

## **Foresight Tackling Obesities**

### **Decisions**

1. *To receive a presentation from Jon Parke of the Foresight Obesity Project, who will update members on the project's findings*

### **Actions Required**

2. *As determined by the board following the discussion.*

**Action by:** *LGA Secretariat*

14 November 2007

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## Foresight Tackling Obesities

### Summary

1. *Over the last 25 years, the number of people classed as either overweight or obese in England has tripled. The year on year rise in obesity is not confined to adults. In England in 1995, 10% of boys under 16 were classed as obese. Now the proportion exceeds 16% and is forecast to reach 24% by 2025. As weight increases, so does the likelihood of a range of chronic, life limiting conditions including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and arthritis leading the Chief Medical Officer to describe obesity as a 'health time bomb'.*
2. *Obesity has risen up the policy agenda very rapidly, and Alan Johnson described it as a problem of similar magnitude and complexity to climate change. A cross government team, jointly chaired by the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families, and for Health, has been established and is due to meet three times a year. It is to be supported by a cross government support team charged with assisting with the creation of a national action plan.*
3. *In 1998 the National Audit Office estimated that obesity cost the NHS £480 million. By 2002, the Health Select Committee considered the costs to the NHS to be between £990 - 1,125 million. Indirect costs to the economy are thought to be £2 billion a year, rising to £3.6 billion by 2010.*
4. *The health and economic costs to the nation alone are compelling reasons for the need to seriously address obesity. However, obesity is set within a complex cultural, social and behavioural framework, with a dynamic landscape of contributing factors. Such complexity suggests that solutions will not come from a single source but will involve multiple scientific disciplines and evidence sources.*
5. *An article which appeared in The Guardian on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007 is **attached** to this report for members' information.*

### Background

6. *The government's Foresight Programme is led by the Office of Science and Technology. Foresight and its associated horizon scanning centre aims to provide challenging visions of the future to ensure effective strategies now. It does this by providing evidence to inform action by government, business and academia.*
7. *The Foresight obesity project was announced in July 2005 and reported back in the autumn 2007. It aims to gather scientific evidence from across a wide range of disciplines to inform a strategic view of the issue. The programme team also consider a wide range of factors that may impact on obesity, such as the built environment, working patterns and diverse cultural influences.*
8. *The LGA was represented on the Stakeholder Group by Cllr David Rogers OBE*

## **LGA policy and the role of local government**

9. *In the build-up to the publication of the white paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*, the LGA published *Releasing the potential for the public's health with the UK Public Health Association and the NHS Confederation*. This called for a number of changes including the creation of a cabinet-level minister for public health and a strengthened role for local authorities and primary care trusts, with a more streamlined performance management framework and more initiatives such as joint teams and pooled budgets.*
10. *We have built on this further with the publication of *The future of adult health and social care: a partnership approach for well-being*, which outlines a partnership based approach which aims not only to meet communities health and welfare needs but also to improve well-being. Community involvement in identifying priorities and in seeing their ideas realised on the ground quickly is essential.*
11. *The IDeA Healthy Communities Team has responded to this emerging agenda in a number of ways:*
  - *the Healthy Communities Team worked with NICE on the dissemination of the first set of its guidance prepared in a version for local government, schools and early years settings.*
  - *This was the quick reference guidance 43 on obesity ([www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)), which is available on Knowledge.*
  - *a study seminar has been planned jointly with the UKPHA for 8th February 2008 on obesity, with an invited set of participants from local government, health and academia.*
  - *One aim is to publish a set of top hints and tips, and another is to make links with the Foresight approach.*
  - *the National Adviser has accepted the invitation to join the Delivery Reference Group for the PSA programme, and is the only local government member.*
  - *the theme features very strongly in the LAA programmes and was prominent in the JSNA workshops supported by the Agency.*
  - *obesity is a major issue for related workstreams, eg, in the children's and adult programmes and in housing.*
12. *The National Support Team on Obesity will be conducting some 11 pilots by March 2008, to establish how best to help organisations struggling with this theme. The Healthy Communities Team in IDeA has been working closely with the team and has arranged some parallel working although it is potentially allied to the health inspectorates rather than local government self improvement programmes.*

