

TITLE OF REPORT: **Review of Obesity (across the life course)**

REPORT OF: **Director of Public Health**

SUMMARY

This report gives details of the evidence gathering session that will take place on 13th September 2018. The views of the Committee are being sought on the evidence presented and the future plans outlined.

Background

Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed that the focus of its review in 2018-9 will be obesity across the life course.

The review will help the Committee to consider and understand the complexity of the obesity agenda. A simple and frequent stance is to focus on individual lifestyle choice, but this is only one small part of the picture. In fact, the Foresight obesity report (2007) identified over 100 factors that contribute to the prevalence of obesity. These can be broadly clustered into groups of influences including societal, media related, food industry, biological, environmental and psychological factors.

The causes of obesity are indeed complex and it is important to strive for a balanced perspective about the roles of the individual and the environment and influences to which they are exposed. The result of these exposures will be further influenced by a person's education, occupation, income, living conditions, and family and community networks.

There is no simple solution and an approach that involves the 'whole system', with action at an individual, environmental and societal level will be explored further with the Committee

The Committee will also consider the current evidence base as part of a 'whole system approach' including a focus on legislation, regulations, advertising control and taxation measures in tackling and reducing obesity, with a view to agreeing a set of recommendations for Gateshead.

Purpose of this session

The scoping report agreed by OSC on 14th June 2017 described the complexity of the obesity agenda and that

- The evidence base suggests that in order to tackle obesity effectively we need an approach that involves the whole system.
- Consideration of factors influencing obesity that can be tackled by joint working across working a number of areas need to be part of the solution, the local authority is uniquely positioned to take this forward.
- Successfully tackling obesity is a long term, large scale commitment. The current prevalence of obesity in the population has been at least 30 years in the making. This will take time to reverse and it is reported that it will at least 30 years before reductions in the associated diseases are seen.
- The evidence is very clear that policies aimed solely at individuals will be inadequate and will not be sufficient to reverse this trend. Significant effective action to prevent obesity at a population level is required.

This first evidence gathering session will hear a presentation of fifteen minutes from:

- Andy Graham, Consultant in Public Health, Gateshead Council
- Emma Gibson, Programme Lead in Public Health, Gateshead Council

The presenters will provide an overview of the current picture for Gateshead in terms of what the local data is telling us about the size of the problem for both children and adults who are classed as overweight and obese. An overview of the evidence base and emerging areas of interest in terms of a ‘whole system obesity approach’ will be presented and the proposed outline for future evidence gathering sessions and speakers outlined.

Issues to Consider

When considering the evidence outlined above the Committee may wish to consider the following:

- Maternal obesity is linked to an increased risk of pregnancy related complications and children becoming obese in later life.
- 69.0% of adults in Gateshead have excess weight (overweight and obese). This is significantly worse than the England and regional average. Almost two in every three adults in Gateshead has excess weight and around one in four are obese.

- Obesity rates are highest for children from the most deprived areas. Children aged 5 and from the poorest income groups are twice as likely to be obese compared to their most well-off counterparts and by the age of 11 they are three times as likely.
- Of those children who are obese at preschool age, research suggests that between 26% and 41% will go on to be obese in adulthood.
- Sectors of the population are at considerably higher risk of becoming obese.
- Gateshead has the fifth highest rate of fast food outlets per 100 000 population in the North East (160.5 per 100,000), and is above the England value.
- NHS costs attributed to overweight and obesity in Gateshead are estimated to be £68.7 million per annum for 2015 (underestimation).
- The evidence base on effective action to tackle obesity remains weak, and skewed towards individual level downstream approaches (trying to manage the consequences of obesity rather than more upstream approaches, which attempt to solve the real problems underpinning obesity).
- Currently there are very few examples around the world of successfully reversing the trend of 'obesity' despite over a decade of intervention. Work is emerging from Amsterdam in terms of a wide-reaching programme which is getting results. Please see the full report at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/obesity-policy-research-unit/sites/obesity-policy-research-unit/files/what-learned-from-amsterdam-healthy-weight-programme-inform-policy-response-obesity-england.pdf>

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

Long term sustained approach

Just as obesity develops slowly, both within individuals and populations, it will take time to establish new habits and build new structures to support healthy diets and enhanced physical activity. This also implies the need for long-term strategies spanning several generations and beyond traditional planning cycles. Longer term commitment is needed and lessons learned from tackling smoking behaviours is that it takes longer than 5 years of the impact of public health work to come to fruition.

Complex Problem. Obesity is a complex issue with many drivers, meaning efforts at prevention are particularly challenging. According to the UK national obesity strategy, long term sustainable change will only be achieved through the active engagement of schools, communities, families and individuals with action required across government, industry and the Public Sector.

Weight bias and stigma. Considerable work is still required to re-frame the focus on healthy weight, to move away from the continued focus on personal shortcomings, individual blame and individual behaviour change interventions. There is extensive

research highlighting the bias and stigma and personal blame, people who are overweight and obese may experience. A recognition of the role and impact of societal changes needs to be acknowledged.

It is important to note the impacts of societal changes. People in the UK and Gateshead don't have less willpower and are not more gluttonous than previous generations. Nor are people's biology significantly different. Society, however, has radically altered over the past five decades, with major changes in work patterns, transport, food production and food sales which has impacted on individual's weight.

How do we challenge the Food Industry? The obesogenic environment is powered by widespread availability and the food industry's multi-million pound promotion of high fat, high sugar and high salt food and drinks. How do we challenge and influence the Food Industry to make a sustained change?

Opportunities

Leadership Role. The leadership role of local authorities in developing a workable whole systems approach is crucial. Local Authorities with their responsibilities in health, planning, highways, transport, education, culture, housing, employment, social care and their relationships with businesses of all sizes, are in a uniquely influential position to bring about transformational change in the way that obesity is tackled.

A system-wide approach, redefining healthy weight as a societal and economic issue. Determinants that contribute to obesity are both diverse and far-reaching in their effects. Action is needed to reshape not only the physical and dietary aspects of the environment but also the social, economic and cultural environments.

Community focused led interventions in tackling obesity as part of a place-based, approach. Local initiatives to promote the healthy weight agenda and address obesity across the whole system, which are driven by the community. Promoting such an approach requires a commitment to "step back" and allow the community to lead whilst changing behaviour at the community level and creating cultures of participation.

Population Approach. The evidence is very clear that policies aimed solely at individuals will be inadequate and that simply increasing the number or type of small scale interventions will not be sufficient to reverse this trend. Significant effective action to prevent obesity at a population level is required

Recommendation

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to agree:

- The approach and content as set out in this report and presentation.

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