

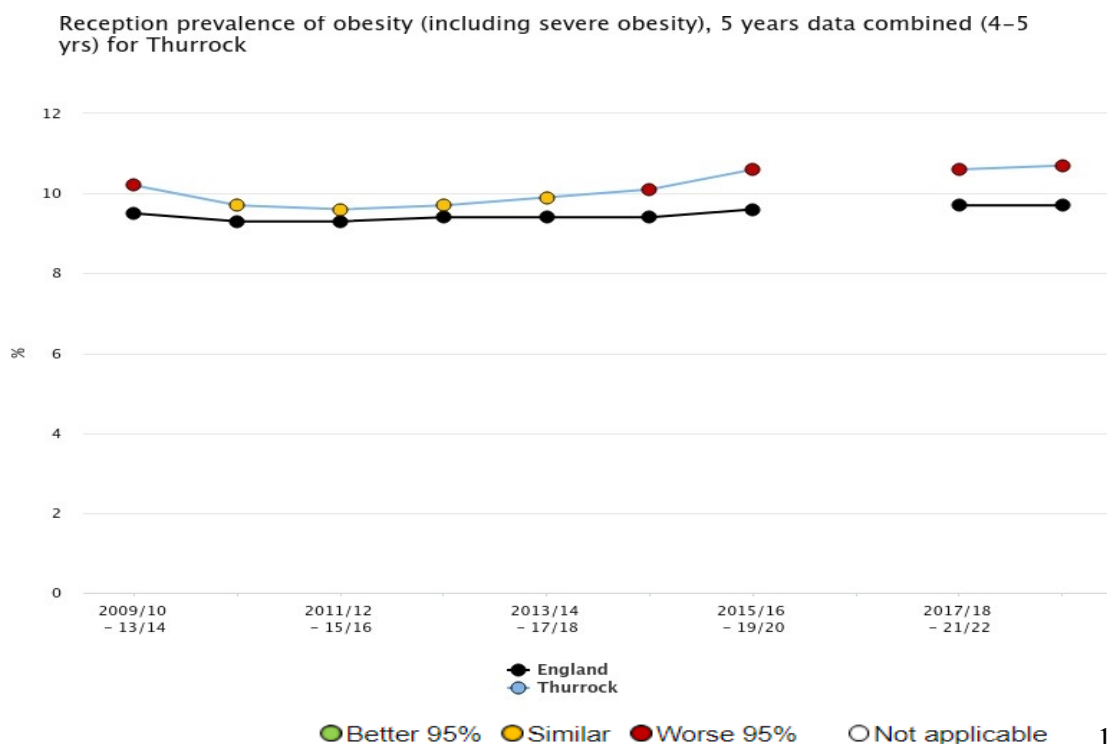
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Briefing Note: Childhood Obesity Task and Finish Group

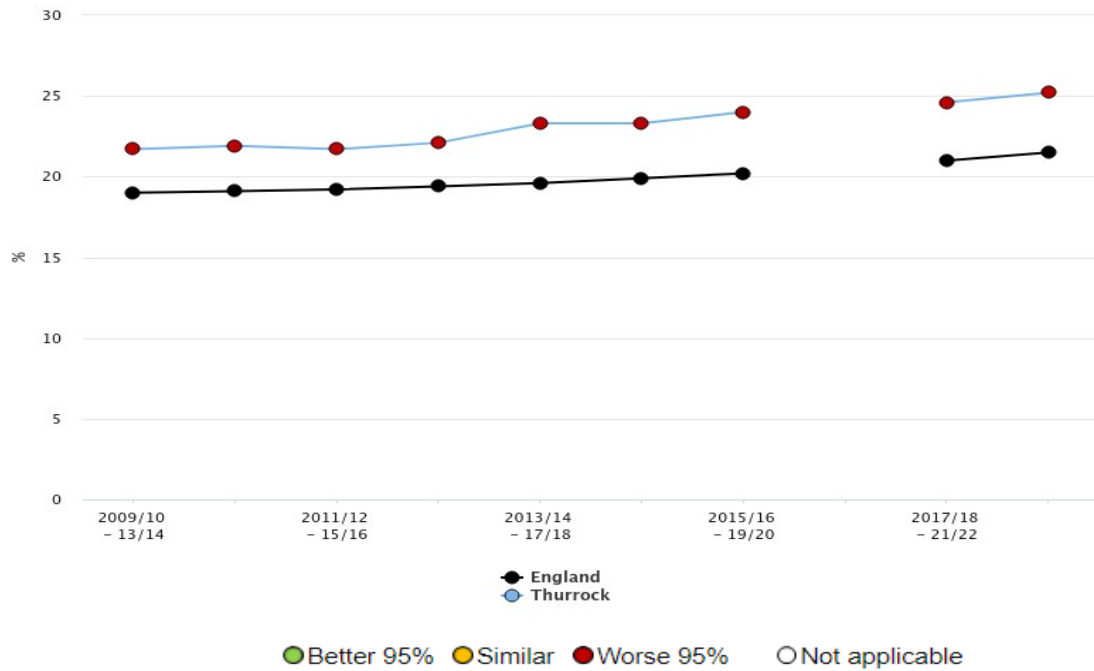
Purpose of the briefing note: This briefing note provides a response to requests related to childhood obesity in Thurrock made by members of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 July 2024.