13. *The Foresight programme has been detailed and thorough, and it suggests that an approach based in community and societal transformation in relation to obesity is required if rapid progress is to be made. This is about far more than education and treatment for those already in trouble.*
14. *It requires considerable forward planning to link together the big building blocks for health, eg, in land use planning, education, the encouragement of exercise and sensible diet and family and parental responsibility. The authors suggest that the food industry itself either needs to be enlisted as an ally or to be better regulated if it is recalcitrant. The materials are complex and extensive, and the IDeA's Healthy Communities Team has decided to commission some briefing papers on particular themes that have been emphasised by Elected Members in leadership academies.*

## **Local authority case studies**

### **London Borough of Newham**

15. *Newham developed a Food Access Strategy. The aim is that this will be incorporated into the Community Plan for the Borough, and also into the local Primary Care Trust's strategy. Activity in Newham includes school breakfast clubs, food co-ops, food delivery schemes, a mobile food shop visiting out-of-the-way housing, a national accredited training programme for community food workers, healthy eating and cooking classes and talks. The strategy was developed in recognition of the fact that low income, physical and geographical boundaries, lack of skills and knowledge and the failure of the retail market all inhibit people's ability to access a healthy diet. This has serious consequences which are borne out in the levels of health inequalities in areas where these problems exist. The London Borough of Newham is an area faced with rising levels of health inequalities - the existence of which may be linked to the prevalence of poor nutrition amongst many of its 250,000 residents.*
16. *The seven key areas covered by the strategy are:*
  1. *Schools*
  2. *Young people*
  3. *Food and health network (ie information and communication)*
  4. *Vulnerable residents*
  5. *The (food) retail economy*
  6. *Sustainability*
  7. *Regeneration*
17. *The Newham Food Access Partnership (NFAP), an umbrella group including the local authority, housing associations, health bodies and voluntary and community sector groups, drives much of this work. It was established following a report identifying 'food deserts', where it was difficult for people to access fresh fruit and vegetables. Access problems were generally combined with low levels of income and mobility and were shown to exacerbate health inequalities in areas which were already facing significant deprivation.*
18. *The Partnership has helped set up breakfast clubs and fruit tuck shops in schools, lunch clubs for the elderly, a mobile food store and home delivery service. Time has been invested in working with local communities to set up fruit and vegetable stalls in schools and community centres to supply residents with fresh affordable produce.*

### **Eastleigh Borough Council**

19. *Eastleigh Borough Council in Hampshire runs a number of projects as part of their 'Healthy Eastleigh' brand.*
20. *The Cook and Eat project is a local project which aims to address the issue of childhood obesity. Through the South Hampshire Food Forum, Eastleigh Borough Council's Health Development Officer has linked up with local school meals provider, HC3S, Eastleigh and Test Valley South PCT, a Community Dietician from Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare Trust and the Marketing Officer from Hampshire County Council's Hampshire Fare, to develop a project which improves parents and children's knowledge and skills around healthy eating.*
21. *Stoke Park Junior School was selected to run the pilot "Cook and Eat" course. Every Monday after school for six weeks, parents and pupils learnt the importance of a balanced diet, basic cookery techniques, food budgeting, menu planning, food safety and hygiene and how to source local food. It proved so popular that the course, limited to a maximum of 20 parents and children, was quickly over-subscribed. The Mayor of Eastleigh presented certificates and a healthy eating recipe book to the twenty parents and children who took part in the six week course.*
22. *The feedback from the evaluation of the pilot Cook and Eat course was positive, with the course enjoyed by tutors and participants. The course was able to demonstrate to the participants that they could prepare healthy food and that these dishes tasted good. Through the evaluation it was also identified that participants gained confidence, made new friends and developed their cooking skills using inexpensive ingredients.*
23. *This successful venture was made possible through effective partnership work between Eastleigh Borough Council, HC3S, Stoke Park Junior School, Eastleigh and Test valley South PCT, Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare Trust, Hampshire Fare, South Hampshire Food Forum, Hampshire County Council and Sunnyfields Organic Farm. Partners contributed funding, equipment, aprons, expertise and local produce. The South Hampshire Food Forum proved to be an excellent network for establishing links with all of the above agencies.*
24. *Eastleigh Borough Council is working to secure further funding to run 'Cook and Eat' courses in other schools in the Borough.*

