

DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Update on children's weight and oral health

Health Scrutiny Committee 22 March 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents a summary of Blackpool children's weight and oral health, and describes the strategies and local actions taking place to improve the public's health in these areas.

2. HEALTHIER WEIGHT

Maintaining a healthy weight protects against a range of serious health conditions. Overweight and obesity are risk factors for a number of serious health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, cancer and early death. Beyond the consequences for individuals there are significant implications for the wider community and economy, through sickness absence, worklessness and the costs of treating the health consequences of obesity. It has been estimated to cost the NHS £6.1bn nationally for treating health conditions associated with obesity.

The government acknowledges that obesity, particularly amongst children, is an issue. In August 2017 the Department of Health published a national strategy, *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action*. The strategy deliverables include:

- Soft drinks industry levy
- Reformulation of food products across nine categories that make the largest contribution to children's sugar intake
- Increasing physical activity in schools
- Making healthy options available in the public sector – from leisure centres to hospitals
- Health rating scheme for schools (voluntary)
- Making school food healthier – updated standards

(a) The local picture

Levels of overweight and obesity have been rising in recent years amongst both children and adults both locally and nationally. The UK has some of the highest rates of overweight and obesity in Europe. In Blackpool rates are higher than average, and whilst rates of childhood obesity appeared to plateau nationally this slow-down was not seen locally or in other socially disadvantaged areas. So our local population experiences higher than average levels of overweight and obesity, and rates continue to rise faster than average which is widening the inequality between Blackpool and the national average.

Overweight and obesity levels in Blackpool:

- **More than a quarter of 4-5 year olds** are overweight or obese (26.5%).
- **More than a third of 10-11 year olds** (40%)
- **Almost three quarters of adults aged 16 and over** (74.5%). This is more than 84,000 adults in the town.

It is also recognised that some of the factors driving overweight and obesity in the town are also contributing to other issues of public health concern, for example consumption of sugary drinks and poor oral health.

(b) Overview of the Healthier Weight Strategy

The factors driving increasing levels of overweight and obesity are complex and broad. We all need to eat. Food is good for us – a healthy balanced diet protects against ill health, helps faster recovery from illness, and enables optimal growth for kids. Preparing and sharing food is important for us socially too. However, at the simplest level there is a mismatch between the calories that we consume and the calories that we burn during our daily lives. Whilst on the whole people know about messages such as ‘five a day’, this doesn’t always translate in to behaviour change. Our ability to make healthier choices is often undermined by the environment in which we live. Advertising of high-fat high-sugar foods, promotions of unhealthy foods (for example ‘buy one get one free’), availability of cheap fast-food, a takeaway culture, sedentary lifestyles, use of food as a coping tool, lack of clear labelling are just some examples of this.

Blackpool’s Healthy Weight Strategy was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in January 2016. The strategy is structured around the following themes for local action:

- Increase knowledge, skill and abilities to make healthier choices
- Focus on children and young people
- Reducing sugar consumption
- Promoting the redesign of environments to promote healthier eating and physical activity
- Securing good quality weight management services for children

(c) Progress with actions arising from the strategy

An update on progress with the actions arising from the strategy was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2016.

Summary of progress to date:

1. In January 2016, Blackpool Council became the first council in the country to sign a **Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight** and made a commitment to support employees and the residents of Blackpool to tackle the issue of obesity by encouraging individuals to make healthy choices. Good progress is being made with the Local Authority Declaration and a number of the priorities are progressing well.
2. Blackpool’s first **Healthy Weight Summit** took place on 2nd February 2017 and saw 20 organisations pledge to follow the Council’s lead and adopt their own declaration on healthy weight.
3. **Give up loving pop (GULP)** campaign in secondary schools and colleges in November 2015 and March 2017. Work is underway to incorporate the GULP messages in the Fit2go programme that is delivered across all Year 4 children and we are exploring the development of a GULP science lesson plan which will be targeted at Years 5/6 children.

4. Work to promoting **healthier lunchboxes** is underway at present and on track to launch Spring/Summer 2017.
5. **Healthier vending guidelines** implemented and audited.
6. **Making Changes**, the redesigned weight management service for children and families launched in September 2016.
7. The **Healthy Choices Award** is now operational and a number of takeaways and sandwich shops have already received the award.
8. There has been good partnership work with the Corporate Procurement team reviewing how we influence and shape contracts in the future to reflect the priorities of the declaration.
9. Public Health and Public Protection/Enforcement are working together to develop a **Street Trader Policy** with particular reference to Ice Cream Vans and Street Food providing healthier choices.
10. **Holiday breakfast scheme** in local authority children's centres.
11. **Living Streets 'Walk to School' project** extended.

Blackpool's work on healthy weight has received considerable external recognition:

- Case Studies in two Local Government Association (LGA) publications: *Healthy weight, healthy futures: Local government action to tackle childhood obesity* and *Healthier Food Procurement*
- National coverage of GULP on BBC News, November 2015
- Poster presentation at Public Health England's national conference, September 2016
- Environmental Health News, February 2017
- The team have provided input to national scoping work to develop actions arising from the national Childhood Obesity strategy
- As the first local authority in the country to sign a Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight it has generated a lot of good publicity and interest in the work being undertaken in Blackpool and we are being held as a beacon of success. Areas across the country that are interested to learn about what we are doing are Lancashire, Cumbria, Leeds, Tameside, Cheshire West, Camden and Islington, and Lambeth.
- The work has also enabled the Public Health team to develop good links with the Department of Health's lead for Obesity, Emma Reed, who attended the Healthy Weight Summit giving the keynote address.