- 1.1 Data on child obesity has been collected by the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) since 2006. The NCMP is a mandated public health programme which measures the height and weight of children in Reception (aged 4-5 years) and Year 6 (aged 10-11 years) at state-funded schools, including academies, in England. The participation rate in Thurrock in the most recent year (2022/3) was 98% in reception children and 97% for children in year 6.
- 1.2 In the most recent data, 24% (1 in 4) of Reception Year (Year R) children in Thurrock were overweight or obese. This is the highest percentage in the East of England, where the average was 20%, and significantly higher than the England average of 21%. The prevalence of excess weight is higher in Year 6 than Year R: over the same period 39% (around 1 in 3) of Year 6 children in Thurrock were recorded as overweight or obese. This is also higher than the regional and England rates of 34% and 37% respectively. Figures 1 and 2 show the trends in prevalence of obesity. (Note: 5 year rolling averages allow the underlying trend to be seen more clearly. The gaps in trends are when the COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures, affecting the NCMP collection).

Figure 1: Thurrock and England trends in obesity (including severe obesity) for Reception Year

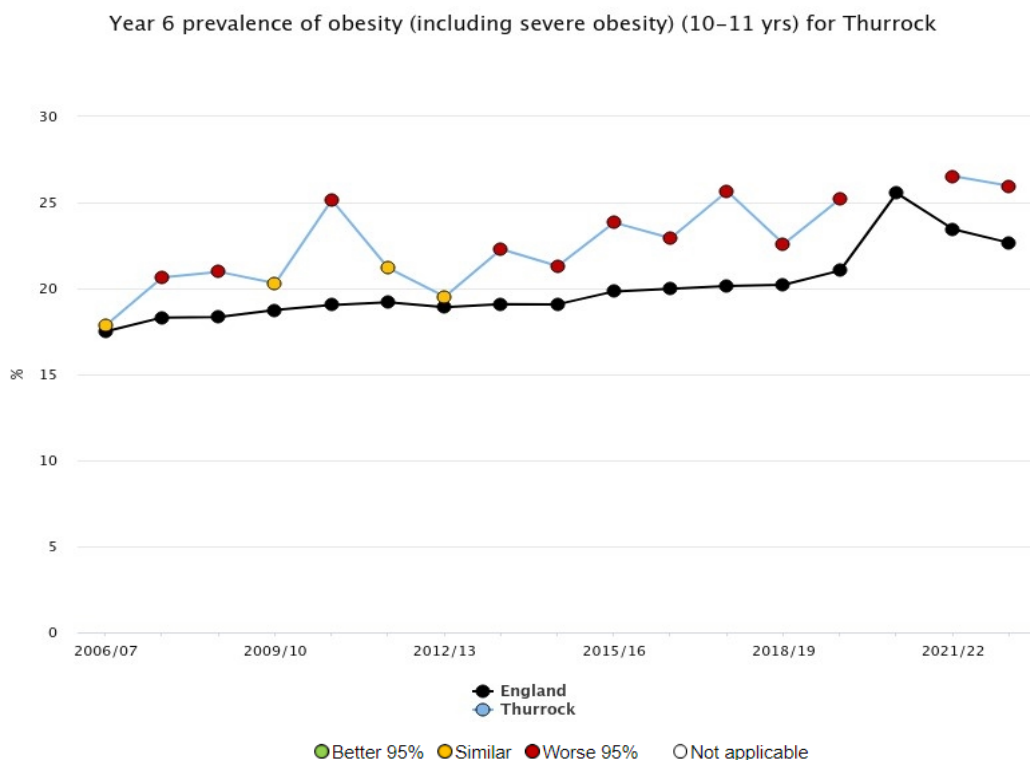


Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 5 years data combined (10–11 yrs) for Thurrock



1.3 The prevalence (%) of childhood obesity has been increasing since the 1980s. Figure 3 shows the increasing prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) amongst Year 6 children since the start of NCMP recording. The prevalence in Thurrock has increased by 8% between 2006/07 and 2022/23, compared to an average 5% increase across England.

