

By: Meradin Peachey, Director of Public Health

To: CFE: Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 6 November 2009

Subject: Kent Healthy Weight Strategy

Classification: Unrestricted

---

Summary: Obesity will soon overtake smoking as the biggest cause of premature death and long-term illnesses.

Unless we reverse the trend of increasing numbers of people being overweight or obese, children born today will have a life expectancy less than their parents for the first time in over 100 years. The Children Families and Education Directorate with their partners, has a crucial role to play to prevent this.

Kent and Medway have the highest prevalence of obesity in the South East region and are above the national average.

Some people, often due to their economic and social circumstances have greater difficulty in acting on the advice they receive of taking up the opportunities to live healthier lifestyles than others.

Most people know the key public health messages and are fed up with being told what to do, especially if they are made to feel bad if they do not follow it.

KCC is directing a lot of effort at these problems and there is some excellent practice across the county. The strategy provides a coherent framework for this activity including the key targets that we are working towards.

---

## 1. Introduction

1. Maintaining a healthy weight is a crucial component of being healthy and avoiding many seriously debilitating illnesses and conditions. But despite people's best intentions this can be very difficult to attain in our modern society.
2. The causes of being overweight or obese are simple – eating or drinking more calories than we use in exercise, but their solutions are often complex. People may need help and support to achieve their aspirations. Children especially need to

understand the importance of a healthy diet and lifestyle to avoid problems in later life.

Living in deprivation can also make it very difficult to take advantage of the choices and opportunities available and the Kent Regeneration Framework and the Health Inequalities Strategy will be crucial to addressing weight problems and other lifestyle issues in Kent.

3. We must also acknowledge that people in Kent are generally very aware that they should eat healthily, take more exercise, stop smoking and drink responsibly. They do not need to be lectured or made to feel that they have failed if they do not do always do these things and neither should people be pressured to change many things in their lives all at once. Young people especially tell us this very strongly.
4. The KCC Select Committee on obesity informed the production of a Healthy Weight Strategy by PCT colleagues that was drafted in the second half of last year. The strategy presented today is a higher level summary and distillation of that document which provides a framework for KCC and other organisations to work within when designing and planning interventions designed to address issues of healthy weight and promote healthier lifestyles.

## **2. The Kent Healthy Weight Strategy**

1. The Kent Healthy Weight Strategy outlines the main issues involved and why healthy weight is important for everyone involved in public health. These are:
  - Early prevention for weight problems
  - Promotion of healthier food choices
  - Building physical activity into our lives
  - Creating incentives for better health
  - Use of opportunities created by the KCC regeneration framework
  - Better messages for the public through the use of social marketing
2. The key priorities reflect those identified in the Foresight report and then incorporated in the DH Guidance - Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) have also issued guidance on how obesity and related matters should be addressed.
3. Aligning this activity with the priorities allows those involved to understand better the connections between the various interventions and how they can be effective. Future initiatives can also be planned and reconciled within the overall framework to ensure they complement and support other actions.

4. Much being done across KCC directorates and by our partners in the District Councils, Primary Care Trusts and Voluntary Sector to help people improve their diet and take more exercise. In the current economic climate we need to ensure that people understand that healthy living can be affordable and does not involve great expense on things like gym membership or playing organised sport.

Many of the examples quoted in the strategy are demonstrations about how healthier living can be quite simply incorporated into anyone's lives in small ways by adapting what they do and without making major disruptive changes to their or their families, lives.

5. As the Foresight Report and Healthy Weight Healthy Lives recognise, early prevention and working with children and their families are crucial to future success in combating obesity. Early years initiatives are very important sources of information and support for families to incorporate diet and exercise into their lives. This includes pre-birth and the promotion of breastfeeding. (Both Kent PCTs have targets to increase breastfeeding rates).
6. Healthy Schools have an obvious role to play in promoting healthy eating and the importance of physical exercise in daily life. Encouraging children to participate in sports at school and elsewhere is also very important and the opportunities offered by the 2010 Olympics such as the Kent School Games are good examples of how this can be developed.
7. Progress on the Healthy Weight strategy will be reported to the Public Health Board through the representatives of each KCC directorate including Children Families and Education.

Once adopted by KCC as policy it will also be important that Members promote the county council's contribution to the strategy across its directorates. Policy Overview Committees can assist this by requiring progress reports on their own directorate's efforts to deliver the strategy and the aspirations it contains.

8. If the commitment already shown by KCC and its partners is maintained the people of Kent will have support and encouragement to achieve a healthy weight equal to that available anywhere else in the country.

### **Recommendation**

- Members of the Vulnerable Children and Partnerships Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to endorse the Healthy Weight Strategy for Kent.

Mark Lemon  
Head of Policy  
Kent Public Health Department  
Mark.lemon@kent.gov.uk  
Tel: 01622 694853

---

*Background Documents:*

- Kent Regeneration Framework
- Health Inequalities Strategy

*Other Useful Information:* None