

APPENDIX 5 Whole Systems Approach to Obesity

A growing body of evidence, including Foresight’s Tackling Obesity: Future Choices report, suggests that a whole systems approach could help address complex problems like obesity. The Whole Systems Approach to Obesity Programme provides the following definition:

“A local whole systems approach responds to complexity through an ongoing, dynamic and flexible way of working. It enables local stakeholders, including communities, to come together, share an understanding of the reality of the challenge, consider how the local system is operating and where there are the greatest opportunities for change. Stakeholders agree actions and decide as a network how to work together in an integrated way to bring about sustainable, long term systems change”.

A local whole systems approach to obesity is a ‘Health in All Policies’ approach, which draws on local authorities’ strengths, supports their leading priorities, and recognises that they can create their local approaches better and more effectively by engaging with their community and local assets.

Actions to address obesity at a local level do not just benefit people’s health. Delivering a more health-promoting and vibrant environment can contribute to issues like reducing litter and improving the environment and support local businesses and workforces. Maintaining a healthier local workforce may also have positive impacts on other longer-term local agendas, including employability and productivity of local populations, and the demand for social care.

Adopting a whole systems approach is not something that can be achieved overnight; it can take up to 5 years to implement and imbed. PHE identifies 6 phases that are required in order to successfully implement the approach, as below:

