

<b>12 March 2024</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Childhood Obesity in Thurrock</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable	
<b>Report of:</b> Sareena Gill (Senior Public Health Programme Manager)		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sara Godward (Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health)		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Jo Broadbent (Director of Public Health)		
<b>This report is</b> Public		
<b>Version:</b> Committee		

## Executive Summary

During the Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16 November 2023 concern was raised on the local rates of childhood obesity in Thurrock. Members requested that a report was tabled for the meeting on 12 March 2024. This report sets out to provide Members with the local picture for overweight and obesity in children and update on the measures in place to tackle to issue.

Obesity is a complex problem with multiple causes and significant implications for health, as well as a wide range of socio-and economic impacts. Thurrock has concerning rates of overweight and obesity amongst children and adults. Tackling this issue is a priority for the Council, as reflected in the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy goal to ‘*Work with communities to reduce obesity in Thurrock*’.

Thurrock has adopted a ‘whole systems’ approach to tackling obesity. A whole systems approach refers to the network of broad and interlinking factors that contribute to a solution or problem. Traditional approaches that focus on single interventions have been shown to be ineffectual at reducing the prevalence of obesity at a population level. Conversely, collaboration across stakeholders to deliver coordinated action and multiple initiatives is vital to success. Multiple sectors including health, social care, planning, housing, transport and environment all have a role to play, as do our local businesses, workplaces and the wider community themselves all by jointly making better use of resources and working towards a vision of better health and wellbeing. Public Health lead and coordinate the implementation of the Whole Systems Obesity Strategy and other strategic and operational actions to prevent and address overweight and obesity locally. An update on this programme, with a particular focus on children and young people is detailed within the report.

## Commissioner Comment:

Not applicable.

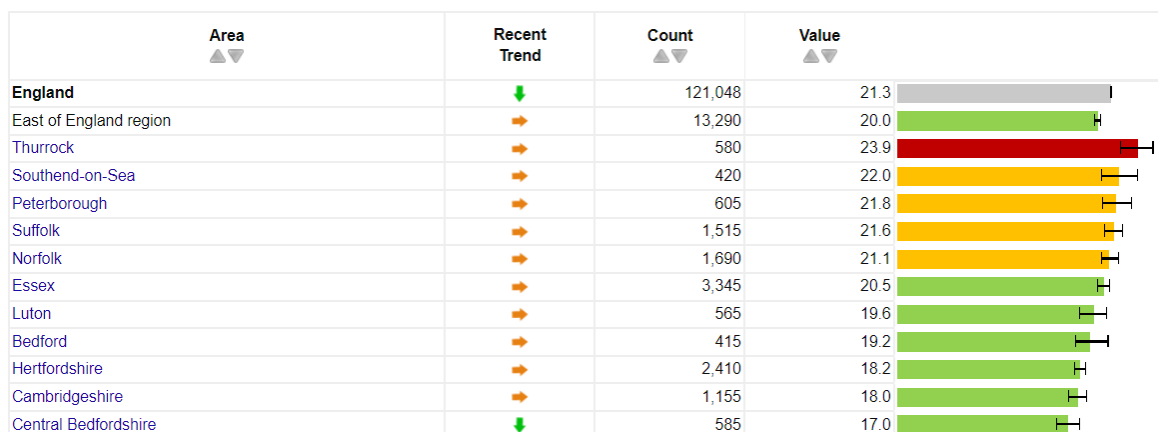
## 1. Recommendation(s)

Version Committee – Draft ready for submission to public committee

- 1.1 Members are asked to note the current rates and distribution of childhood obesity in Thurrock and actions taken in support of addressing this issue.**
- 1.2 Members are asked to raise awareness of local opportunities to support the Whole Systems Obesity Strategy and its associated deliverables.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Thurrock Council's [Whole Systems Obesity \(WSO\) Strategy](#) was developed as the key driver for preventing and reducing obesity in Thurrock. The strategy outlines 5 goals highlighting areas within the system where there is scope to influence and promote healthier lifestyles leading to healthier weights in the local population:
- Goal A – Enabling settings, schools and services to contribute to children and young people achieving a healthy weight.
  - Goal B – Increasing Positive Community Influences.
  - Goal C – Improving the food environment and making healthier choices easier.
  - Goal D – Improving the built environment and getting the physically inactive active.
  - Goal E – Improving the identification and management of obesity.
- 2.2 The WSO Strategy is based on the evidence of the [Whole Systems Obesity Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) published in 2017 by the Public Health Team. Although the strategy was initially set to run from 2018-2021 the ambition and deliverables are still relevant and inform both strategic and operational delivery at present. The strategy will be refreshed in the future if required.
- 2.3 During 2023/24, 2 separate strategic groups were set up to support the delivery of the WSO Strategy and ensure a system-led approach to addressing overweight and obesity locally is implemented. Each group brings together relevant personnel from public sector services, private sector and voluntary sectors.
- 2.4 The 'Thurrock All Age Healthy Weight Strategic Partnership' drives strategic transformation and system improvements across the weight management agenda. This includes but is not limited to; increasing successful referrals into weight management services, improving workforce training and development for obesity outcomes, increased use of communications, improved utilisation of health intelligence to inform commissioning and improving health outcomes for the most vulnerable related to obesity through a focus on reducing health inequities.
- 2.5 The Child Weight Management Taskforce was set up to primarily focus on embedding the learnings from the pilot year of the Tier 2 Child Weight Management Service (provided by BeeZee Bodies) into the subsequent year and rapidly increase referrals to and uptake of the programme. The group recently expanded its focus to other strategic and operational tasks, including but not limited to; increasing uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, supporting schools to offer healthier options, and supporting the training and development of staff to address healthy weight matters.
- 2.6 The 2022/23 National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP) data shows that 23.9% of Reception Year children in Thurrock were overweight or obese. This is the worst rate in the East of England, where the average is 20% and significantly higher than the England rate of 21.3% (see Figure 1).



Source: OHID, using National Child Measurement Programme, NHS England

Figure 1: Rates of overweight and obesity in Thurrock amongst Reception Year children in comparison to Local Authorities in the East of England

2.7 The prevalence of excess weight increases with age. In Thurrock, 38.7% of Year 6 children were recorded as overweight or obese. This rate is significantly higher than the regional and England rates of 34.2% and 36.6% respectively (see Figure 2).

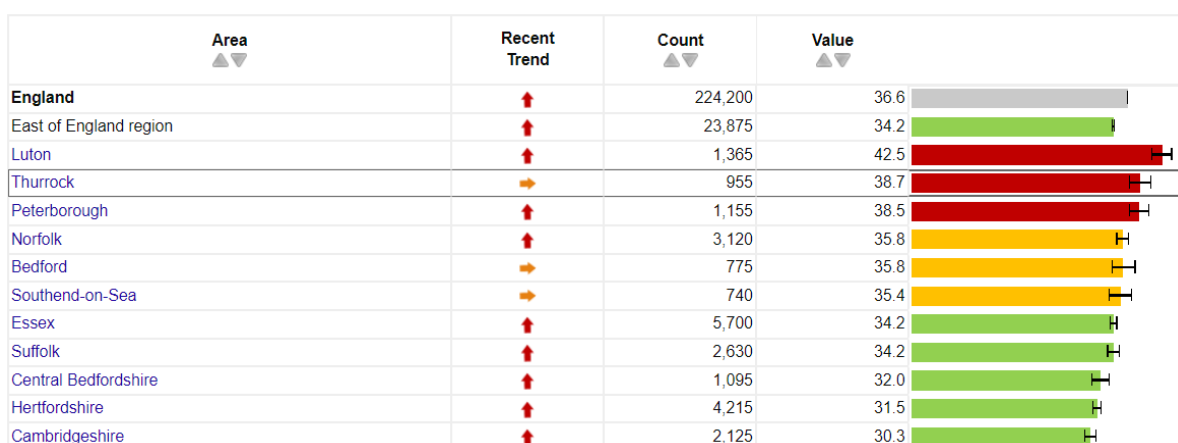


Figure 2: Rates of overweight and obesity in Thurrock amongst Year 6 children in comparison to Local Authorities in the East of England

2.8 In Thurrock there are more boys than girls who are classed as overweight or obese, particularly in Year 6 (34% vs 31%).

2.9 Excess weight amongst children in Thurrock does not affect ethnic groups equally, with those from Black, Asian and mixed ethnic groups experiencing the highest rates. Amongst Year 6 children 40% of mixed ethnicity children are overweight/obese, compared to 38% of the Black ethnic group; 34% of the Asian ethnic group; 33% of the Chinese Ethnic group and 29% of the White ethnic group children.

