

1st November 2021

Agenda Item: 8

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SERVICE
DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES**

**CHILDHOOD OBESITY TRAILBLAZER UPDATE – TACKLING FOOD
INSECURITY**

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Committee on progress and learning from the range of initiatives delivered in the first two years of Nottinghamshire's participation in the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme and the response to supporting families facing food insecurity.
2. To seek approval of plans to sustain successful elements of the programme using existing resources and the continuation of this partnership approach work by Early Childhood Services with Public Health and wider County Council services.

Information

3. A report providing information on the Nottinghamshire project as part of the government's Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme was taken to the Children and Young People's Committee in November 2019. Committee was asked to consider whether there was any further action or information it required and Members requested a further report and progress update in Year 3 of the programme.
4. Access to healthy nutritious food and eating a balanced diet is essential to child growth and development, school readiness and attainment, prevention of obesity, diabetes, and diet related disease in later life.
5. The COVID 19 pandemic highlighted and increased the issue of food insecurity, faced by families. Information for the UK from the Food Foundation report shows that as a result of the first few weeks of the March 2020 lockdown, millions of households with children reported loss of income, experienced food insecurity, skipped meals and ate less nutritious food.
6. During the same time period, the Trussell Trust, responsible for the running of nearly half the food banks in Nottinghamshire, reported an 81% increase in people needing support from food banks compared with the same time the previous year. National data shows a 121% increase in demand for food banks from families with children.

7. The latest published data (2019/2020) for Nottinghamshire shows the percentage of obese children was 9.0% in Reception children and 19.2% in Year 6 children, which is lower than that for England (9.9% and 21.0%). There is an upward trend in prevalence in children in Year 6 in Nottinghamshire in recent years, with high prevalence in Ashfield, Mansfield, and Bassetlaw Districts.
8. Obesity amongst children has been identified as an area of inequality within Nottinghamshire between the most and least deprived areas. This gap is high for the prevalence of obesity, and overweight children, for Reception year and Year 6. The scale of this gap is also high when compared with other local authorities. Inequalities within Nottinghamshire are in the highest 20% of all local authorities in England for both of these age groups and for both obesity and being overweight.

Overview of Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme

9. The [Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme](#) (COTP) is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and managed by the Local Government Association. The programme aims to use a test and learn approach to help find out how local authority levers can be used to address causes of childhood obesity. The programme's objectives include sharing of learning and best practice with other local authorities and to identify actions which government can take to deliver change at scale. Therefore, the aim is not to reduce prevalence of childhood obesity across the target areas over the three years of the programme, but to evaluate what is delivered to inform how councils can take effective action for their communities. Public Health already commission weight management services for families in order to reduce childhood obesity.
10. Nottinghamshire County Council is one of five local authorities selected through a competitive process to take part in this programme from June 2019 to June 2022 and receive total grant funding of £300,000. Each local authority is focusing on testing out different approaches, such as food advertising, the planning system, and engaging families from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.
11. The national programme was interrupted by the COVID pandemic and related restrictions. The Nottinghamshire project team has worked hard to continue the programme and adapt and align the interventions with the Local Resilience Forum COVID humanitarian response and recovery programme, in relation to ensuring food supply and addressing food insecurity issues for families. This approach has been endorsed and commended by the Local Government Association and national Programme Board.

Delivery of the programme in Nottinghamshire

12. The focus of the Nottinghamshire project is on food and nutrition for pre-school children and their families living in more disadvantaged areas of higher childhood obesity prevalence.
13. There are four objectives to the work:
 1. Making access to affordable healthy food easier for families
 2. Improving the quality of food provision through early years settings
 3. Enabling parents to develop good eating habits with their children
 4. Promoting consistent messages on healthy food for pre-school children.