Figure 3: Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) for Year 6 children in Thurrock



1.4 Overweight and obesity is an international and national issue and common across all wards in Thurrock but is more prevalent in some areas than others. There is a strong link between obesity and socio-economic deprivation, and the prevalence is three times higher in the most deprived quintile (20% of the Thurrock population) compared to the least deprived quintile. This trend is observed in both Reception Year and Year 6 children. Year 6 obesity prevalence by ward is illustrated in figure 4.

Figure 4: Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3-years data combined 2019 to 2020, to 2021 to 2022 (%)



The prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) in Thurrock amongst Year 6 children is similar that of statically comparable local authorities, as demonstrated in figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) 2022/23 (%) Thurrock compared to statistical neighbours

Area	Recent Trend	Neighbour Rank	Count	Value	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI
England	↑	-	138,867	22.7	22.5	22.8
Neighbours average	↑	-	-	-	-	-
Middlesbrough	↑	11	555	28.5	26.5	30.5
Stockton-on-Tees	↑	12	650	26.3	24.6	28.1
Salford	↑	15	785	26.0	24.4	27.6
Thurrock	→	-	640	26.0	24.2	27.7
Oldham	↑	9	795	25.3	23.9	27.0
Telford and Wrekin	↑	2	575	25.3	23.5	27.0
Rochdale	→	4	815	25.3	23.8	26.8
Havering	↑	8	825	25.2	23.8	26.8
Peterborough	↑	3	755	25.2	23.7	26.8
Bury	↑	10	565	24.7	23.1	26.6
Blackburn with Darwen	→	13	560	24.7	23.0	26.5
Tameside	↑	5	625	24.2	22.6	25.9
Milton Keynes	↑	14	930	23.5	22.2	24.8
Medway	→	1	800	23.1	21.8	24.6
Swindon	↑	6	625	22.3	20.9	24.0
Bolton	↑	7	875	22.3	21.0	23.6

Better 95%
Similar
Worse 95%
Not compared

Recent trends:
 - Could not be calculated
 - No significant change
 - Increasing & getting worse
 - Increasing & getting better
 - Decreasing & getting worse
 - Decreasing & getting better

- 2.1 Thurrock has a Whole Systems Obesity (WSO) Strategy 2018-2021 which is in the process of being refreshed. The strategy recognises the multifactorial nature of the causes of excess weight and the barriers to tackling it. It is well established that the long-term solution to tackle obesity in the population is to address environmental factors, making healthy choices easier, rather than simply to invest in more weight management programmes. Goal A of the WSO strategy is to 'enable settings, schools and services to contribute to children and young people achieving a healthy weight' and several strategic and operational activities have been implemented to support this ambition. A whole systems approach is also promoted by the 'Health in All Policies Approach to Place-shaping' guidance published by Public Health in 2023. This guides the whole council in how to take opportunities to support and improve health and wellbeing e.g. improving the accessibility and affordability of healthy sustainable foods, planning decisions, creation and use of green and blue spaces.
- 2.2 The first 1,000 days, from a child's conception to age 2, is a critical period. During this time of heightened vulnerability, the foundations of a child's health and development (physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development) are laid, and a trajectory is established. At each stage during the 1,000-day window, nutrition is important to developing a child's physical growth, protecting them from illness/ chronic disease and building healthy eating habits.
- 2.3 Over the last ten years or so, several initiatives to promote healthy weight in children have been implemented in Thurrock. These include healthy eating approaches, physical activity initiatives, and weight management programmes for children and their families. Services and programmes have been commissioned or piloted, often with small amounts of non-recurrent funding and with varying levels of success. Some programmes have been decommissioned as they have failed to demonstrate significant uptake or value for money. Child weight management needs to overcome the associated stigma, ensure the content and delivery is appropriate to young people in diverse populations and be accessible to families who often have competing priorities.
- 2.4 Local services are available to provide children and families with support to eat well, keep active and achieve a healthy weight and include both universal prevention and targeted treatment services to address varying levels of need:
- Family focussed HENRY (see below) programmes delivered within the Family Hubs
 - Health Visiting and School Nursing services (commissioned via the Public Health Healthy Families contract) providing healthy lifestyle support and supporting a whole school approach
 - The BeeZee Bodies Tier 2 child weight management service for children identified as overweight or obese
 - Paediatric Nutrition and Dietetic Services for children who are underweight or very overweight and/or have more complex needs.

