

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: 16th March 2022
Report for: Information
Report of: Eleanor Roaf, Director of Public Health

Report Title

Healthy Weight among Children and Young People

Summary

Both nationally and locally children's weight remains an area of concern and this has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID.

The new Trafford Healthy Weight strategy identifies a whole system approach to addressing the complex system of factors using a whole system approach.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the scope of the work that is currently in progress to improve the ability of Trafford children and young people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and comment on the proposed plans for further work that will be developed with schools and early years settings.

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1. Background

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is challenging and complex, and excess weight (overweight and obesity) is a serious Public Health concern. Excess weight can have serious health implications for individuals, with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, vascular dementia and some cancers and significantly reduces life expectancy. Being overweight can be prevented, but it can be seen as a normal reaction to an abnormal environment, where it is very difficult to achieve and maintain a healthy weight given all the external factors and influences on our lives.

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) has been recording the height and weight of children in Reception and Year 6 since 2006. It was set up to provide intelligence to support local public health initiatives and to inform the local planning and delivery of services for children.

Trafford fares relatively well compared to England, however prevalence of obesity more than doubles between the first and last years of primary school, and Trafford school children living in areas that rank in the 10% most deprived in England are more than twice as likely to be obese as those living in the 10% least deprived areas.

This paper will provide an overview of:

- The local picture of overweight and obesity in children and young people in Trafford
- The impact of COVID on children and young people's weight
- The development of an all age healthy weight strategy for Trafford including a whole system approach to excess weight

2. Local picture

2.1 Weight status in children is measured using BMI centile on the UK90 Growth Reference charts. There are different centile thresholds for population monitoring compared to clinical classification as shown in the table below. BMI is the most suitable way to determine excess weight in most of the population.

Classification	BMI centile	
	Clinical	Population
Underweight	<2 nd	<2 nd
Healthy weight	≥2 nd to <91 st	≥2 nd to <85 th
Overweight	≥91 st to <98 th	≥85 th to <95 th
Obese	≥98 th to <99.6 th	≥95 th to <99.6 th
Morbidly obese	≥99.6 th	≥99.6 th

There is currently no guidance on different BMI ranges for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children, however a recent study in the Journal of Public Health (Firman et al. 2020) suggests that BMI overestimates weight category in children from black backgrounds, and under-estimates BMI in children from South Asian backgrounds. This means that parents of black children may be informed that their child is overweight when they are in fact a healthy weight, and that parents of children from a South Asian background may be informed that their child is a healthy weight when they are

overweight. Overweight and obese are terms that represent excessive body fat accumulation that presents a risk to health, and therefore in different populations the level of excess weight at which there is a risk to health can be different.

2.2. Trafford NCMP Data 2019/20

- In children of reception age (age 4-5) one in five (18.8%) are overweight or obese, and this increases to almost one in three (32.2%) by year 6 (age 10-11).
- It is estimated that the increases in excess weight are fairly linear as age increases, and therefore it is likely that by the age of 18 around 45% of young people are overweight or obese.
- In addition, between Reception and Year 6, the prevalence of children who are obese doubles from 7.2% to 17.8% and is more than twice as high for children living in the most deprived decile compared to the least deprived. As child poverty increases, so does excess weight, and a similar pattern can be seen with obesity.
- The ratio of obesity prevalence between Reception and Year 6 has been stable at around a 2.2-fold increase since 2010/11 but this has increased slightly to 2.6 in 19/20.
- In Reception, the prevalence of excess weight remains lower than the 2006/07 baseline, whilst in year 6 the prevalence of excess weight has increased slightly (32.2%) compared to the 2006/07 baseline.
- Prevalence of excess weight in Reception in Trafford is lower than the England average, however, excess weight in Year 6 is similar to England.
- At the other end of the weight spectrum, around 1.3% of children at Reception and 2.1% of Year 6 are underweight with the latter increasing from 1.2% to 2.1% in the last year, and if this prevalence is consistent throughout childhood, then between 700 and 1200 children and young people in Trafford are underweight.

2.3. National Data 2020/21

The latest findings from the Government's National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) for England, 2020/21 school year have been published. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020/21 collection was carried out as a 10% sample and statistical weighting was applied to the data to produce an estimate of obesity prevalence at national level.

The key findings were:

- prevalence of overweight in reception children has increased from 23.0% to **27.7%**
- prevalence of obesity in reception children has increased from 9.9% to **14.4%**
- prevalence of overweight in year 6 children has increased from 35.2% to **40.9%**
- prevalence of obesity in year 6 children has increased from 21.0% to **25.5%**.

National data tells us that there are certain groups within a population who will be disproportionately affected by overweight and obesity.

- Obesity prevalence is higher in black children than white children at both reception and year 6;
- Children living in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to be obese, than those living in the least deprived areas.
 - 20.3% of Reception children living in the most deprived areas were obese compared to 7.8% of those living in the least deprived areas
 - 33.8% of Year 6 children living in the most deprived areas were obese compared to 14.3% of those living in the least deprived areas
- Boys have a higher obesity prevalence than girls for both age groups
 - In Reception, 14.8% of boys were obese compared to 14.1% of girls
 - In Year 6, 29.2% of boys were obese compared to 21.7% of girls.

The Trafford 10% data sample for 2020/21 is currently being analysed and will be shared when complete.

Trafford's School Health Team will be visiting Trafford primary settings from March 2022 to deliver the NCMP 2021/22 programme. A full data set will be captured this academic year. All eligible Reception and Year 6 children will be measured and weighed (unless parent has opted out).

2.4. Impact of COVID on Children and Young People's weight

There is little doubt that the pandemic has had a significant impact on children's health. School closures, strained household finances, where families are more likely to buy cheaper and more calorie-dense foods, increased screen time, and marketing of fast foods have increased exposure for many children during the pandemic to the environmental drivers of weight gain. For the most vulnerable children who did not attend school this may have resulted in restricting their only source of regular, healthy meals, exacerbating the health divide between more and less deprived households.

Physical activity has also decreased. Before the pandemic, over 50% of children were not achieving physical activity guidelines. Despite restrictions allowing 60 minutes of exercise in a local area, nationally nearly 30% of children reported not leaving the house on a typical lockdown day. With recreational areas, and sports clubs closed and screen time increased, there has been further reduction in physical activity in young people; this is more pronounced among ethnic minority communities.

3. Trafford Approach

In July 2019 a multi-agency Healthy Weight steering group was established in Trafford to start the process of developing a healthy weight strategy, address issues relating to safeguarding, look at pathways into current available services and agree an approach for Trafford in relation to healthy weight. There has been excellent engagement in the steering group and sub-groups from key children's services such as education, school nursing, health visiting, social care, safeguarding, primary care etc.

3.1 Safeguarding

The first priority for the healthy weight steering group was to establish a protocol and toolkit for the identification of obesity in the context of neglect. This decision was taken as a result of recent Serious Case Reviews in Manchester and Bury where children had died and their obesity was a factor in this. There were recommendations from each review which were relevant to the processes and procedures at the time in Trafford. These were:

- There is a lack of professional clarity about when childhood obesity should be considered as a child neglect concern which, if not addressed, leaves children at risk of continued harm.
- The lack of professional knowledge about the multiagency obesity pathway, coupled with the way services are currently delivered does not support professionals in the management of obesity.
- Professional sensitivities to “naming the problem” in relation to obesity is unduly driving practice. This will be compounded when a parent is seen as challenging.
- Professionals are not supported to take a psycho-social approach to obesity, whereby the well-being of children and their parents are linked and worked with as such.
- Children’s help-seeking behaviour is insufficiently recognised and responded to by professionals, leaving them unsupported in the short term and potentially less likely to ask for help in the future.

