



St. Helens Council

St. Helens Council's Adult Social Care and Health
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF OBESITY

"It's about what we do, and what we eat!"



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Introduction by the Chair



I am pleased to introduce the report of the Scrutiny Review of Obesity Task and Finish Group. The review was established by the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2009 to examine what could be done to address the serious and growing health issue of obesity.

I welcomed the opportunity to Chair the Task Group which led this review because it is important that the Council, and its partners, do all they can to address an issue that is creating real – and in many cases life-threatening – health problems for many of the residents of St Helens. The Task group found this a very interesting review and it has provided Members with an insight into the excellent work, which is carried out by a range of services and organisations, aimed at tackling obesity on many different levels.

The title of this review reflects the approach and subsequent findings of the Task Group - *“It’s about what we do and what we eat!”* - reflects the small changes which can have a big impact on people’s health and well-being. The Council, PCT and key partners all have a role to play in, promoting opportunities for physical activity and healthy food, and ultimately contributing to health of St Helens residents.

Councillor Joe Pearson

Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 This report presents the results of a scrutiny review undertaken by Members of St.Helens Council's Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine issues of obesity and overweight.
- 1.2 The Task Group undertaking the review acknowledged that the causes, characteristics and potential solutions to obesity are complex and cross-cutting and in order to make the topic manageable for a scrutiny review and add value it would have to be scoped and focused
- 1.3 The Task Group wanted the review to focus on improving the health and well-being of as many people as possible and not just those who are obese and overweight, but also those people who may not have weight problems at the moment but for whom the findings and recommendations in the review may act to prevent weight gain in the future. The Task Group agreed that by looking at the environments and cultures, which impact on the amount of physical activity and food people consume, within St Helens workplaces and schools, the review could achieve outcomes which make a real difference to the people of St Helens.
- 1.4 St.Helens Council, as one of the largest employers in the Borough has, not only a duty, but also a unique opportunity to impact on the health and well-being of its employees. This is reflected in the review in the way that the Task Group feel the Council, and key partners, should lead by example by encouraging others to adopt policies and encourage opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating.

2. **Membership of the Task and Finish Group**

- 2.1 The following Members of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, formed a Task Group who led the review and undertook the detailed work required.

Councillor Joe Pearson (Chair)

Councillor Betty Lowe

Councillor Neil Taylor

Co-opted - Emma RodriguezDosSantos – St Helens LINKs

Officers from the Council and PCT who assisted the Task Group

Dympna Edwards – Deputy Director of Public Health, Halton and St Helens PCT

Catherine Sharman – Programme Change Lead, Halton and St Helens PCT

Paula Edmondson – Health Improvement Team Manager, Halton and St Helens PCT

Pam Worrall – Health Improvement Team Manager, Halton and St Helens PCT

Ann Davies – Adult Social Care and Health Department, St.Helens Council



3. **Aims of the Scrutiny Review:**

3.1 To examine the environments and cultures in St Helens which affect obesity and consider what can be done to reduce obesity within the borough.

3.2 **Objectives**

- A. To investigate what could be done to tackle obesity in St Helens? With regard to the environments and cultures of workplaces, schools and communities within St Helens.
- B. To gain an understanding of obesity, and the associated consequences, at both national and local level.
- C. Explore how transport and methods of travel can impact on the amount of physical activity that people undertake within workplaces and schools.
- D. Consider obesity issues relating to children and young people and how schools and the Building Schools for the Future scheme can promote health and well-being.
- E. Investigate how workplaces are and can encourage the health and well-being of employees.
- F. Investigate how St.Helens Council can encourage healthier workplaces.

