

Wiltshire Council

Health and Wellbeing Board

23 May 2024

Subject: Whole Systems Approach to Obesity

Executive Summary

The Public Health team are embarking on a Whole Systems Approach to Obesity which seeks to take a collaborative approach in tackling this important agenda, with all key stakeholders engaged and empowered to lead on change and drive forward action within such a complex system.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that the Board:

- i) notes; the whole systems approach to obesity as the strategic approach in tackling obesity in Wiltshire
- ii) considers who in their teams and organisations should be involved in the systems approach, and to put forward individuals to the Core Working group
- iii) notes; the outcomes of the Whole Systems Approach to obesity will be driven by engagement with key stakeholders and Wiltshire residents.

Reason for Proposal

Living with obesity increases an individual's risk to certain health conditions such as cancers, cardiovascular disease, and mental health. Wiltshire's last Obesity Strategy came to an end in 2020, and since then there hasn't been an obesity strategy in place. The outcomes measured in the previous strategy ranged in terms of their impact.

Tackling obesity and helping people achieve or maintain a healthier weight is complex. A growing body of evidence suggests the Whole Systems Approach is the strongest evidence base that could help tackle complex problems like obesity. Wiltshire Public Health team is embarking on this approach along with Systems Thinking colleagues as a Transformation Programme within Wiltshire Council.

To ensure the success of this approach, we seek to engage all key stakeholders to engage and play an active role in the approach.

Kate Blackburn Director of Public Health
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Subject: Whole Systems Approach to Obesity

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an overview of the Whole Systems Approach to Obesity

Relevance to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2. Supports all four themes of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Background

3. On average, obesity deprives an individual of an extra 9 years of life, preventing many individuals from reaching retirement age (Health Matters: obesity and the food environment, 2017). Wiltshire has the 4th highest level of obesity in adults aged 18+ in the South West at 28.8%, compared to 25.7% (South West) and 25.9% (England) (Public Health Outcomes Framework, 2023).
4. Excess weight in childhood is potentially predictive of adult obesity and elevates risks of developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and various other long term health conditions that can pervade into adulthood. Obesity data for Wiltshire indicates 21.9% of 4–5-year-olds are living with overweight/obesity, increasing to 33.1% of 10–11-year-olds. This increases further in adulthood with an estimated 67.2% of 18-year-olds and over living with overweight/obesity (Public Health Outcomes Framework, 2023). There is further evidence highlighting the inequalities in this obesity data with an increased likelihood of people living with overweight/obesity at all stages of the life course greater in those living in areas of highest deprivation (Wiltshire JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment), 2022).
5. A recent review of the inequalities gap of childhood obesity data shows the gap between community areas with the highest and lowest prevalence has widened to 10.1% in 4–5y year olds and 16.0% in 10–11 year olds, whereas 3 years ago at the end of the Wiltshire Obesity Strategy in 2020, the inequalities gap was 5.6% and 7.1% respectively. The review of the data indicates obesity levels are reducing in some community areas, yet in others it is increasing, therefore widening the inequalities gap. It is for this reason that tackling current obesity levels, as well as preventing obesity, is needed.
6. Obesity costs the NHS an estimated £6.5 billion each year, through the treatment of associated health conditions such as cancers, mental health challenges, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. This in turn puts

an increased demand on health services in terms of appointments, medications and treatment but reduces quality of life, as well as life or healthy life expectancy of those living with overweight/obesity.

7. The evidence base supports the complexities of obesity and the importance that the wider determinants of health have on this issue, ranging from education to employment. Wider determinants of health are defined as the diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which impact on people's health. It requires a system of partners who have an impact or who are impacted by any decisions or change linked to this work, to drive forward improvements and creating healthier environments. Partners also include those with lived experience of obesity living or working in Wiltshire.
8. There is no single solution in preventing or driving down obesity levels. There are so many interacting factors which cause obesity. These factors are apparent in places where people live, work, and play as well as the food and built environment, making it difficult to make healthy lifestyle choices. Such issues cannot be tackled in isolation. Different organisations play separate roles in driving up obesity rates nationally and locally, whilst others pull in a different direction. The need for a whole system approach to obesity/healthy weight, requires a system to engage in this approach and understand how each driver influences another and in which direction. If obesity levels continue to grow and the specific drivers of obesity within Wiltshire are not addressed, then health inequalities are likely to continue to widen at a local level.

Main Considerations

7. The Whole Systems Approach to obesity requires senior level engagement and commitment from a range of stakeholders to enable understanding of obesity and lead to better use of local assets and resources through aligning actions.

Next Steps

8. Over the next 6 months the core working group are seeking to identify key stakeholders across the system to engage and begin building the narrative of why obesity matters locally, and creating a shared understanding of how obesity is addressed in Wiltshire.
9. Action plans will begin to be developed based on the developed narrative from stakeholders over the next 6-9 months.
9. Key stakeholders to be empowered to lead on action and drive forwards change to improve the health and wellbeing of Wiltshire's population in the whole systems approach to obesity.

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