
Scrutiny Management Committee

24 April 2006

Report of the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services

Children's Health Scrutiny Working Group: Scoping Exercise

Purpose of report

1. This report recommends that diet-related children's health is approved to be added to the list of future scrutiny topics.

Background

2. In June 2004, a topic was registered by Cllrs Kind and Jones relating to 'Children's Health: The Role of Leisure, Education and Partnerships with others' (topic reg. form no. 99).

On 27 June 2005, the Scrutiny Management Committee considered a background briefing by the Director Designate of Children's Services on the proposed topic and resolved that a working group be set up to further scope the topic particularly in relation to Healthy Eating in Schools. The membership of the group was Cllrs Cuthbertson, Bradley and Kind.

Information

3. Between September and December 2005, the group carried out preliminary information-gathering about factors affecting children's health and fitness, in particular diet-related health. The group tried to identify where current data and indicators were available locally, regionally and nationally and where there were gaps in this data. They also gathered information about local initiatives that promote healthy eating.

Round-table discussion regarding diet-related children's health

4. On 30 September the group met with Margaret Wilkinson (Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Observatory), Clare Barrowman (Schools Drug Education and Healthy Schools Consultant), Janet Flanagan (Head of Health Improvement, Selby & York PCT), Liz Jones (School Fruit and Veg. Scheme Co-ordinator), Barbara Kistasamy (Client Catering Manager, CYC) and Keith Tillbrook (Catering Manager, North Yorkshire County Caterers).

5. The main points from the discussion were as follows.
- A lot of data about children's health is not currently being collected and data that is collected is not necessarily reliable. The Public Health Observatory reported that statutory bodies were waiting for guidance from the Department of Health on indicators.
 - There is no breakdown of statistics in terms of children's health in the York and Selby areas, although they have very different socio-economic profiles.
 - Undernourishment is as much a problem as obesity in deprived areas.
 - There is a correlation between low birth-weight babies and health problems in later life. Pre-conceptual care is therefore important.
 - There was discussion about how young people are taught about food in secondary schools. Support packages for schools include Healthy Schools Scheme and a Food in Schools toolkit.
 - School meals: The lack of uptake of school meals, including free meals, is an issue. There needs to be a range of food on offer in schools. There is a problem with children going to local shops/fast food outlet at lunchtime. In some schools there is a policy where children have to have written permission to go out at lunch-time. School vending machines encourage unhealthy eating
 - A lot more is packed in to the school day, making mealtimes shorter and less of an opportunity for socialising whilst eating. Should packed lunches be made available earlier in the morning?
 - Breakfast clubs are a good opportunity for children to get a nutritional meal that they might miss out on at home. Clubs have been tried at Burnholme school, but the take-up was low.
 - Needs parents to be educated about healthy breakfasts/meals
 - Nursery schools/youth service – what are they doing to support healthy eating?

Meeting with Surestart staff

6. On 14 October the group visited Hob Moor School and met with Alison Walls, Surestart Project Manager and other staff at Surestart.
7. The main points from the discussion were as follows.
- The children and young women Surestart works with are more likely to be anaemic rather than obese.
 - There is a lack of local shops in the area selling fresh produce. Items sold at Tesco Express, Acomb tend to be more expensive than at superstores located outside the local area.
 - Parents do not have basic cooking skills and children are often not the first generation that haven't learnt skills. It is cheaper and easier for parents to buy processed food that will fill up the children with calories but may be of little nutritional value.

- At their sessions with parents, Surestart have subtly introduced more fresh fruit and vegetables, less processed foods, and fresh juice rather than juice squash with additives.
- Surestart want to shop on-line more for better choice and cost, rather than having to go through approved suppliers that may not offer nutritional food cost effectively.
- Feasts in the community centres are popular. A fathers group meets weekly and cooking has been a part of this. The young parents group encourages whole families to eat together. There is the opportunity for linking with schools on the work Surestart do relating to healthy eating.