4. **Methodology**

4.1 During the course of the review the Task Group met:

- The Deputy Director of Public Health, and, Halton and St Helens PCT's Programme Lead for Obesity and Tobacco, to gain an overview of obesity, both nationally and locally, and associated issues.
- NHS Halton and St Helens Health Improvement Specialist (workforce), to find out about how workplaces can encourage the health and well-being of employees.
- A Travelwise Officer from the Merseyside Travelwise Team, to learn about the work travelwise undertakes and how transport provision can impact on the amount of physical activity people undertake.
- St.Helens Council's Head of Sports Development
- St.Helens Council's Healthy Schools Consultant
- St.Helens Council's Principal Environmental Health Officer (Food)
- St.Helens Council's Senior Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services



5. **Setting the scene**

5.1 **National Context**

5.2 Worldwide, 300million people are obese and a further 750million are overweight. In the UK, the prevalence of obesity has been steadily increasing over the last 50 years and has trebled since the 1980s.

5.3 In England 43 percent of men and 33 percent of women are overweight and an additional 22 percent of men and 23 percent of women are obese. This means that the health of approximately two thirds of men and half of all women is at risk through their being overweight.

5.4 Approximately two-thirds of the population of the UK are overweight and obesity has grown by almost 400 per cent in the last 25 years.

5.5 The Task Group considered the following reports and guidance when undertaking this review;

5.6 **Foresight Report Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Project Report (2007)**

5.7 The Foresight Report provides a strategic view that the challenge of obesity presents by using scientific evidence, commissioned research and expert advice. The report contains the following sections;

- Obesity and the wider debate
- Social policy frameworks for action
- Inequalities and obesity
- Key areas of influence and responsibility
- Conclusion and effective responses

5.8 Essentially, the Foresight Report gives ten priorities for local action:

1. Rise to the challenge
2. Prioritise obesity prevention – take a holistic approach to tackling obesity and the obesogenic environment
3. Target children and vulnerable groups
4. Use Local Strategic Partnerships, which have been developed to bring together partner agencies to work together on issues such as obesity prevention
5. Identify ‘obesity champions’
6. The Sustainable Community Strategy is intended to generate local action and solutions to obesity prevention
7. One size does not fit all
8. Practice what you preach
9. Don’t reinvent the wheel
10. Make information accessible so local people can understand how to balance energy intake against energy expenditure.



5.9 National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Guidance 43 – Obesity for local authorities, schools and early years providers, workplaces and the public.

- 5.10 In 2006 NICE identified that there was a clear lack of good evidence of the effectiveness of weight management interventions, particularly in children, but recommended that action should be taken to;
- Stem the rising prevalence of obesity and diseases associated with it
 - Increase the effectiveness of interventions to prevent overweight and obesity
 - Improve the care provided to adults and children with obesity
- 5.11 The guidance recommended key actions which local authorities and partners, schools and workplaces, should take to tackle obesity.
- 5.12 **Local authorities** - should work with local partners, such as industry and voluntary organisations, to create and manage more safe spaces for incidental and planned physical activity, addressing as a priority any concerns about safety, crime and inclusion, by providing facilities and schemes such as cycling and walking routes, cycle parking, area maps and safe play areas.
- 5.13 **Schools** – HeadTeachers and chairs of governors, in collaboration with parents and pupils, should assess the whole school environment and ensure that the ethos of all school policies helps children and young people maintain a healthy weight, eat a healthy diet and be physically active, in line with existing standards and guidance. This includes policies relating to building layout and recreational spaces, catering (including vending machines) and the food and drink children bring into school, the taught curriculum, school travel plans and provision for cycling policies relating to the National Healthy Schools Programme, the National Physical and Education Sport Strategy and extended schools.
- 5.14 **Workplaces** – Workplaces should provide opportunities for staff to eat a healthy diet and be physically active, through; active and continuous promotion of healthy choices in restaurants, hospitality, vending machines and shops for staff and clients, in line with existing Food Standards Agency guidance. Working practices and policies, such as active travel policies for staff and visitors. A supportive physical environment, such as improvements to stairwells and providing showers and secure cycle parking. Recreational opportunities, such as supporting out-of-hours social activities, lunchtime walks and use of local leisure facilities.
- 5.15 Local Context
- 5.16 The boroughs of Halton and St Helens have a 10 percent higher than national average level of obesity. The level of obesity in year six children is 25 percent higher than the national average and in reception age children it is 31 percent higher.
- 5.17 In 2007/08 32.2 percent of reception year children were overweight and obese and 34.7 percent of year 6 children were overweight and obese.
- 5.18 No up to date lifestyle survey data is available for adults in St Helens however, information from the 2001 National Census Household Survey suggests that 53 percent of adult residents were overweight, and almost 14 percent obese.



