

**Review of healthy weight approaches in
County Durham**

**Report of Jane Robinson, Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services, Durham County Council;
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Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To present a review of healthy weight approaches in County Durham as an update from the 2018 *Working towards a healthy weight in County Durham* report and its recommendations for action.

Executive summary

- 2 In 2015 the report of the Director of Public Health 'Obesity: An issue too big to ignore... or too big to mention?' expressed a call to action to create collective action to halt the rise of obesity. The report set out the many actions that were being taken to improve access to healthy foods and opportunities to be more active and identified evidence-based recommendations.
- 3 In 2018 an update report 'Working towards a healthy weight in County Durham' outlined progress and further evidence of successful work taking place in County Durham and setting out clear short and medium term goals emanating from the Leeds Beckett University pilot of a Whole Systems Approach (WSA) to obesity programme with 70 local authorities (including DCC) to test interventions which could impact Obesity levels. Its purpose was to inform the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) [6 phase WSA to obesity](#) toolkit to guide a WSA.
- 4 The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2021 'Putting life into living' reported on work undertaken to progress public health strategic priorities that had significant interdependencies with the healthy weight agenda in County Durham – including a focus on 'good jobs and places to live, learn and play' and 'promoting positive behaviours'. Progress in

planning matters relating to hot food takeaway prevalence and improving opportunities for children to be active at school are key elements of the systems approach that is continually developing.

- 5 This review considers the progress that has been made in County Durham's continued development of a WSA to overweight and obesity, as well as presenting a review and evaluation of the role of Tier 2 (targeted) services for adult weight management within a WSA.
- 6 A raft of measures have been implemented to support whole systems development including publication of a healthy food policy, regulation of hot food takeaway prevalence, a healthy options takeaway pilot, a physical activity strategy, and commitment to a regional approach to a regional good food framework and network.
- 7 An audit and reinvigoration of the Healthy Weight Alliance has welcomed further expertise (as members into the partnership) to ensure there is key representation from across the system. These include partners from NHS and NENC ICS, Education, academics with expertise in healthy weight, as well as cross-departmental representation from Durham County Council and VCS organisations.
- 8 WSA to overweight and obesity is based upon a six phase model that covers set up, building the local picture, mapping the local system, actions, managing the system network, and reflecting and refreshing as appropriate. This model has informed the '*where are we now?*' aspect of this review.

(a) Set up

This was (and is) supported by internal and external senior leadership and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB). The COVID-19 pandemic had some impact upon ongoing development, highlighting some need to refresh organisations at a senior level through the established County Durham Healthy Weight Alliance – reporting into the HWB.

(b) Building the local picture

A significant amount of work has taken place to understand local assets and capacity, as well as identifying key partners and collaborators.

(c) Mapping the local system and agreeing actions

These phases continue to be developed. Between 2016 and 2018, stakeholders met to agree a shared vision and agree strategic themes, and more recently multi-agency workshops

have been held to develop the collaborative shared vision to achieving healthy weight

(d) Managing the system

Whilst this phase of work did develop up to 2019/20, it was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, this remains a focus of work going forwards, i.e. via the County Durham Healthy Weight Alliance.

(e) Reflect and refresh

This phase forms the basis of this review, which includes matters relating to the systems approach to healthy weight in childhood.

9 The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) produced '*What good healthy weight for all ages looks like*', a high-level framework for what a good quality, local approach to promoting healthy weight should be. This has been used to inform this review in terms of '*Where do we want to be?*'.

10 It comprises seven pillars for action, including:

(a) Systems leadership

County Durham is delivering, but continually developing this area, and will benefit from continued engagement at leadership level through the HWA. The alliance is also considering whether the county should sign up the Healthy Weight Declaration.

(b) Long-term systems approach

This is essential in effecting long-term sustainable change, that will be achieved through reinforcing the 'health in all policies' approach, i.e. to services whose main aims/objectives do not relate to healthy weight.

(c) Health promoting environment

This relates to tackling the wider environmental causes of overweight and obesity. The review advocates for continued focus of the wider system (i.e. planning, transport, economic regeneration, etc) to include matters that we know have an impact of the risk of overweight and obesity, i.e. availability of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) and hot food takeaway provision. The 'Moving Together in County Durham' physical activity strategy is also significantly interdependent with this work.

