p>		
<p>Comments from Service:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We are committed to working with Hot Food Takeaways. 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.</p>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Completion date</b>
<p>6.1 A key lever for the council in delivering this recommendation is through the development and implementation of the Local Plan. To support the Local Plan's development, the following actions have been undertaken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conducted the Community Infrastructure Audit 2024.</li> <li>2. Completed the Play Space Audit 2024.</li> </ol> <p>These audits have informed the New Local Plan by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Community Infrastructure:</b> The Community Infrastructure Audit will be referred to whenever new or upgraded community facilities are proposed</li> </ul>	Public Health / Planning	Completed but subject to planning inspectorate approval of the new Local Plan.

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<p>as part of a development. This will ensure that the needs of young people are considered and that they are actively involved in the planning process if additional spaces for them are required. (Referenced in Chapter 18).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Biodiversity and Open Space - Policy BO6 Play and recreation spaces:</b> play and informal recreation facilities should be exciting and engaging for all abilities and ages. This would also be informed by the Play Space Audit to ensure adolescents are accounted for in play spaces. (Referenced in Chapter 19).</li> </ul> <p>6.2 Continue to deliver the Food For Health programme to ensure fast food outlets provide and promote healthier food and drink alternatives.</p>	<p>Environmental Health</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>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.</p>		
<p>Comments from Service: 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.</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Action</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Owner(s)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Completion date</b></p>
<p>7.1 We will fund SEND specific providers to deliver holiday clubs (easter, summer and Christmas).</p> <p>7.2 To undertake a review of the current Junior SEND physical activity offer to increase access and provision across the borough, in collaboration with the new Be Well Leisure service.</p>	<p>Poverty Team</p> <p>Leisure</p>	<p>Dec – 2024</p> <p>Mar – 2025</p>

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7.3 Ensure as many children with SEND are able to access their free school meal entitlement, by continuing to deliver the school food improvement programme in Primary Schools and the Secondary Free School Meal policy.	Healthy Lives	Jul – 2025
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>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.</p>		
<p>Comments from Service: 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.</p>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Completion date</b>
8.1 Conduct a review to assess the prevalence and needs of underweight children, including the availability of support services in Tower Hamlets.	Public Health	Nov – 2024
8.2 Establish a faltering growth pathway within the health visiting service to map the current support journey for children identified as underweight.	Child Healthy Weight Team – GPCG	Mar – 2025
8.3 Develop compassionate and appropriate key messages on healthy eating that minimize weight stigma.	Child Healthy Weight Team – GPCG	Completed