6. **Rationale for the Scrutiny Review of Obesity**

- 6.1 The St Helens Local Area Agreement has prioritised tackling smoking, **obesity**, alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancy over the next three years. When scrutiny Members spoke to key partners about the topics which scrutiny should look at, obesity was flagged as an area which would benefit from a review.
- 6.2 This Scrutiny Review supports a number of local priorities and targets, including:
- St Helens Local Area Agreement targets relating to childhood obesity.
 - Corporate aims to improve the health and well-being of children and young people, and, to support vulnerable and all other adults to enjoy good physical health.
 - Sustainable Communities Plan to improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities.

7. **Review Findings**

Travel

- 7.1 The Task Group heard from Merseyside's Travelwise Team and received information about the work Travelwise undertake and how transport provision can impact on the amount of physical activity which people undertake within workplaces and schools.
- 7.2 Travelwise is a campaign which aims to encourage people to make smarter travel choices by walking, cycling and using public transport. Travelwise carries out work on behalf of Merseytravel and the five Local Authorities in Merseyside to promote sustainable travel.
- 7.3 There are two strands to Travelwise's work. One element is to conduct marketing and publicity campaigns. The other strand is to work with a wide-range of organisations and schools to create Travel Plans.
- 7.4 A travel plan is a package of measures produced to encourage people to use alternative modes of transport rather than make lone journeys in a car. Travel plans can include; car sharing schemes; a commitment to improve cycling facilities; strategies to encourage walking; interest free loans for public transport tickets or restricted parking allocations.
- 7.5 Travel plans can have a real impact on the methods people use to travel to workplaces and schools which, in turn leads to increased physical activity, and so real health benefits to employees at workplaces and staff and pupils at schools. In addition, travel plans also benefit the environment by reducing CO2 emissions.

- 7.6 Recommendation:** That all organisations on the Local Strategic Partnership should lead by example and adopt Travel Plans for all sites used as workplaces, the progress of which should be reported back annually to the LSP.



Healthy schools and Building Schools for the Future

7.7 *The Healthy School Scheme* is a national programme introduced by Central Government in 2005 in order to support schools in promoting the health and well-being of children and young people.

7.8 The programme consists of four themes:

- Personal, Social and Health Education
- Healthy Eating
- Physical Activity
- Emotional Health and Well-being

7.9 The Healthy Eating theme includes criteria regarding the implementation of the statutory standards and measures for engaging pupils in healthy eating, in particular schools are required to show how they have established a “whole school” approach to healthy eating, by implementing a consistent food policy and promoting healthy eating throughout the curriculum.

7.10 St. Helens Council provides a range of support materials to help the borough’s schools achieve ‘Healthy Schools Status’.

Building Schools for the Future

7.11 *Building Schools for the Future (BSF)* is the Government’s programme to transform secondary schools throughout England. The overall aim of the BSF programme is to create modern secondary school buildings which:

- Facilitate teaching and learning
- Contribute to higher pupil attainment
- Meet the demands of the 21st Century curriculum.

7.12 The BSF programme was launched by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2003. The programme combines long term Government investment in secondary school buildings with wider educational reform. Under BSF funding will be rolled out to every local authority in England. It is expected that all secondary schools will have been re-built or re-modelled using funding allocated through the programme.