(d) Community Engagement

There is a strong drive to understanding community needs in County Durham through coproduction, as informed by the 'Approach to Wellbeing'. The review recommends increasing engagement with community groups through awareness raising and public education (via the HWA) to build local capacity to promote healthy eating, as well as a focus on health literacy work in the context of healthy weight.

(e) Focus on inequalities

The review identifies the correlation between overweight and obesity and poverty, as well as prevalence in those with long-term conditions (i.e. learning disability and mental health) and recommends actions to ensure that these are addressed, i.e. access to healthy, affordable food.

(f) Life course approach

It is important that approaches to healthy weight cover the life course with a focus on those who are most in need. This includes children and young people. Matters relating to the provision of targeted weight management services (Tier 2) in the context of a whole systems approach are recommended, as well as a focus in services to children provided by the Family Health Service and Family Hubs.

(g) Monitoring, evidence, evaluation and innovation

There should be a continuous 'reflective improvement' approach, and data systems are now in place, including the production of a Power BI system that brings relevant data sources re overweight and obesity into one place. This will be complemented by recommendations to evaluate and monitor progress amongst key HWA organisations (i.e. via partnership surveys), as well as working with (and learning from) regional and national colleagues to inform and develop local approaches.

11 Tier 2 adult weight management services were decommissioned around 2018/19 in favour of a WSA focus.

12 Scrutiny of the evidence base and academic literature concludes that there is a place for such services within a WSA. The evidence does, however, state that such programmes are more likely to be effective if they are 12-18 months in duration.

- 13 Currently, targeted weight management services are available in County Durham in the form of provision by Wellbeing for Life, the NHS digital weight management programme, and the National Diabetes Prevention Programme. A recommendation below proffers that current NHS provision should be scoped for suitability to address need – i.e. provision of targeted services within a developing WSA. The new specification for procurement of the Wellbeing Service contains information relating to weight management services that those tendering for the contract would be expected to provide.

Recommendation(s)

- 14 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:
- (a) Consider the findings of this review
 - (b) Endorse recommendations for action and approve progress to delivery stage

Background

- 15 Overweight (including obesity) is a chronic condition which can cause long-term physical and mental health conditions, as well as an increased risk of premature death. Helping people to achieve and maintain healthy weight is one of the most important things we can do to improve population health. Having excessive body fat is associated with an increased risk of diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers (2).
- 16 Healthy weight levels can be supported by making health promoting behaviours available and more accessible, for example, by enabling residents to access, prepare and cook affordable, healthy food and by empowering people to be more active in their daily lives. The government has taken some steps to introduce policies to change this environment, and to shift some of the focus of healthcare towards public health and prevention.
- 17 A whole systems approach to overweight is a long-term commitment that requires consistent, aligned action and innovation by national and local government, and strong partnership collaboration across sectors and communities at a local level. This review acknowledges a significant body of work has been conducted and implemented in County Durham so far.
- 18 Between 2016 and 2018, County Durham was part of the whole systems pilot which informed the production of the six-phase approach to obesity (PHE,2019).

Purpose

- 19 The purpose of this report is to share the findings of this review and the recommendations for actions.

Where are we now?

- 20 WSA to overweight and obesity are based upon a six phase model that covers set up, building the local picture, mapping the local system, actions, managing the system network, and reflecting and refreshing as appropriate. This model has informed the '*where are we now?*' aspect of this review.
- 21 Full detail of the findings of this phase of the assessment can be found in the full report.

Healthy weight in childhood

Review of childhood healthy weight pathway 2018

- 22 The purpose of this review was to develop a set of recommendations to support children to maintain a healthy weight, as well as supporting those identified by the NCMP (and their families) as obese or overweight.
- 23 The 2018 review recommended an options appraisal of the [then] Tier 2 provision for children and young people (FISCH programme). This was decommissioned shortly afterwards in favour of a population level whole systems approach, with a focus on prevention; addressing the wider, multi-factorial environmental issues that are known determinants of overweight and obesity.
- 24 There is no evidence to counteract the decision made in 2018 to decommission the FISCH programme. Indeed, the recommendations of the 2018 review stand firm, and the recommendations made below contain a refreshed call for a family approach to targeted weight management services.

What progress has been made?