2.10 The problem of excess weight spans across all wards within Thurrock and as such requires a borough wide response. However, in Thurrock there is a strong link between obesity and socio-economic deprivation, with rates 3 times higher in the most deprived quintile compared to the least deprived quintile. This trend is observed in both Reception Year and Year 6 children and is higher than the national trend where rates are twice as high in the most deprived quintile vs the least deprived. The Year 6 obesity variance by ward is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

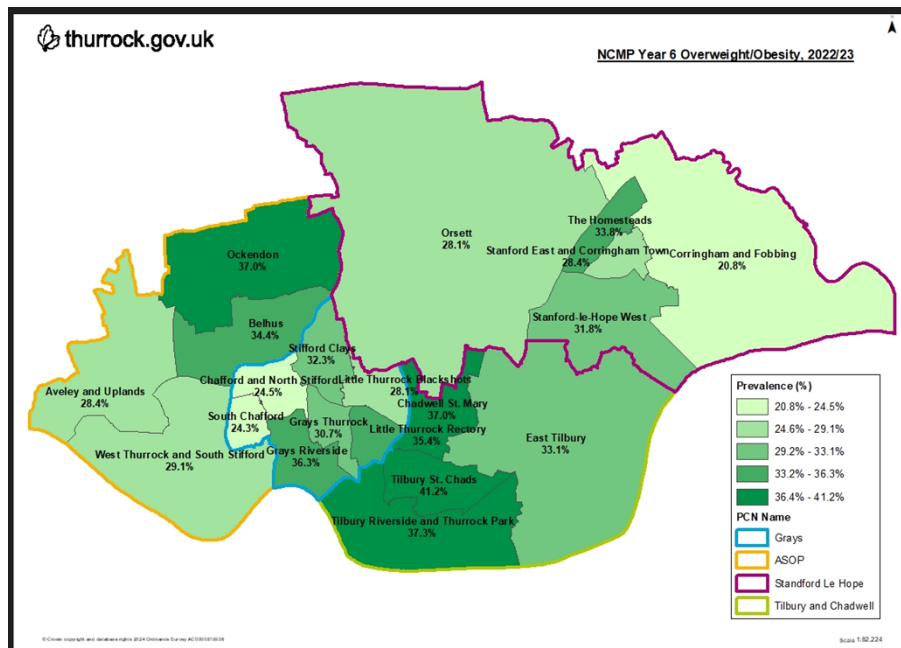


Figure 3: Year 7 rates of overweight and obesity in Thurrock, by ward

- 2.11 Obesity in childhood is linked to many health complications and tends to indicate the child will be obese as an adult. Data based on the Active Lives Adult Survey 2021/22 shows Thurrock has a high percentage of adults classified as overweight or obese, at 69.7%. This is higher than the regional and national averages of 63.9% and 63.9% respectively.
- 2.12 Between 1 February 2022 and 31 January 2023, Thurrock Public Health team put in place a grant arrangement with BeeZee Bodies to deliver a Tier 2 Weight Management Service for children and young people in Thurrock. This was a one-year grant funded arrangement with Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) monies, following the disruption to services caused by services being redirected to support COVID and school closures. Prior to this, the delivery in schools was primarily focussed on prevention and not delivering weight management interventions.
- 2.13 Disappointingly, the uptake of the service during this pilot year was lower than expected, particularly considering the high rates of overweight and obesity locally. Collectively, several learnings were identified from the pilot with BeeZee Bodies and documented within an Insights Report.
- 2.14 There was a brief pause between February 2023 and September 2023 to take stock of the learning from the pilot year and to bridge the gap until integration of child weight management service provision within our new 0-19 Healthy Families contract that is due to commence in September 2024.
- 2.15 The recommendations set out below were developed following the Insight Report, and more importantly, the service provider and grant managers (past and present) agreed what had worked well and what changes were needed during year 2:
1. Referral pathways need to be established before the start of another programme so that the service can 'hit the ground running'. Groundwork is required to ensure stakeholders work collaboratively and 'pump prime' the main referral routes.

2. More on-the-ground in person promotion / presence by the provider is required in Thurrock.
3. Build referrals into the new 0-19 Healthy Families contract (i.e., School Nursing, Health Visiting and the NCMP).
4. Ensure a robust approach to Council and wider partner communications to enable ongoing promotion of the service offer.
5. Any future Tier 2 programme needs to sit within a wider context to be most effective. The pilot years' service provision was unanchored and floating on its own rather than being integrated into a wider system. It needs to be more 'self-sustaining' and less reliant on the individual grant manager driving action.
6. Build relationships with partners (particularly GPs) to get them to accept training offered for having conversations about child weight.