The role of BSF in promoting Healthy Schools

7.13 BSF has a key role in the drive to promote healthy eating in St Helen’s schools. Promoting healthy schools initiatives is one of the key priorities that all BSF projects must support.

7.14 The Task Group met with St. Helens Council’s Senior Assistant Director (Performance and Strategy) for Children and Young People’s Services, who explained that health issues were at the forefront of the BSF Strategy and that formal as well as informal opportunities to promote health and well-being were being



considered. The group were informed of various proposals which could be incorporated into schools as part of the BSF scheme to promote healthy eating and physical activity, including the following;

- Ensuring that food technology has a prime position in the design of schools and, where possible, situating food technology classrooms next to commercial kitchens so that pupils can make use of such facilities to support the development of vocational diplomas. In addition, schools could use allotments on land outside schools to grow produce which could be used by school dining staff.
- Making dining facilities in schools more attractive, inviting and mealtimes a social experience.
- Ensuring that every school has a Green Travel Plan in place and efforts would be made to put cycle entrances and exits and storage in all high schools.
- Creating high quality, well-maintained pathways around the school parameters which would enable young people to 'walk and talk' during breaks.

7.15 The Task Group are aware that schools have many priorities but wanted to make sure that health remained high on the list. The Building Schools for the Future programme will provide great enhancements to the quality of school buildings and an opportunity to make sure that school buildings help to promote health, as well as the school curriculum.

7.16 Recommendation: That any contractual arrangements entered into by the Council, with BSF and other providers, incorporate the principals of green travel, healthy food and physical activity.

How workplaces can help to reduce obesity

7.17 Many people spend a great deal of time at work and so the workplace is a good place to address health issues, particularly with those sections of the population who are less likely to access mainstream health advice.

7.18 The Task Group heard from Halton and St Helens Health Improvement Team Manager and were informed of a number of instances of good practice by employers and in workplaces. For example, The Health Improvement Workforce Specialist informed the group about initiatives various workplaces have introduced which have had a demonstrable impact on employees health by allowing staff time away from their duties to attend health checks, issuing staff with pedometers which encouraged more walking, healthy and nutritious catering arrangements and advertising a range of activity sessions.



7.19 NICE guidance states that ‘many employers recognise that they have an obligation to the health and well-being of their workforce. Investing in the health of employees can also bring business benefits such as reduced sickness absence, increased loyalty and better staff retention’.

7.20 Recommendation: That the Local Authority, schools and all local NHS employers should be models of good practice and lead by example in the use of the workplace as a setting to promote healthy lifestyles and in making healthy choices available to all their employees, fully in-line with guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence

The role of St. Helens Council in promoting the health and well-being of its employees

7.21 Many adults spend a great deal of time in work. Whilst, in the past, this often used to provide a means of burning off calories through physical activity, many jobs which people currently undertake offer less chance for being active.

7.22 The Task Group heard how the PCT’s Health Improvement Team was operating innovative schemes to work with workplaces to encourage healthy lifestyles amongst their staff. The group heard how an organisation’s policies and incentive schemes could help to create a culture that supports healthy eating and physical exercise. Evidence based action will not only improve the health of employees but also have economic benefits for the organisation (e.g. less sickness absence and greater productivity).

7.23 St. Helens Council employs more than 11,000 people, with a significant number of those in sedentary work. Obviously, not all of these employees are St Helens residents but a significant proportion are, and many will have partners, family, friends and relatives to take positive messages home to.

7.24 There are some obvious areas for improvement, such as providing showers for people jogging or cycling into work, providing healthy options within canteens, making stairwells well-lit and attractive, setting up work-based sports leagues, removing snack machines and biscuits at meetings etc.

7.25 Recommendation: The Council develop human resource policies that encourage physical activity and healthy lifestyles amongst all staff and that these policies are fully in-line with guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence.