- 25 The Family Health Service includes all elements of the Healthy Child Programme, and a key aim of the service is to reduce childhood obesity by promoting healthy eating and physical activity – and this is one of the six health visiting early years high impact areas, as well as being one of the six school aged key priority areas. A key aspect of this service is delivery of the NCMP at reception and year 6.
- 26 The service employs Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (SCPHN), who have an enhanced role for ensuring that (amongst other key areas of work) healthy weight/infant feeding are embedded into mainstream practice. Furthermore, clinical champions within the family health nurse workforce have responsibility to provide operational frontline guidance and support to their colleagues on (amongst other areas) matters relating to healthy weight.
- 27 Recommendations made in the review relate to programmes delivered by the Family Health Service (Health Exercise Nutrition for the Really Young and National Child Measurement Programme), as well as raising awareness of overweight and obesity related matters in the newly created Family Hubs service.

Tier 2 provision within a whole systems approach to overweight and obesity

- 28 This review has considered the current evidence base concerning targeted (Tier 2) weight management interventions and includes an evaluation of a government funded Tier 2 programme in County Durham between 2021/22.
- 29 Despite the decommissioning of Tier 2 weight management services circa 2018/19, current evidence concludes that there is a place for tier 2 services in the context of a whole systems approach, whilst stating that such programmes are more likely to be effective if they are 12-18 months in duration. The same applies to commercial programmes delivered over a longer period, and regional insight supports the academic literature of commercial providers being in a strong position to offer Tier 2 services.
- 30 Currently, targeted weight management services are available in County Durham in the form of provision by Wellbeing for Life, the NHS digital weight management programme, and the National Diabetes Prevention Programme. A recommendation below proffers that this current provision should be scoped for potential suitability to address need – i.e. provision of targeted NHS services within a developing WSA.

Where do we want to be?

- 31 The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) produced 'What good healthy weight for all ages looks like', a high-level framework for what a good quality, local approach to promoting healthy weight should be. This has been used to inform this review in terms of 'Where do we want to be?'
- 32 Whilst the WSA phased model has been used to show progress made since 2019, the ADPH 'What good weight looks like' model is an effective means of both assessing where we need to be and monitoring progress against achieving healthy weight going forward.
- 33 The full details of this phase of the assessment can be found in the full report.

How will we get there?

- 34 An entire system wide response must be at the centre of efforts to achieve healthy weight, as unilaterally no single partner will be able to make the positive changes required for our communities.

- 35 In County Durham, the Healthy Weight Alliance is committed to tackling the healthy weight agenda. Furthermore one of its key objectives is to ensure that the population of County Durham (as well as wider partners) are aware of the issues associated with overweight and obesity and what can be done to address it. Awareness raising and public education are key tools in collaborative efforts to achieve a healthy weight.
- 36 Accordingly, the alliance will remain at the forefront of developing and improving strategic partnerships to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity in County Durham.
- 37 This review has yielded a set of recommendations that will facilitate ongoing development of a whole systems approach to achieving healthy weight in County Durham. These can be found in the full review report.

Conclusion

- 38 The current whole systems approach to overweight and obesity has its roots dating back to the 'Healthy weight strategic framework 2014-20', the 2015 DPH report 'Obesity: An issue too big to ignore... or too big to mention?', and the 2018 reports on 'Working towards a healthy weight in County Durham' and 'Review of childhood healthy weight pathway'.
- 39 The current review shows that steady progress has been made in the development of a WSA in County Durham and identifies recommendations that will further develop and bolster this approach as the primary means of improving healthy weight across the county.
- 40 Developing a whole systems approach to healthy weight is a long-term approach. Raising and maintaining current awareness of the key issues and managing expectations are important aspects of this work. It is crucial that key stakeholders are able to continually engage senior leadership and political support, whilst ensuring sustained buy in and ongoing commitment from our communities and wider stakeholders.

Background papers

- Review of Healthy Weight Approaches in County Durham, October 2023

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

There will be financial implications in any decision to commission Tier 2 weight management services.

Consultation

From January to May 2023, key stakeholders across sectors (VCS, DCC colleagues, health, community groups, public) were consulted.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Specific consideration has been given to health inequalities and inequities.

Climate Change

There are some interdependencies with matters relating to food availability and production and the climate change agenda. Stakeholders from Neighbourhoods, Community and Climate Change are engaged in this work.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

No risk assessment required at this stage.

Procurement

The only potential procurement consideration at this stage would lie within any decision to commission an external provider to supply Tier 2 weight management services.