2.16 The second grant arrangement commenced 23 September 2023 and will end 31 August 2024. This grant has built on the learnings from the previous pilot, addressing the points above. Commissioned activity includes:

- **BeeZee Live** – a 12-week programme of weekly webinars for children and the family (aged 5-8 and 9-12), 'drop in' clinics for parents/carers and follow-up 1:1 calls for those requiring extra support.
- **BeeZee Academy** - offering short video content, with information, challenges and behaviour change opportunities for local people who are either (a) not ready to access a full, weekly weight management service, or (b) do not meet the traditional thresholds for Tier 2 weight management.
- **B-You<sup>th</sup>** - a locally appointed B You<sup>th</sup> Officer will work with schools and colleges to deliver engaging, evidence-based sessions, which were originally coproduced with young people, for those aged 13-18 years. Due to the length of grant, this will be delivered in a pilot form to demonstrate a model that has worked elsewhere, but alongside this providing an example of other models that may be used given more time and a larger infrastructure for family and young person weight management support.
- **Insights Report** - work within local infrastructure to make connections and capture insights from professionals (from public sector, private sector and VCSE) and from the public. This will be used to generate an in-depth report and inform the real-time development of locally relevant deliverable material and signposting. Where possible, we will conduct insights gathering with young people to ensure that we continue to learn from, and coproduce with, young people in Thurrock, and this will be represented in our service report following the completion of the grant period.
- **HENRY 'Train the Trainer' Training** – HENRY (Health Exercise Nutrition in the Really Young) is a licensed programme that was developed in response to an identified gap in delivering child weight management through the Healthy Child Programme. The programme is designed for 0–2-year-olds and brings together other protective factors that support a healthy start and meet the outcomes of the Family Hub Delivery Plan. This includes effective support for parents, breastfeeding, parenting efficacy, family lifestyle habits, emotional wellbeing, nutrition, physical activity, sleep and healthy weight.

2.17 Uptake of the BeeZee Live service offer has been encouraging, with over 40 children/ families starting the first cohort of the programme in January 2024. A subsequent Insights Report will be captured for this second year of the grant, to further develop future service provision.

2.18 From September 2024 a Tier 2 child weight management service will sit within the 0-19 Healthy Families contract to allow greater synergy and integration with key services including School Nursing, Health Visiting and the National Child Measurement Programme.

2.19 Through the Family Hubs offer HENRY has been launched in Thurrock. Delivery will include the 8-week 'Healthy Families Right from the Start' programme for families during pregnancy or with children aged 0-2. There will be 9 programmes delivered across the 3 Family Hub localities offering a total of 108 spaces. There will also be a series of standalone 1-day workshops provided in the Family Hubs offering places to 144 families. To date, 14 practitioners have received HENRY training, with future training commissioned in the future to further expand delivery of the programme.

2.20 Public Health are also leading strategic work to encourage uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme in Thurrock. Healthy Start is a UK-wide scheme providing a nutritional safety net to those who are 10+ weeks pregnant or for children under 4 in low-income families in receipt of qualifying income-related benefits. Recipients receive between £4.25 and £8.50 per week which can be spent on fruit and vegetables, pulses, milk and baby formula. The scheme also provides vitamins for during pregnancy and breastfeeding and vitamin drops, suitable from birth to 4 years old. Public Health has driven promotion of the Healthy Start scheme across the Borough since April 2022. Since then, uptake amongst eligible families has increased from 49% to 71% as of the end of January 2024. There are still 537 families who are eligible but not currently accessing the scheme. There is great variation in uptake across the Borough. The most recently published data showing uptake rates by ward is from July 2023. Figure 4 shows the uptake rates between January and July 2023 ranged from 35% in Little Thurrock Rectory to 88% in Belhus. Anecdotal intelligence suggests that the primary reason for low uptake amongst eligible families is a lack of awareness of the scheme and their eligibility. They charity Sustain have estimated that the value of unclaimed vouchers in Thurrock during 2023 was equivalent to a £208K cash shortfall. As well as supporting families during the cost-of-living crisis, this funding would have also benefitted the local economy. Work continues to identify these families and encourage uptake of the scheme.