7.26 Whilst undertaking this review, the Task Group noted that St. Helens Council was carrying out some very positive activities to promote the health and well-being of its employees. The group received information about the work that the Council’s Environmental Health section carries out.

7.27 Local Authority Food Enforcement Teams are commissioned by the Food Standards Agency and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health whom have public health as part of their agenda. Within the team, there is a Health Promotion Officer



whose remit covers physical activity, home safety, alcohol, nutrition and topical health issues. The Health Promotion Officer is responsible for promoting the health and well-being of council employees. Environmental Health undertakes various schemes as part of its 'well workforce' programme, which includes fruit on desks schemes, articles on the Council's intranet, nutrition training and facilitating physical activity.

- 7.28 The Group were informed of St Helen's 'Scores on the Doors' scheme, which provides members of the public with Local Authority hygiene ratings for food businesses. The Group noted the success of the scheme and felt that a similar ratings scheme to reflect the 'healthiness' of food offered by local food businesses would assist Members of the public in choosing healthier food. It was noted that outlets could still provide choice to customers and the scheme would encourage food businesses to take appropriate steps to use healthier cooking alternatives where appropriate, and, offer healthier alternatives alongside other food groups.
- 7.29 The group noted that the Council established a steering group as part of St Helens at Work Initiative Survey 1999, yet the funding and programme ceased. The group felt that a Health and Well-being Steering Group, consisting of nominated leads from each department within the Council, would provide a platform for the co-ordination and strategic overview of the identification and implementation of schemes which would improve the health and well-being of staff.
- 7.30 Furthermore, the Task Group highlighted the importance of leadership, not only to co-ordinate such a steering group, but also to identify and promote opportunities for all departments and sections within the Council to adopt and embrace cultures which promote physical activity and healthy eating.

- 7.30 Recommendation:** The Council nominate an 'Obesity Champion', at senior management level, to further develop, lead, co-ordinate and ultimately champion opportunities to promote the health and well-being of employees.
- 7.31 Recommendation:** A Health and Well-being Steering Group, consisting of nominated leads from each department within the Council, be established, to co-ordinate the variety of aspects which impact upon employees health and well-being, such as catering policies, procurement policies, green travel plan issues and so on. Work undertaken by the Group should be reported to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on an annual basis.
- 7.32 Recommendation:** The Council should support the Environmental Health Section to launch a 'Healthy Catering Award'.
- 7.33 Recommendation:** The Council, and all Partners on the LSP, review existing catering and vending arrangements for staff to ensure that all food offered is consistent with a healthy diet.

Partnership Working

- 7.34 The Task Group felt that there was much benefit to be gained by statutory public sector organisations working in partnership with the private sector, and whilst the group heard of some excellent examples of partnership working, felt that this could



be improved by strengthening and putting clear processes in place, particularly when considering how public sector and private organisations can work together to improve people's health.

- 7.35 The Task Group heard from a number of people from different organisations who shared similar goals. The Health Improvement Team, Travelwise, Sports Development Services, and, Environmental Health, are all trying to get more people to be more active and eat healthier. The Task Group feel that the achievement of shared goals would be more successful if partnership working was strengthened and further opportunities for cross-referral identified.
- 7.36 For example, the group acknowledged that St Helens Chamber play a crucial role in identifying and referring employers to the Health Improvement Team who can then work with employers to use the workplace as a means of improving health and well-being. Yet, if the Health Improvement Team then referred employers to Travelwise, to consider establishing green travel plans (whilst they were already engaged in a scheme aimed at improving the health and well-being of their staff) then a further opportunity to increase staff activity levels would have been utilised.
- 7.37 This cross-referral could work the opposite way round, when an organisation contacts Travelwise, they would be referred to the Health Improvement Team and/or St Helens Chamber if it was appropriate.
- 7.38 The group felt that opportunities like those described above were key to the achievement of shared goals between different services and organisations.
- 7.39 In addition, the Task Group identified a number of workstreams within the Council which, although not primarily aimed at increasing levels of physical activity and/or healthy eating, could promote and provide opportunities to for people to engage in such activities. For example, the Council's Cultural Agenda is in a unique position to encourage participation in different forms of dance or drama to people within the borough, which would not only raise awareness and education of culture but would also increase opportunities to promote and undertake physical activity. In addition, the Task Group heard from the Head of Sports Development that recent dance activities arranged by the service had been well received and popular. The group felt that combining workstreams such as these would again contribute to the achievement of shared goals.