A task & finish group was established from the healthy weight steering group which was led by the Trafford Safeguarding Board. From this, a new policy document was developed and approved in December 2019 “Safeguarding response to obesity when neglect is an issue”. The document includes clear guidance to support professionals when it is considered that a child’s obesity may be related to neglect (Appendix 1). It also includes two safeguarding analysis tools – one for health practitioners and one for non-health practitioners – to help practitioners establish whether neglect is a concern in relation to the child’s weight, and this then links to Trafford’s Levels of Need document to determine the appropriate level of support. The levels of need document also includes clear weight-related needs to support decision-making.

This policy is now being rolled out with practitioners across Trafford. This is being supplemented with additional support where required.

3.2 Pathways

A second task and finish group met to look at pathways into services that support people who want to achieve a healthy weight. Members of the steering group were unsure of the support that was available and felt that this was reflected in the wider workforce. Therefore a document that details key services that are in place was collated to share with partners and the workforce. A piece of work is also underway to review the way this information is presented on the Trafford Directory to ensure that it can be easily accessed and found by members of the public and professionals.

In addition, the current pathway into the children and young people’s weight management service was shared to ensure that the wider workforce were aware of this specialist offer.

3.3 Trafford Healthy Weight Strategy and whole system approach

The importance of taking a whole system approach to tackling childhood obesity has been well recognised. Trafford's Council newly published Strategy has identified the following priorities as part of the Start Well programmes:

- Support parents and carers to establish healthy eating and physical activity habits for their family from a very early age, including promotion of breast-feeding by equipping key professionals to have positive conversations about healthy weight.
- Support early year's settings to support children in their care and their families to develop healthy habits.
- Support and deliver the National Child Measurement Programme.
- Enable children and young people to access the support they need to achieve a healthy weight.
- Work with schools around implementing and enhancing the School Food standards.
- Support those working with children, young people and families to embrace the role that active play and physical activity can play in supporting school readiness, physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Maximise the engagement of young people in sport and physical activity as participants, leaders and volunteers.
- Ensure there are effective pathways and transitions so that children and young people can maintain participation in sport and physical activity in different settings as they move through childhood and adolescence into adulthood.
- Work with children, young people, families and schools to identify the actions which will support them to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Work to challenge the culture whereby food that is high in salt, fat and sugar is used as a reward for good behaviour.
- Work with schools to address obesity stigmatization
- Consideration of the influence that external factors such as social media have on our children and young people, and what we can do at a local level to raise awareness of this influence

As children return to schools and early years settings, these institutions could play an even more important part in delivering healthy nutrition, and physical and food education.

3.4. Commissioned services

Trafford Council and NHS Trafford CCG commission the following:

- Specialist Weight Management services for children and young people. Clinical support for CYP who are very overweight, delivered by specialist dietitians.
- Foundation 92 - a targeted, 6-week family health improvement and lifestyle change programme, focusing on healthy eating, physical activity and mental wellbeing. Delivered in targeted neighbourhoods as pilot programme. Next steps – evaluate to establish outcomes and success for Trafford families.

- Schools healthy lifestyle programme – Core Strength. Developed locally and delivered by sports club foundations. Delivery will begin in 10 primary schools after Easter 2022 and will be evaluated to establish outcomes and success for Trafford children.

The national and international evidence base on effective services to support children, young people and families to achieve a healthy weight is weak. Nationally, there are 11 pilot sites where different interventions are being delivered and evaluated to try and build the evidence base during 2021/22. There is no feedback from these pilots as yet, hence why we are looking at local pilot programmes to build a local evidence base and inform future commissioning.

4. Links to Corporate Priorities

- Reducing health inequalities – there is a clear social gradient in childhood obesity, and inequalities have widened during the last two years.
- Supporting people out of poverty – food insecurity (affordability and accessibility of food to enable a healthy balanced diet) as a result of poverty is contributing to the social gradient in childhood obesity.
- Addressing our climate crisis – a diet that meets the EatWell guide for a healthy balanced diet is one that should have a positive climate impact.

5. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the scope of the work that is currently in progress to improve the ability of Trafford children and young people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and comment on the proposed plans for further work that will be developed with schools and early years settings.

Appendix 1

Safeguarding and childhood obesity policy



TSSP Childhood
Obesity Policy - V_10.