

## Divisions Affected – All

### CABINET 17 October 2023

## Oxfordshire Healthy Weight Report of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Agree to respond to the recommendations contained within this report.
  - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update HOSC for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until it is completed (if earlier).

### REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 provide that the committee may require a response from the responsible person to whom it has made the report or recommendation and that person must **respond in writing within 28 days of the request.**

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. The Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee considered a report by the Director of Public Health on Oxfordshire Healthy Weight during its meeting on 21 September 2023.
4. The Committee would like to thank the then Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities (Michael Oconnor); David Munday and Derys Pragnell (Public Health Consultants), for attending and answering questions in relation to the report.
5. The Committee would like to express that it recognises the significant work being invested into promoting Healthy Weight throughout the County, and that it endorses this overall initiative to tackle excess weight..

6. This report was scrutinised by HOSC given that it has a constitutional remit over all aspects health as a whole; and this includes initiatives by the Council to promote healthy weight and to tackle excess weight within the County. When commissioning this report on Healthy Weight, some of the insights that the Committee sought to receive were as follows:
- The extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in increased excess weight amongst the population in Oxfordshire, and if so, whether there is a recovery from this trend.
  - How the work to promote Healthy Weight sits in the broader context of a preventative public health agenda, including in relation to Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
  - Details of any potential data relating to excess weight numbers, and if there are any identifiable patterns of excess weight and life expectancy that are Oxfordshire specific.
  - Details of what the underlying drivers and causes of excess weight might be, and whether these drivers are long-term or short-term in nature.
  - The extent to which co-production or co-delivery were at the heart of the work to tackling excess weight, as well as the degree to which a whole-systems approach is being adopted to tackle excess weight.
  - Whether there is a strong relationship between deprivation and excess weight, and how this relationship can be more thoroughly understood so as to create measures to address this.
  - Details of any potential challenges to tackling excess weight, including the degree to which residents might be receptive to the promotion of healthy living habits; whilst considering the factor of whether there is sufficient resource for all of this work.

## **SUMMARY**

7. During this item held on the 21 September 2023, the Committee Chair outlined that the purpose of this scrutiny item was to examine the work undertaken to help promote Healthy Weight within the county; and that there will be a focus on the Whole Systems Approach to tackling excess weight.
8. The Chair also highlighted that the timing of this item is crucial given that excess weight affects many residents and families, and it is crucial for there to be plans in place to support residents living with excess weight as well as their families.
9. David Munday and Derys Pragnell (the two lead Public Health Consultants for the work on Healthy Weight) explained to the Committee that unhealthy

weight can often manifest within more disadvantaged communities, including some ethnic minority groups, within the County, and that the Whole Systems Approach aims to address this proclivity.

10. It was also explained to the Committee that the existing data on children and excess weight is stronger and more readily available as opposed to the data on adults, and that through utilising this data, one can observe that some areas manifest with more excess weight over a long period than others, with deprivation also being a key determinant of excess weight amongst children.
11. Nonetheless, the Public Health Consultants also stressed that the wider environment is also a factor in eliciting unhealthy weight, as opposed to deprivation per se. For instance, there are areas with a greater presence of fast-food outlets, which can create easily available unhealthy dietary options for families and children who reside in such areas.
12. The Committee were also informed that continuing to offer support to people who experience excess weight, alongside a prevention component is a crucial element of the Whole Systems Approach to healthy weight, and that particular services have been established for some ethnic groups as well as for men, whilst further considerations are being made for establishing more services to support women during pregnancy.
13. It was also emphasised to the Committee that the role of advertising of unhealthy products remains prevalent within Oxfordshire, and that much like other areas beyond the County, it was pivotal for this to be tackled. Residents that reside in areas with higher levels of excess weight are more likely to face exposure to such forms of unhealthy advertising, which could again relate to the presence of particular food outlets within these areas.

## **KEY POINTS OF OBSERVATION:**

14. This section highlights some key observations and points that the Committee has in relation to the work on promoting Healthy Weight within Oxfordshire. Many of these observation points are centred around ensuring adequate support for residents in the context of the cost-of-living crisis and the associated challenges with affordability of healthier diets; identifying and providing support for population groups/communities that may struggle with healthy weight; the heavy presence of fast food outlets in certain localities, and exploring the role of licensing/planning in this regard; and the support being provided to families to promote healthy weight amongst children. The key points of observation outlined below were also expressed during the discussions.

***Cost-of-living crisis:*** The Committee believes that the cost-of-living crisis has clearly had an impact on families and households within Oxfordshire. This crisis has rendered it harder for residents on lower incomes to afford to purchase foods that may contribute to having a healthy balanced diet overall. It is imperative that these financial strains are taken into account when tackling excess weight. There is a need for further clarity and

availability of support that residents can expect to receive to help achieve a healthy balanced diet in the context of a cost-of-living crisis. The Committee also feels that food banks need to be further supported in a manner that enables them to distribute more healthy foods for deprived communities and residents, particularly against a recent background of an increased reliance on food banks by households. It is also noteworthy that it is not only the purchasing power of deprived communities that has been drastically affected, but also that of ostensibly middle-income households. The Committee therefore urges for a stronger understanding and clarity, within the system as a whole, as to how the cost of living is impacting on weight and on healthy eating and the role of the market in this regard.