### **Devon County Council**

25. *Devon County Council has made tackling childhood obesity part of their Local Area Agreement, building on work using the Healthy Schools model. Work begun in primary schools as part of LPSA2 will be extended to secondary and special schools, 'healthy start' and parenting initiatives through the LAA. The County Council also plans to use the LAA to improve access to activity and leisure facilities, through integrating planning arrangements and aligning funding arrangements for the voluntary and community sector.*

### **Implications for Wales**

26. *This report concerns Wales.*

## **Financial Implications**

27. *None.*

Contact Officer: Paul Ogden, [paul.ogden@ga.gov.uk](mailto:paul.ogden@ga.gov.uk), 020 7664 3277

### 'Fit towns' plan to tackle child obesity

Article from *The Guardian* online: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007 ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) )

- *Proposals for 10 healthy eco cities*
- *Weight a key factor in cancer: study*
- [Patrick Wintour](#), political editor
- [The Guardian](#)
- *Thursday November 1 2007*

*The government is planning to tackle the growing obesity epidemic in Britain by broadening its plans for eco towns and turning them into healthy or fit towns, the Guardian can reveal.*

*The health secretary, Alan Johnson, is convinced that two great challenges facing Britain - climate change and obesity - are linked.*

*He believes it makes sense that 10 eco towns already being planned by the government should now be built and designed to confront the UK's obesity crisis, drawing on pioneering schemes already producing results in Australia, France and Finland.*

*Mr Johnson wants Britain to follow the example of 10 French towns which have focused on young children and seen substantial cuts in obesity. The initiatives in France led to the proportion of overweight boys aged seven to 12 falling from 19% to 10% and in the girls from 10% to 7%.*

*He is convinced only a comprehensive rather than the current fragmented approach will work.*

*Practical measures in new healthy towns being considered by ministers include:*

- *Regular weigh-ins for children starting as they leave primary school, including the recording of body mass indexes*
- *Increasing the number of cycle lanes*
- *Designing safe walking routes to schools and from suburbs into the centre*
- *Programmes in schools to inspire children to eat healthily, avoid fast food outlets, learn to cook and play sport from a young age*
- *Ensuring GP practices are on the high street so more people can use them*
- *Larger parks, modern playgrounds and improved leisure centres*

*Details of the policy emerged as an authoritative five-year cancer study yesterday warned that one third of cancers are linked to our diets and lack of exercise. The report from the World Cancer Research Fund says obesity is a major factor in cancer and people should fight to keep their weight down throughout their lives. "The most striking thing to emerge from the report is the importance of overweight and obesity," said Sir Michael Marmot, professor of epidemiology*

*and public health at University College London and chair of the panel which reviewed 7,000 studies on causes of cancer.*

*Mr Johnson said: "International evidence and research shows that we need a large-scale approach across the whole community to help tackle obesity. As part of our commitment to provide new eco towns we are also considering making them healthy towns - through their layout, facilities and construction. If this works it could also apply to areas undergoing housing growth and renewal."*

*He added: "We have to look at ways of improving the built environment, doing more to help people make physical activity a normal part of everyday life."*

*Mr Johnson is leading a cross-government drive to put the eco towns concept at the cutting edge of the fight against obesity. Each new town is planned to house as many as 20,000 people. He has also been looking at tackling some of the least healthy cities in the north or London boroughs to see if progress can be made in redesigning existing towns.*

*Obesity is estimated to cost the UK £1bn a year and is projected to rise to £45bn by 2050.*

*Last month's influential report by government scientists Foresight suggested that on current trends about 60% of men, 50% of women and 25% of children in the UK would be obese by 2050.*

*The report suggested the baseline projections indicate that "left unchecked, the health costs associated with overweight and obesity will become insupportable". It also repeatedly argued that there was no single magic bullet, but instead required a comprehensive long-term strategy.*

*ENDS*

[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)