

Health Scrutiny Committee

6 April 2022

Childhood Obesity Strategy and Action Plan

Summary

1. This report considers the progress and implementation of the whole system approach to childhood obesity including Suffolk's Childhood Obesity Strategy and Action Plan. It sets out and responds to the questions raised in the scrutiny focus section below, and provides details of the Strategy, its aims and priorities and key areas of work. Evidence to support this work is referenced within this report.

Objective of Scrutiny

2. The objective of this item is to provide an opportunity to consider the work taking place to tackle the issue of childhood weight management and obesity in Suffolk following the agreement of a whole systems approach and action plan in September 2019, with a view to identifying what is working well and where improvements could be made to accelerate progress.

Scrutiny Focus

3. The scope of this scrutiny has been developed to provide the Committee with information to come to a view on the following key questions:
 - a) What are the priorities in the current Strategy? What is working well and what could be improved?
 - b) What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the success of the Strategy?
 - c) To what extent are the current initiatives sustainable?
 - d) What does the data tell us about which children are most likely to be affected by being overweight (in terms of geography, socio-economic or other factors?)
 - e) What has been learnt from the Amsterdam pilot project taking place in Lowestoft and Brandon?
 - f) What levers do anchor organisations have which could assist in accelerating progress in addressing the rising levels of childhood obesity in Suffolk? Are there levers which are not currently being used?
 - g) Are there opportunities to seek delegation of policy decisions through a county deal?
 - h) What influence can be bought to bear by planning authorities? Are there examples of good practice elsewhere in the Country?
 - i) What influence can be bought to bear on schools to make educating for healthy weight a priority?

- j) Are there examples of good practice in schools which could be promoted more widely?
 - k) To what extent do we understand the views of local communities about healthy weight?
 - l) What can be done to refresh the “healthy eating” messages?
 - m) What are the next steps for refreshing this work, given the current strategy runs to 2023?
 - n) How will co-production be used to inform the new Strategy/refresh?
4. Having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:
- a) comment on the information received;
 - b) agree to set up a Joint Task and Finish Group to explore specific issues in more depth;
 - c) make recommendations to system leaders and/or the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board;
 - d) seek to influence partner organisations;
 - e) request further information.

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Background

5. Childhood obesity is recognised as a widespread and urgent public health issue. In Suffolk, childhood obesity is a growing concern, with National Childhood Measurement Programme data indicating that the numbers of children who are overweight or obese is continuing to rise. Evidence suggests that obese children and adolescents are not only more likely to become obese adults but are also at increased risk of developing associated physical health problems and psychosocial conditions from an early age. Obesity can have a negative effect on children’s emotional health and wellbeing through stigmatisation and low self-esteem which can also lead to poorer levels of educational attainment and impact upon life chances.
6. During 2017/18, Public Health Suffolk worked alongside Public Health England (PHE), Leeds Beckett University and several other Local Authorities to develop and pilot a whole systems approach to obesity. The National [PHE Whole systems approach to obesity guidance](#) was published on 25 July 2019. This guidance provides a set of resources designed to support local authorities with implementing a whole systems approach to address obesity and promote a healthy weight at a local level.
7. During 2018 two stakeholder workshops were held with partners from across Suffolk asking participants to identify causes and actions being taken to address childhood obesity. A core working group including the NHS, education, leisure, public health, district and borough councils and the voluntary sector examined the causal map and actions from the two workshops, alongside the evidence

presented in the Suffolk Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and agreed priorities for action. These priorities formed the basis of the [Tackling Childhood Obesity in Suffolk Action Plan](#) (see Agenda Item 7 – Appendix 1), which was agreed by the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board on 26 September 2019. The report makes the case for a whole systems approach to tackling childhood obesity, bringing together health, education, social care, planning, housing, transport and business, to make better use of resources and identify opportunities to support children and families at key points to help prevent obesity and receive timely support to maintain healthy lifestyles.