***Ethnic groups and excess weight:*** The Committee understands that the report outlines that some ethnic groups are more likely to experience excess weight. It is therefore crucial that the system develops a stronger understanding of which ethnic groups tend to experience excess weight, as well as greater specificity of understanding on what the causes of this might be. If particular ethnic groups experience excess weight, then support should be provided to such groups in a way that takes cultural sensitivities into account, and in a manner that is receptive by particular population groups.

***Advertising of products high in fats, sugars, salts (HFSS):*** The Committee recognises the role of advertising of unhealthy products, which remains prevalent within Oxfordshire. It has come to the Committee's attention that other areas beyond the County have implemented an array of measures to tackle the widespread availability and visibility of advertising for HFSS products. The Committee urges for Oxfordshire City and District Councils to learn from such initiatives implemented elsewhere to assess their efficacy, and to similarly adopt measures that have proven successful. It is particularly crucial that younger residents and children are not excessively exposed to such adverts. The Committee also understands that residents that reside in areas with higher levels of deprivation are more likely to face exposure to such forms of unhealthy advertising, which could be further exacerbated by the presence of particular food outlets within these areas.

***Fast-food outlets and licensing:*** The Committee notes that the report states that areas of greatest socioeconomic deprivation have lower consumption of fruit and vegetables. The Committee urges for further investigations by the County Council into why this might be the case, and for exploring potential avenues of reversing this trend. The committee is also concerned regarding the dense presence of fast-food outlets in deprived areas throughout Oxfordshire, particularly in areas of consistently high excess weight and close to areas children congregate. A point of consideration might also be whether the heavy presence of fast-food outlets in deprived areas might also have some influence over the proclivity to have lower consumption rates of fruit and vegetables. In any case, the committee feels that the role of licensing/planning is crucial in this regard. Given the Council's emphasis on the wider environment surrounding

healthy living habits, considerations should be made for limiting the significant presence of fast-food outlets, particularly in areas close to schools which would require changes to policies and plans at District level. and to consider potentially working with District Councils on this.

***Access to and awareness of support services:*** The Committee understands and notes that efforts are being made within the system to develop support services for residents living with excess weight. The Committee welcomes any initiative that aims to support residents with their weight, as this could be conducive to their overall physical and mental health. However, it is vital that individuals living with excess weight are aware of the support services available to them, and that there are clear and easy pathways of access for support. That support services should be transparent and easily accessible is important for two reasons:

- Families from disadvantaged or deprived communities may feel unable to communicate their experiences or concerns clearly, and a lack of transparency or complexities with referrals to or access for support can further add to these challenges.
- Some residents living with excess weight might suffer from low self-esteem or poor mental health, which can already render them to feel reluctant to seek support.

15. As such, the Committee believes that there is a need for a clear understanding of the root causes of excess weight, and for closer coordination between system partners, including the County Council, the NHS, as well as District Councils in further identifying trends in excess weight, and in developing measures to tackle some of the aforementioned challenges and concerns. Work to support ethnic minorities or vulnerable groups is also key, as well as thinking of how to address the degree to which residents, communities, and families may be receptive to messages around healthy weight and living habits.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. In light of having received a report on Oxfordshire Healthy Weight, as well as on the basis of the discussions had during the meeting on 21 September 2023, the Committee makes the following recommendations:
  1. *To ensure adequate and consistent support as part of secondary prevention for those living with excess weight; and to improve access to, as well as awareness of, support services that are available for residents living with excess weight.*
  2. *To ensure effective support for ethnic groups that are more likely to develop excess weight, and to raise awareness amongst these groups of the support available to them.*

3. *To work on providing support to the parents, carers, or families of those living with excess weight, and to help provide them with the tools to help manage childrens' weight.*
4. *To explore avenues of support for residents who may struggle to afford healthy diets in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.*
5. *To ensure that consideration of the ill-effects of being underweight is also built into the language adopted, and the services being commissioned, as part of promoting Healthy Weight overall within the County.*
6. *In light of recent findings relating to the risks of excess weight medication (GLP-1 receptor agonists), it is recommended that the BOB Integrated Care Board review the availability of these medications and any associated risks; and to update the Committee on this.*
7. *To orchestrate a meeting with HOSC, to include senior Planning/Licensing officers, Chairs of Planning Committees of the District Councils, as well as the relevant Cabinet Member to discuss the planning and licensing around the presence of fast-food outlets in certain areas around the County and advertising of HFSS products.*

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

17. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
18. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.
19. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 provide that the committee may require a response from the responsible person to whom it has made the report or recommendation and that person must **respond in writing within 28 days of the request.**

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Annex 1 – Scrutiny Response Pro Forma

Background papers:           None

Other Documents:           None

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