

Policy Briefing: Tackling Childhood Obesity Together

Document published by: Public Health Merton, Merton Council **Date published:** April 2017

Original document: http://www.merton.gov.uk/annual_public_health_report_2016.17.pdf

Purpose of document

Childhood obesity is a public health issue in the Merton. Therefore, tackling childhood obesity is a local priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board in Merton as it is for London and England. The Board's prioritisation of childhood obesity has resulted in the publication of *Tackling Childhood Obesity Together*. It is the first, independent, annual public health report of the Director of Public Health - Dr Dagmar Zeuner. The report focuses on ways to help more children in Merton to reach and maintain a healthy weight and the challenges of doing so. It complements the Child Healthy Weight Action Plan 2016-18 which sets out commitments on childhood obesity from Merton Council and its partners. The action plan is already being implemented in Merton. Merton has also included reducing childhood obesity as one of the outcomes of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-18.

Summary of contents

The report covers the following areas: 1) epidemic of childhood obesity and how overweight and obesity is measured; 2) the influences on childhood obesity and the factors that combine to increase the risk of obesity; 3) the physical, emotional and mental health problems that impact on being overweight or obese, long-term consequences and the financial costs on the healthcare system; 4) pattern of childhood overweight and obesity across different areas in Merton; 5) insights from research with local people into the factors that may motivate attitudes towards weight, diet and physical activity, to understand different perspectives; 6) approaches to tackling obesity that is based on evidence and cost effectiveness; 7) current work already taking place in local areas and the progress that has been made and 8) links to a range of resources and support for children, young people and families.

Summary of outcomes

The report recognises that reducing childhood obesity is greatly affected by environment such as the places where people live, work and play just as much as personal lifestyle choices. It highlights a concern that some parents may not recognise that their children are overweight or obese due to a shift in what society thinks is a health body weight, size and shape. This puts children at increased risk of developing long-term chronic illnesses. The report acknowledges that although a lot of good work is already taking place, more joint working needs to happen to tackle the challenge of reducing childhood obesity. Public Health Merton will continue to engage and work together with stakeholders, partners and local residents through the report and further discussions. By doing so, they will hopefully refine their approaches and create actions and solutions that can be maintained in the long-term.

Summary of recommendations

- Use a whole-systems approach that recognises the different factors that combine to influence obesity, to tackle it at population-, community- and individual levels.
- Create a healthier environment in Merton to make it easier and the preferred choice for local people, especially in poorer areas, to make healthier choices.
- Make best use of Early Years services by maximising the role of schools, developing clear pathways and supporting professionals working with adults, children and young people.

- Strengthen working partnerships and relationships between the voluntary-, community- and public sectors, and also business partners.
- Use joined-up approaches between sectors to influence decisions.

Further information and resources

Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan - 2016-18

http://www.merton.gov.uk/childhood_healthy_weight_action_plan_summary_for_web.pdf

Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015/16-2017/18

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/merton-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-web.pdf>