8. The strategy aims to:
 - a) identify key opportunities and evidence-based approaches that would deliver better health outcomes and reduce health inequalities;
 - b) build capacity within organisations that would improve sustainability of services and embed a culture of promoting healthy weight;
 - c) promote and advance collaboration that would develop multi-disciplinary working and allow a co-ordinated approach to system wide change, in order that tackling obesity is on everyone's agenda and each recognises the important contribution they make; and
 - d) reduce health inequalities and improve the health of the Suffolk population by enabling practitioners to focus on those most in need through the creation of the right conditions.
9. The strategy identifies three priorities for action:
 - a) Improve access to affordable, healthier food for children, young people and their families by creating healthy food and drink environments both in and out of home;
 - b) Improve access to safe environments that encourage physical activity participation by children, young people and their families, including active travel;
 - c) Improve support to children and young people to maintain healthy lifestyle behaviours that promote health and wellbeing.
10. Under each of the priorities a range of specific actions were identified, with lead organisations, targets and timescales. The strategy and detailed action plan can be found under the Supporting Information section in Evidence Set 1.
11. As well as agreeing the whole system action plan, the Health and Wellbeing Board approved a 10 point Suffolk Sugar Reduction Plan. This plan can also be found within the supporting information in Evidence Set 1. Public Health Suffolk, in conjunction with Suffolk Community Foundation, offered grants of up to £1000 to support the work of voluntary and community organisations to deliver work to support those who live and work in Suffolk. The fund was open to groups including Parent Teacher Associations and community groups which could encourage a reduction in sugar intake and a healthier lifestyle.
12. Public Health Suffolk also developed a framework based on the Amsterdam community model, with colleagues and partners in Lowestoft and Brandon, with a view to implementing a whole system, place-based approach to healthy weight in 2 wards. The Amsterdam approach is an internationally recognised place-based approach to obesity which, since its inception in 2013, has reported

significant improvements in the numbers of children overweight and obese. The approach recognises the immediate and more distant influences on the behaviours of the individual, their family, and community, from age, sex and constitution, living and working conditions, to socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions. Further information on the Amsterdam approach including a video link is provided within the supporting information in Evidence Set 1.

13. In May 2019, Suffolk hosted a two-day workshop at which the academic team from Amsterdam presented their work and facilitated debate about a Suffolk approach. This event was organised by Leeds Beckett University and OneLife Suffolk and was attended by senior leaders from across the system.
14. Since the agreement of the action plan, significant work has taken place on a range of initiatives including sugar reduction and healthy eating campaigns and initiatives, school based and early years programmes, initiatives to increase physical activities in schools and countywide, targeted work through OneLife Suffolk and the Tier 2 and Tier 3 child weight management services, and through the universal offer and school nursing service.
15. However, concerns remain about the levels of childhood obesity in Suffolk. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on progress and taken focus away from this issue. There are concerns regarding the sustainability of initiatives due to finance and system capacity. The numbers of children overweight or obese in Suffolk continues to increase and data from the [Active Lives Survey](#) shows a high proportion of children still do not meet the recommended [physical activity guidelines for children and young people](#). The current OneLife Suffolk contract is due to end in September 2023 and work is underway to assess future needs and develop options for future service provision. This includes a programme of engagement, consultation and coproduction. Consideration also needs to be given to a refresh of the Strategy and what the future child weight management offer in Suffolk should look like.
16. The Health Scrutiny Committee will be joined by members of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for this agenda item.

Main body of evidence

The following information has been provided to support this review:

Evidence Set 1 has been provided by Suffolk County Council Public Health and Communities Health Improvement Team in response to the key areas for investigation set out at paragraph 3 above.

The following representatives have been invited to attend the meeting to address questions from the Committee on the day:

- Carnegie Professor of Exercise and Obesity, Leeds Beckett University
- Consultant, Public Health and Communities, SCC
- Schools Engagement Coordinator, Public Health and Communities, SCC
- Physical Activity Team Manager, Public Health and Communities, SCC
- Health Improvement Commissioner – Public Health and Communities, SCC
- Behaviour Change Manager, Transport, Growth Highways and Infrastructure, SCC

- Deputy Director of Transformation: Children and Young People, SCC/Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Designated Safeguarding Nurse, Ipswich and East CCG
- Strategic Children Services Manager, One Life Suffolk
- Senior Development Officer, Active Suffolk
- Head of Communities, East Suffolk Council
- Strategic Director, AbbeyCroft Leisure

Supporting Information

Healthy Suffolk (2021); [Tackling Obesity in Suffolk](#).

Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership (January 2020); [Safeguarding Response to Obesity when Neglect is an Issue](#).

Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board (26 September 2019); Agenda Item 7 [Healthy Weight in Childhood and the Whole Systems Approach to Obesity](#).

Public Health England (25 July 2019); [PHE Whole systems approach to obesity guidance](#).

[Suffolk JSNA State of Suffolk report on Obesity](#) provided by Suffolk County Council Public Health and Communities Department.

[Tackling Obesity: Future Choices Foresight](#) report from the Government Office for Science, 2007.

[Active Suffolk; Active Lives Survey Academic Year 2020/21 Report](#) (9 December 2021).

[NHS Physical activity guidelines for children and young people](#) (Reviewed 12 November 2021).

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