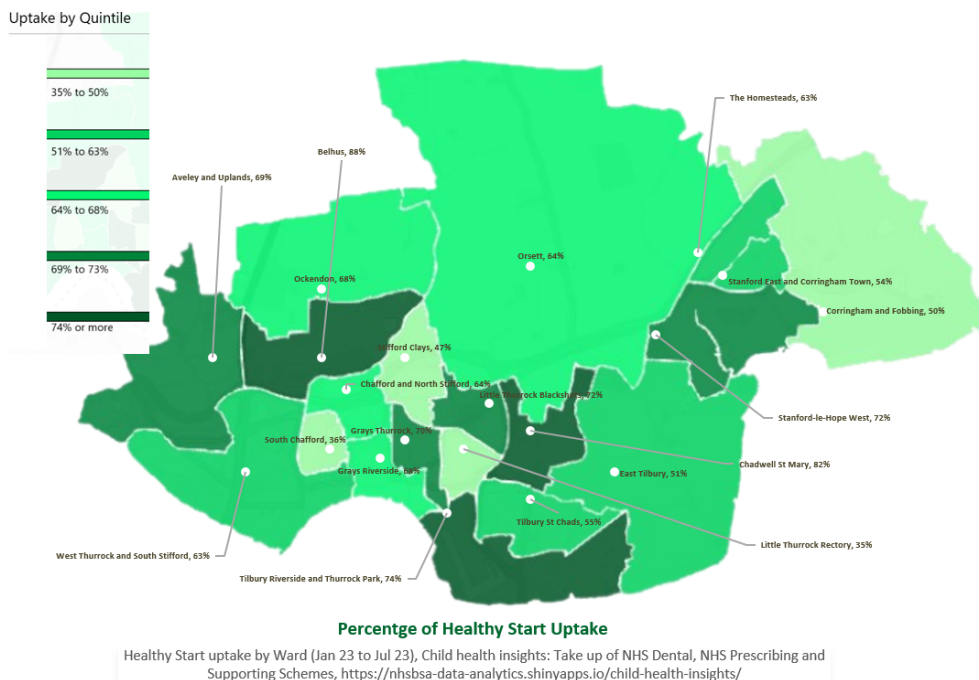


Figure 4: Percentage uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme in Thurrock between January – July 2023

2.21 More recently, Public Health have established and coordinate a multi-agency communications group that brings together communications leads from across the sector. It is recognised that these stakeholders play a key part in sharing health promotion messages and can assist in

targeting those who may require access to local services. The focus of this group is linking into the NHS Better Health campaign, which focuses on losing weight, promoting mental health, quitting smoking, getting active, drinking less and every mind matters.

- 2.22 It was previously agreed that a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish group for Members would be stood up to engage Members in local action to address obesity. Currently the administrative support for this group for this group has not been identified and has delayed the set-up of this group. Given the imminent commencement of a pre-election period, it is recommended this group should pause commencement until after the elections have taken place.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 In 2024/25 Public Health will undertake a deep dive into the scale and prevalence of obesity locally and the weight management offer locally. The review will inform future strategic activity and commissioning to address this matter, with a particular focus on reducing health inequalities and levelling the playing field.
- 3.2 These actions are being taken forward by a range of partners that make up the Thurrock All Age Healthy Weight Strategic Partnership and its sub-groups. This list is not exclusive and does not detail the comprehensive list of actions that are underway to tackle obesity in Thurrock. It does however highlight the priorities that are dependent on partnership working across the system.
- 3.3 A guidance document has been published titled 'A Healthy in All Policies' approach to placeshaping. This guide aims to influence how we can shape places to support and improve health and wellbeing, acknowledging that where we live, work and socialise plays an important role in our health. This guidance will assist in driving forward the ambitions of the WSO strategy as it seeks to support the accessibility and affordability of healthy sustainable foods as well as how our environments can assist in keeping people active. It does this through a framework for creating change, highlighting five key areas for action: transportation networks, neighbourhood design, housing, natural environments and food systems.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 To update members of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the latest data on childhood obesity in Thurrock and actions taken in support of addressing childhood obesity locally.

### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 Not applicable.

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Head of Financial Management**

**13 February 2024**

Projects identified are prioritised within Public Health and Family Hub grant funding.

## 7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

**19 February 2024**

The Council has a duty under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 section 116 to prepare a joint strategic needs assessment and under the same act section 116A to prepare a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Council's current Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy 2022-2026 was approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board in June 2022. The Whole Systems Obesity Strategy sits beneath the overarching Health and Wellbeing strategy, which anticipates that the Whole System Obesity Strategy will be refreshed.

## 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer**

**14 February 2024**

All information regarding Community Equality Impact Assessments can be found here:  
<https://intranet.thurrock.gov.uk/services/diversity-and-equality/ceia/>

There are no direct diversity implications contained in this update report. However, this report does highlight that there are differences in rate of obesity according to age, gender, ethnicity and location. The Whole Systems Obesity Strategy and commissioned child weight management service seeks to reduce obesity rates across all these characteristics.

## 7.4 **Risks**

None.

## 7.5 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

None.

## 8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):



- [Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026](#)
- [Thurrock Whole Systems Obesity Strategy](#)
- [Thurrock Whole Systems Obesity Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)

## **9. Appendices to the report**

None.

### **Report Author:**

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Public Health