

**Merton Child Healthy Weight
Action Plan
SUMMARY
2019 – 2022**

Introduction

Reducing Childhood Obesity in Merton has been a key priority within the Health and Well-being Strategy since 2015. The refreshed Health and Well-being Strategy (2019-2024) maintains this focus and includes childhood obesity as one of 3 priorities within the 'Start Well' children and young people's theme. Childhood obesity is a complex issue and there is no single solution. Therefore a preventative, whole systems approach is required, which recognises the influence of the places where we live, work and play on our health and well-being, as well as our individual behaviours and choices. Sustained and consistent action is therefore required, to have a positive impact on childhood obesity and partners in Merton are committed to this issue.

This Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (CHWAP) provides the framework for taking forward actions which will support achieving the "Start Well" theme. The Action Plan reflects the learning over the past 3 years as well as aligning to national and regional work to reduce childhood obesity. There are a number of other action plans and strategies which support reducing childhood obesity and this action plan will not seek to duplicate these but include priority actions that enhance the work over and above work included in wider action plans for the next 3 years. Therefore, this should be noted by readers to understand the scope of this Child Healthy Weight Action Plan. The Plan has been refreshed alongside the Tackling Diabetes Action Plan and has some shared themes and actions. The approach recognises that if we reduce childhood obesity levels, we could potentially reduce the numbers of people with type two diabetes in the future and there are clear synergies between the two action plans. We also know that we need to have a Think Family approach which recognises the importance of taking a whole family approach rather than thinking of an individual (child or adult) in isolation. Without this approach, we often miss the bigger picture around that individual's life and opportunities to support.

Our key CHWAP aims are to:

- Continue to develop a sustainable whole systems approach to addressing childhood obesity locally, focusing on 4 themes (see below)
- Increase proportion of children who are a healthy weight
- Reduce the 'gain' in excess weight between reception (4-5 year olds) and Year 6 (10 – 11 year olds)
- Reduce the gap in obesity between the east and the west of Merton (by improving the east)

This Child Healthy Weight Action Plan is split into 3 key themes (see page 7 for summary):

- 1) *Making childhood obesity everyone's business***
- 2) *Supporting children, young people and their families***
- 3) *Healthy Place***

The Director of Public Health's Annual Public Health Report (APHR) 2016-17 (Tackling Childhood Obesity Together) available on the following link provides the local context on childhood obesity on Merton <http://www.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/publichealth/annualpublichealthreport.htm>. The APHR sets out the challenge of childhood obesity in Merton and is a call to action to partners to work together on the solutions. It brings together data and information from a range of sources and provides evidence about what works as well as examples of action to tackle obesity at the population, community and individual level, to provide a local reference and resource to support our joint effort. It recognises the good work already taking place across the borough and highlights some examples underway.

Merton context

- In Merton an estimated 4,500 children aged 4-11 years are overweight or obese– equivalent to 150 primary school classes.
- One in five children entering Reception year are overweight or obese and this increases to one in three children leaving primary school in Year 6.
- There has been a slight reduction in reception from 21.2% in 2016/17 to 18.5% in 17/18 (lower than England – 22.4% and London – 21.8%).
- There has been a slight increase in excess weight in Year 6 from 34% in 2016/17 to 35.6% in 17/18 (higher than England (34.3%) but lower than London (37.7%)
- Childhood obesity contributes to health inequalities - the gap in overweight and obesity between the east and west of the borough is widening in both Reception and Year 6 and is 11% higher in east Merton in Year 6 (2014/15–2016/17).
- There are a number of primary schools in Merton where over 50% of children in year 6 are classed as overweight or obese.
- Fast food outlets are an important and popular food source for children and young people –providing a significant proportion of their fat, salt and sugar intake.
- Evidence indicates that a child is more likely to be obese if they are from:
 - a lower income household
 - a black British , black African or black Caribbean ethnic background, and have one or more overweight parents
- Overweight and obese children are more likely to experience bullying and stigma. This can affect their self-esteem and may in turn affect their performance at school.
- Children who are obese are more likely to become obese adults and they risk the early development of obesity related problems such as diabetes, heart disease, cancers and have reduced life chances. Obesity can harm people's prospects in life, their self-esteem and their underlying mental health.