7.40 Recommendation: The LSP proactively explore opportunities to systematically embed health into a core programmes to improve working across sectors and departments.

7.41 Recommendation: The Council, with partners, seek to incorporate healthy eating and physical activity into the cultural portfolio of the authority.

Food Labelling

- 7.42 The Task Group heard from the Environmental Health Officer how the Food Standards Agency has clear guidelines for the nutritional labelling of pre-packaged



foods. Labelling is important because it provides people with clear and simple information about the nutritional make-up of the food they are buying. The Task Group noted that whilst currently pre-packaged foods need to display nutritional information there is no requirement for take-away outlets to provide such information. Whilst food purchased in supermarkets readily displays key nutritional information, the Task Group felt that consistent information should be provided when eating out, whether that is at a small local take-away, or large fast-food restaurant.

- 7.43 Providing nutrition and calorie information about food, before it is ordered in restaurants and take-away outlets, is one way for people to compare the relative healthiness of meal options at glance.

7.44 Recommendation: The Council, through Members of Parliament, lobby central government about nutritional labelling on menu's of take-away outlets.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 During this review the Task group received evidence of some exceptional work being undertaken, by a range of services and organisations, which undoubtedly contribute to the fight against obesity. However, not all organisations and services were aware of the work being undertaken by others and how working together could improve and enhance the services they offer.
- 8.2 There are a number of issues around food packaging and advertising which can only be effectively tackled by national government. The Task Group acknowledge these limitations but would ask St. Helens Council and it's key partners to make a difference where it can.
- 8.3 The Task Group found that workplaces and schools are in unique positions to have a real impact on the behaviours of employees and pupils. Subsequently, St. Helens Council can (1) make sure that St Helens schools have environments and cultures which promote physical activity and healthy eating, (2) promote opportunities and implement policies which would make employees more active and healthier, and, (3) encourage others to adopt health initiatives by leading by example.
- 8.4 In addition, St. Helens Council can identify opportunities for partnership working and cross-referral both within and outside the authority. Tackling obesity is not the responsibility of one organisation, indeed, one organisation could not resolve the complexity involved with obesity. Yet, a lot can be done to increase the amount of physical activity people undertake and reduce the amount of unhealthy food people consume.
- 8.5 The Task Group are confident that, if accepted, the recommendations outlined within this report will improve the health of people in St Helens and help to reduce obesity.



Recommendations

1. Recommendation: That all organisations on the Local Strategic Partnership should lead by example and adopt Travel Plans for all sites used as workplaces, the progress of which should be reported back annually to the LSP.
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3. Recommendation: That the Local Authority, schools and all local NHS employers should be models of good practice and lead by example in the use of the workplace as a setting to promote healthy lifestyles and in making healthy choices available to all their employees, fully in-line with guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence
4. Recommendation: The Council develop human resource policies that encourage physical activity and healthy lifestyles amongst all staff and that these policies are fully in-line with guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence.
5. Recommendation: The Council nominate an 'Obesity Champion', at senior management level, to further develop, lead, co-ordinate and ultimately champion opportunities to promote the health and well-being of employees.
6. Recommendation: A Health and Well-being Steering Group, consisting of nominated leads from each department within the Council, be established, to co-ordinate the variety of aspects which impact upon employees health and well-being, such as catering policies, procurement policies, green travel plan issues and so on. Work undertaken by the Group should be reported to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on an annual basis.
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