The HENRY (Health Exercise Nutrition in the Really Young) programme is designed for 0–2-year-olds and brings together protective factors that support a healthy start in life.

This includes effective support for parents regarding breastfeeding, parenting efficacy, family lifestyle habits, emotional wellbeing, nutrition, physical activity, sleep and healthy weight, all of which support a healthy start in life. Commissioned for Thurrock in 2023, HENRY is a licensed programme with the strongest evidence base of any national health and wellbeing provider in the UK achieving statistically significant sustained changes in parenting, diet, physical activity, emotional wellbeing, and lifestyle habits for the whole family. Peer-reviewed and [published evidence](#) using validated measures shows that HENRY works. Specifically, it has demonstrated that:

- Families participating in the HENRY programme make statistically significant improvements to family lifestyle and parenting efficacy which are sustained over time
- Children whose parents attended a HENRY programme had a trend for BMI z-score reduction towards an ideal weight, whereas in the control group there was an increase in BMI z-score

- 2.5 Local delivery will include the 8-week 'Healthy Families Right from the Start' programme for families during pregnancy or with children aged 0-2 as well as a series of standalone 1-day workshops provided within the Family Hubs.
- 2.6 BeeZee Bodies have provided a child weight management service in Thurrock since February 2022. The offer includes 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. An online 'Academy' is also available offering short video content, with information, challenges and behaviour change opportunities for families who are either (a) not able or ready to access a full 12-week programme, or (b) do not meet the traditional thresholds for Tier 2 weight management but would still benefit from the content. The performance of the service is good, with 78% of children who attended the programmes in 2023/24 maintaining or reducing their BMI z-score by the end of the programme. Improvements are also noted with increased fruit and vegetable consumption and increased levels of physical activity.
- 2.7 From September 2024, the BeeZee Bodies child weight management service will sit within a new 0-19 Healthy Families contract to allow greater synergy and integration with key services including School Nursing, Health Visiting and the NCMP. It includes a Human Learning Systems approach involving co-production with children and their families, and the commitment to adjust local provision as this indicates.
- 2.8 On 25 July 2024, the interim Director of Public Health presented the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a proposal to set up a Task and Finish Group related to childhood obesity. A proposed Terms of Reference and scoping document was provided to the Committee. Councillor Rigby (Conservative) has been appointed as Chair and membership includes Cllr Fish (Labour), Cllr Panjala (Labour), Cllr Jones (Independent) and co-opted member Gina Bonsu (Thurrock Coalition). The task and finish group will be completed within a 10-week period over September and October. A series of five themed sessions have been identified and plans are underway to coordinate members meeting with appropriate stakeholders to discuss childhood obesity.

2.9 Proposed Dates for the Task and Finish Group activities are set out in the table below:

Action	Invited Participants	Proposed Date	Venue	Time
Members to meet with officers in the council to discuss how the 'Health in All Policies Approach to Place-Shaping' document is being used to help address the wider determinants impacts on childhood obesity	Public Health Planning Parks Open Spaces, Leisure and Recreation Transport Regeneration Housing Resident Engagement	Thursday 5 th September 2024	Committee Room 1 Civic Office	13.30 to 16.30
Members to meet with and hear the views of children and young people themselves about what they think about childhood obesity	Youth Cabinet Young Voices Adolescent Team Bite Back	Wednesday 18 th September 2024	Committee Room 2 Civic Office	14.00 to 16.30
Meet with and question representatives from maternity and health visiting services in Thurrock on their work with pregnant women to manage the problem of excess weight during pregnancy and ensure the best possible outcomes for women and their babies.	Maternity Services Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership Health Visiting Service	Tuesday 22 nd October 2024	Committee Room 1 Civic Office	13.00 to 15.00
Meet with and hear the views of stakeholders in childhood obesity such as early years providers, schools, GPs, community and the voluntary sector	Nursery Provider representation Primary School representation Secondary School representation	Thursday 17 th October 2024	Room 4, 4 th floor, CO2 Civic Office	09.00 to 11.30

	GP representative NHS Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board / Thurrock ICB Alliance Active Essex Impulse Leisure Thurrock CVS			
Visit to current children's weight management programmes being delivered in Thurrock - HENRY	Visit being arranged to Family Hub	TBC	TBC	TBC

Background papers used in preparing the report:

- [Thurrock Whole Systems Obesity Strategy 2018-2021](#)
- [A Health in All Policies approach to place-shaping](#)

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