Celebrating successes - Child Healthy Weight Action Plan 2015-18

Over the past 3 years, there have been concerted efforts through the Child Healthy Weight Steering group and partner organisations which have supported achieving the 2015-2018 action plan. Overall, 47 actions were achieved out of 52 originally agreed as part of the plan. Listed below are examples of some of the key actions that were achieved by the plan through the work of the Child Healthy Weight steering group:-

- **Merton Council signing the Local Government Declaration on Sugar Reduction** - This is an initiative developed by charity Sustain aimed at encouraging local authorities to take significant actions to across six key areas essential to tackle the obesity crisis (including tackling unhealthy advertising, supporting healthier food business and public messaging)
- **Delivering the Great Weight Debate Merton engagement to inform work to tackle obesity** – following the London-wide “Great Weight Debate”, a further local consultation was commissioned through the Child Healthy Weight Plan to undertake focused communication and engagement focusing on East Merton residents, BAME communities and parents and young people. The communication and engagement was an intervention in itself to raise awareness of childhood obesity and providing consistent messaging on healthy eating and physical activity. GWD Merton provided in-depth insights into Merton residents’ views and opinions on childhood obesity and the findings of the consultation have been used by partners and as a basis for the refreshed plan presented in this report.
- **Developing a child healthy weight support service** – the “Family Start” service has been commissioned and established to support children identified as ‘obese’ through the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). This service is delivered by the Merton School Nursing service and consists of 3 one-to-one consultations with families and their children to support lifestyle change. From Sept 17-Aug 18, 241 appointments were held through the service.
- **Supporting the Healthy Schools London Programme locally** - Building on the work of a targeted Healthy Schools programme in the east of the borough previously, Merton is now aligned to the Healthy Schools London (HSL) programme. Merton School Sports Partnership (MSSP) were commissioned to support schools in the borough to achieve Healthy School status. Currently, 14 schools have achieved their Bronze award and 3 of those schools have also achieved their Silver award.
- **Training for 378 school staff on raising awareness and talking about childhood obesity and weight** – School staff from 19 schools have benefited from training and a further 6 schools have been offered training which will be delivered within the 18/19 academic year. The training is to better support primary school staff around the issue of childhood obesity, increasing confidence, delivering consistent messages, taking a whole school approach on healthy weight and improving their ability to signpost to support.
- **Developing a food poverty action plan** - Merton was successful in bidding for additional funding from the GLA and Sustain to support development of a Food Poverty action plan (2018-2020). Sustainable Merton were commissioned to lead the development of the plan and its first year of implementation. A partnership steering group has been established to deliver the action plan, with a focus on three themes: ensuring a joined up approach to food poverty, tackling food waste and surplus and strengthening existing food poverty initiatives.

- **Delivering family learning courses for healthy eating on a budget** -These courses were developed following consultation feedback from the Great Weight Debate Merton on the need for clear messaging and support for families, especially those on low incomes. The courses focused on clear messaging around physical activity, meal planning, nutrition and healthy lifestyle changes and target children aged 5-7 years and their families.
- **Healthier Catering Commitment (HCC):** The Healthier Catering Commitment (HCC) is a voluntary award scheme that supports food businesses to offer healthier food options and cooking practices. 37 Merton food businesses have been fully signed up with nearly 50 premises visited (some on more than 1 occasion) to support them to make positive changes such as reducing portion size and changing oils through the HCC. The HCC has been used to recognise food businesses that demonstrate a commitment to offering healthier options, and has been targeted in the east of the borough.
- **Promoting the Daily Mile** – The Daily Mile is a free initiative that has been promoted in Merton schools aiming to get children to run or jog for 15minutes every day at primary and nursery levels. Currently over 20 schools across the borough are delivering the Daily Mile with promotion still ongoing.
- **Children’s Community Services UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative Level 3 Re-accreditation** – The Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) is an accreditation programme run by UNICEF that supports organisations to offer high quality support for families for breast feeding and infant feeding. Merton’s Health visiting service has successfully achieved re-accreditation at the highest level (Level 3), for its provision of breastfeeding and infant feeding support to mothers and families.