Meeting regarding obesity research

8. Also on 14 October, the group met with Professor Ashley Adamson, Visiting Senior Lecturer, Department of Health Sciences, University of York. Prof. Adamson specialises in research into obesity and is leading a project in the North East (sponsored by the Food Standards Agency) to research the link between dietary intake and obesity in children/young people.
9. The main points from the discussion were as follows.
 - There is strong evidence that obesity is increasing in children, that it is linked to morbidity in childhood and that it tracks to adulthood with all the associated problem of adult obesity such as diabetes, cancer, coronary heart disease etc.
 - The determinant of obesity is the Body Mass Index (BMI). The rise in obesity has occurred in the last 20 years and has been dramatic.
 - Regarding asthma there is no evidence that obesity is a pre-disposing factor but it makes the condition worse.
 - All children at school entry are weighed and measured by school nurses. The Department of Health keep this data.
 - Health survey for England is a source of useful info

National and regional context

10. The Selby and York Primary Care Trust has published the following facts about obesity:
 - Obese people are more likely to suffer from a number of serious chronic diseases, many of which are life limiting.
 - Over 30,000 deaths a year are caused by obesity in England alone.
 - Obesity in 2-4 year old children has almost doubled [5%-9%] in 10 years [1989-1998]
 - Obesity in 6-15 year olds has trebled [5%-16%] in 11 years [1990-2001]
 - Obesity in adult women has nearly trebled [8%-23%] in 22 years [1980-2002]

- Obesity in adult men has nearly quadrupled [6%-22%] in 22years [1980-2002]
11. In the Government White Paper 'Choosing Health' it states that the objective for Primary Care Trusts should be to
- move the balance of the national diet in England towards that recommended by the experts
 - halt the year-on-year rise in obesity among children under 11 by 2010, in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole
 - monitor obesity status among people aged 15 to 75 years, as recorded in GP records
(2004 Government PSA10a target)
12. The Selby and York Primary Care Trust has developed a Healthy Lifestyles and Obesity Strategy 2005 –2008 which incorporates local initiatives and provides support in tackling the risk factors of the major lifestyle related diseases.

Local Actions include:

- Supporting the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme roll out and through Healthy School's Programme support the food in schools initiative
- Promotion of the 5 A Day campaign
- Training for professionals to ensure up-to date information given to all community groups
- Promotion of breastfeeding
- Training for all health professionals
- Developing a toolkit for frontline staff for the treatment and management of obesity
- Recording BMI of patients aged 15-75 on GP registers

Recent Government initiatives

13. Following a review of schools meals, a national audit of schools meals is currently being carried out. A panel set up by the Government to make recommendations about improving school meals has proposed a ban on low-quality foods high in fat, salt and sugar, reformed or reconstituted foods made from "meat slurry" and a further ban on chocolate, crisps, and sugary fizzy drinks from vending machines.
14. The Government has also undertaken to introduce more stringent nutrient-based standards, stipulating the essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals required for school meals in primary schools by no later than 2008 and secondary schools by no later than 2009.

Other issues affecting Children's Health

15. To gain an understanding of the priority to be attached to diet-related children's health issues, the group asked public health experts for their view on whether this was most pressing issue and whether, for instance, alcohol abuse amongst young people or physical fitness should be dealt with more urgently. The Department of Health's Regional Public Health Group for Yorkshire and the Humber confirmed that obesity is top of the regional public health policy agenda, together with teenage pregnancy.

Conclusion

16. In conclusion, the group's scoping work has found that obesity in children is increasing at a rapid rate and the health problems associated with it, such as diabetes, continue into adulthood. The group also found that some of the key data needed to track trends relating to child obesity is not reliable or is only now starting to be gathered. The number of indicators of the health and fitness of children is therefore limited.
17. The group recommends that diet-related children's health is approved as a future scrutiny topic, with the following scope:
 - Nutritional aspects of the food consumed by children in York schools, including how new Government standards will be implemented in schools
 - The wider educational issues regarding healthy eating, e.g. how parents are engaged in what their children eat
 - Best practice and how City of York compares with other local authorities regarding school meals

Recommendation

18. Members are recommended to approve diet-related children's health to be added to the list of future scrutiny topics.

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Annexes

None

Background Papers

None