3. ORAL HEALTH

Oral health plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of individuals. The risk factors for many common health conditions are common to those that affect oral health namely, smoking, alcohol misuse and poor diet. The Department of Health sets out the evidence-base for prevention in its publication *Delivering Better Oral Health; an evidence-based toolkit for prevention (3rd edition 2014)*.

For children, poor oral health can have important consequences. These include pain and discomfort, embarrassment and unwillingness to participate in lessons, absence from school, admission to hospital and general anaesthesia for tooth extraction.

(a) Local picture

Blackpool children suffer from considerably worse oral health than the rest of England.

The most recent data for five year olds comes from a survey in 2015 which found that over 40% of Blackpool's five year olds had obvious decay compared to the national average of 25%. Trend data appears to show a rising trend in Blackpool which is in contrast to an improving picture on average nationally. In addition Blackpool children have a high prevalence of Incisor caries (decay) 8.1% compared with 3.9 % in England; this is a pattern of decay associated with sugary drinks fed in bottles and cups with teats.

Each year around 400 Blackpool children under 16 are admitted to hospital for tooth extraction under general anaesthetic as a result of significant dental decay affecting their teeth.

(b) Overview of the Oral Health Strategy

The Public Health Oral Health Strategy aims to promote and support the development of good oral hygiene habits and optimise exposure to fluoride. The strategy delivery comprises the following services and activities:

- Oral Health Promotion Service includes delivery of oral health messaging to children in the town
- Supervised brushing in children's centres
- Toothpaste and toothbrush distribution scheme at 6 months
- Fluoride in school milk scheme from November 2016
- Commissioning of dental epidemiology surveys (mandated)

Oral health improvement in 0-4 year olds is a key indicator for Blackpool's Better Start programme. Blackpool's Better Start Centre for Early Child Development (CECD) programme is enabling additional activities to enhance the local strategy including:

- Supervised brushing scheme expansion to 2,3 and 4 year olds attending nurseries (an additional estimated 2500 children)
- Development and distribution of consistent oral health messaging across the towns workforce
- Community mobilisation and workforce mobilisation

The arrangements and responsibilities for commissioning oral health services are complex and present a challenge for the design and delivery of interventions. Commissioning responsibility for oral health improvement lies with the local authority. However, the authority is limited in its ability to influence how young children and families access dental treatment services. Commissioning of dental treatment and access to dental services, and in turn access to General Dental Practitioners falls under the remit of NHS England (NHSE). The current NHSE contract for dentists does not prioritise oral health improvement and it will require real commitment to collaborative and concerted partnership working to make change. The Better Start partnership offers the opportunity to look closely at this challenge. In January 2017, discussions commenced with commissioning colleagues from NHS England

(NHSE) and dental public health experts from Public Health England (PHE) to find innovative ways to address oral health improvement in the town.

To date NHSE have already agreed to explore a number of potential interventions within Blackpool (as outlined below). These will require NHS England to revise dental contracts to allow General Dental Practitioners flexibility to provide oral health improvement interventions.

1. Ensure practices are giving advice and providing professional interventions in accordance with 'Delivering Better Oral Health'
2. Ensure all children are seen by a dentist before their first birthday
3. Identifying an Oral Health Champion within the practice who is responsible for overseeing prevention oral health promotion activities
4. Oral Health Champion liaises with partners including Health Visitors, Local Dental Networks and Local Authorities to support facilitated access to dental services

(c) Fluoride milk scheme

In November 2016, Blackpool Council introduced a fluoridated milk scheme alongside the free school breakfast programme. This scheme contributes to the oral health strategy objective of optimising exposure to fluoride. The scheme sees a 189 ml carton of fluoridated milk offered to children in Years 1-6 in primary schools across the town. Parents are provided with information on fluoride milk, and are able to decline inclusion in the scheme in which case their child will be offered non-fluoridated milk.

Initial evaluation

Initial evaluation of the implementation is positive. Between November and December 2016, 78% of all school milk ordered was fluoridated milk and we estimate that 6550 children are drinking fluoridated milk on a daily basis. Members of the Public Health team continue to monitor take up and work to support schools.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Public Health has established the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Process with fluoridated milk suppliers and receives a fluoride concentration analysis milk sample test certificate on a regular basis. The suppliers operate food safety compliant quality assurance systems covering raw milk, product processing, filling, handling and distribution, including HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point). All samples need to be checked before they can be released. Each holding tank is subject to sampling and a range of quality checks before the milk is released.

4. SUMMARY

This paper has described strategies and actions in place to promote healthier weight and good oral health amongst children in the town, and has highlighted recent progress.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to note the content of the report and highlight any areas for further scrutiny which will be reported back as appropriate.

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