Lessons Learnt

A number of lessons were learnt in successfully delivering the first Child Healthy Action Plan, and these were used to inform the refresh and development of the updated action plan presented here. These key lessons are summarised below:

- **Maintaining a broad and committed partnership approach** – a key lesson learnt from the first Child Healthy Weight Action Plan was the importance of having a broad partnership approach that engaged local leaders across the local authority, NHS, voluntary and community sector and schools. The range of expertise, resources and ideas generated through the Child Healthy Weight steering group played a significant role in the success of the plan. This has led to the refreshed plans focus on ‘making childhood obesity everyone’s business’ – taking a whole system approach and emphasising partnership working.
- **Maintaining momentum and engagement** – tackling obesity often involves taking actions across many years, repeating or adjusting interventions as needed and challenging behaviour change. Maintaining the engagement of both partners and the public when ‘quick wins’ can be hard to achieve was a key challenge. This has led to the focus of the refreshed plan on developing an effective partnership communications and engagement plan, to provide a co-ordinated approach to maintaining the momentum and reach of messages and interventions to tackle obesity.
- **The challenges of a co-ordinating an ambitious action plan** – the first Child Healthy Weight Action Plan focused on mapping and drawing together the whole breadth of work happening in Merton to tackle obesity. This led to an action plan that had a significant number

of actions, with some being relatively minor. This created challenges in terms of the project management support needed to manage such a large number of actions. While necessary at the time to ensure that links were made, relationships between partners have now matured to the point where the proposed refreshed action plan can focus on a small number of 'high impact' actions.

• **Making the most of what other people do** – in delivering the first Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, actions were most successful when working with, or supported by, work being undertaken by others nationally and regionally. For example, building on the London Great Weight Debate to commission a Merton specific consultation, or developing a food poverty action plan with support from the GLA. With the challenge of limited resources, a key focus of the refreshed plan is to make the most of the opportunities and assets available to us. Key opportunities include building on TFL's breakthroughs on the restrictions of unhealthy advertising and learning from the work of other boroughs in delivering effective communications campaigns.

The Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (2019-2022) has been refreshed through a process of engaging partners through the Child Healthy Weight steering group, reviewing the evidence of what works nationally and regionally, listening to feedback from local resident's and families and reviewing the successes and challenges of the previous plan. The action plan also builds on regional work and opportunities across London and nationally supports the actions included in the National Childhood Obesity Action Plan, Chapter 2.¹

Monitoring the Action Plan

- The Children's Trust Board (CTB) is responsible for monitoring the delivery of "Start Well" childhood obesity priority of the Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Strategy with escalation and reporting to HWB Board as appropriate.
- The Child Healthy Weight Steering Group which includes a range of partners in Merton will lead on ensuring this plan is operationally delivered. Monitoring metrics are already included and any others will be developed during implementation. New and emerging actions will be incorporated into the action plan over time, building on the evolving evidence base as agreed through the steering group.
- It is recognised that many activities and initiatives are already underway across Merton which have a positive impact on child healthy weight. This action plan does not aim to map all activity across the borough, rather it focuses on actions that are additional or enhance existing priority activities over the next 3 years and not featured in other plans.

¹ National childhood obesity action plan Chapter 2: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2>

Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan 2019-2022

Theme 1: Making Childhood Obesity Everyone's Business

Vision: *We have a joined-up approach to tackling obesity in Merton with partners taking a coordinated, whole systems approach with a focus on effective communication and engagement.*

In order to deliver this vision, we will achieve the following actions:-

Action 1) We will communicate effectively with a shared approach across all partners through delivering a co-produced partnership communications plan.

Action 2) We will work in partnership to make best use of available resources through pooling resources and supporting joint funding bids.

Action 3) We will ensure that tackling childhood obesity and a "Think Family" approach is built into all the work we do including through our commissioning practices and the use of social value.

Theme 2: Supporting children, young people and their families

Vision: *Schools and early year's settings support all families to live healthily and children that need additional help are offered high quality and effective support by services.*

In order to deliver this vision, we will achieve the following actions:-

Action 4) We will work with schools and early years settings to support children and families to live healthily through delivering key programmes such as the Healthy Schools London and Healthy Early Years London programmes.

Action 5) We will ensure that our services offer effective help to children and families that need support through reviewing Merton's child weight support offer and GP pathways.

Theme 3: Healthy Place

Vision: *Merton as a place to live and work encourages people to be more active and make healthier choices.*

In order to deliver this vision, we will achieve the following actions:-

Action 6) We will support changes in key settings to ensure they support healthy lifestyles through delivering the School Neighbourhood Project to improve the environment around schools

Action 7) We will deliver changes to create a healthier food environment in Merton by working with partners and businesses through continuing to support the Healthier Catering Commitment, delivering a local Sugar Smart campaign and tackling the advertising of unhealthy food and drink

Action 8) We will increase and promote opportunities to be physically active through delivering a Merton "Year of Physical Activity" and increasing and increasing opportunities for active travel.