Objective 1 - Making access to affordable healthy food easier for families

FOOD (Food on Our Doorsteps) Clubs

14. The project team initiated engagement with the national charity 'Family Action' to explore and test the FOOD Club concept in order to meet this objective and to test the concept the Children's Centre Service being used as a community food asset. The development of FOOD Clubs was also prioritised in 2020 with Local Resilience Forum Partners as part of the COVID humanitarian response, as a means of helping families facing food insecurity issues by providing an affordable and sustainable source of food.
15. The FOOD club programme aims to distribute quality food at a reduced cost to local families to help give families experience of different foods to improve families' diets, reduce food insecurity, reduce food waste, and increase disposable incomes for local families to support their wellbeing and increase life chances. The clubs also aim to increase skills through volunteering opportunities and be an access point for services available within the community. The FOOD clubs are managed by the Family Action charity and are hosted in community venues including Council buildings and are delivered by trained and DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) checked volunteers.
16. As the need for an intervention which supports families facing food insecurity increased during the pandemic, Public Health led a collaborative approach with District and Borough Councils, together with Family Action, to identify funding streams available to fund the projected three year costings associated for a total of 30 FOOD clubs across Nottinghamshire. This collaborative approach has led to securing funding to the amount of £68,000 from the County Council COVID Emergency Assistance Grant, along with contributions from District and Borough Councils and the Trailblazer grant to fully fund the implementation costs of these additional FOOD clubs.
17. The funding also factors in management of the whole programme of work by Family Action, including managing the risk of low uptake, poor quality of produce and project management. To do this effectively there have been two Nottinghamshire FOOD Club Co-ordinators (1.1 FTE) employed by Family Action and 6 FOOD Club Assistants, several of whom have been former Children's Centre Service volunteers.
18. As of October 2021, there are seven clubs hosted by the Children's Centre Service and eight clubs provided by community settings. The latest monitoring data from September shows that on average 317 families are accessing FOOD clubs weekly across Nottinghamshire. The planned roll-out of FOOD clubs in Nottinghamshire will see 30 clubs established by the end of March 2022, with a total of 14 in Council buildings and 16 in other community venues. The prioritisation plan for delivering this is included in **Appendix 1**.
19. The FOOD Clubs hosted by the Children's Centre Service have a focus on families with children under the age of 5, however clubs in other settings may decide their own criteria based on the needs of the community but are likely to have a family focus. In order to meet the needs of a local community, it may be necessary to expand the eligibility criteria to include all families within the local area who have school aged children and young people or look for alternative partners to host clubs.

20. Initial evaluation and engagement with families about their experiences of attending FOOD clubs has been positive; details of this and a case study are available to read in **Appendix 1**.

Healthy Start Scheme

21. A key element of the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme is to improve awareness and increase uptake of the national [Healthy Start scheme](#). The scheme provides support to families on low incomes to access free fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins.
22. The project team has adapted to the changes throughout the pandemic and grasped opportunities to embed Healthy Start in local services. This concentrated effort has resulted in 436 more families across Nottinghamshire accessing the Healthy Start scheme in July 2021 than in October 2020. A 10% increase of uptake was seen, with 255 more families in Trailblazer priority areas (Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood and Mansfield) accessing the Healthy Start scheme in the same time period.
23. Whilst the increase in uptake is welcomed, the Nottinghamshire uptake of the scheme is 60.4% of eligible families. This is higher than neighbouring counties such as Leicestershire (55.8%), Lincolnshire (56.2%) and Derbyshire (60%) but not as high as Nottingham City (70%).

Healthier @ Home meal kit

24. This element of the programme was planned from the outset following consultation with parents and professionals and uses the concept of cooking at home with the ingredients provided in a kit. The kit has enabled the project team to test and prototype at small scale utilising the school meals supply chain in a different way, to provide food to families.
25. The 10-week pilot tested out how food could be ordered and delivered from school meal suppliers into a Children's Centre to be made into meal kits for families to take and cook at home. The meals the families cooked used recipes from the school meal offer.
26. The weekly evaluation completed by the 10 families involved in the pilot demonstrate many successes of this intervention and has helped plan the next steps. More details about this can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Objective 2 – Improving the quality of food provision through early years settings

Early Years Food Survey

27. With support from colleagues in Early Childhood Services, a questionnaire was sent out to all early years providers in Spring 2020. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain a better understanding from the sector of the knowledge, skills, and capacity about food and what they feed children in their care. The questionnaire gave providers the opportunity to feedback where there are examples of good practice and also where they may need some support.
28. There was a good response to the questionnaire with almost a quarter of all providers in Nottinghamshire responding. The results provided the project team with the evidence for

where focus was needed for the programme, for example where barriers are perceived to providing healthy food, what daily challenges providers face and gaps in knowledge and skills.

29. Nearly half of the responses in the survey said they would be interested in learning more about how to tackle fussy feeding, this led to the work with Loughborough University and the training package delivered to 250 practitioners, as explained in **paragraph 33**. Additionally, half of respondents were not aware of the national Healthy Start Scheme and so the project team has ensured that early years providers regularly receive up to date information to support families in accessing the scheme.
30. The analysis of results can be seen in the [Early Years Questionnaire Report](#) and Nottinghamshire [case study](#) published on the Local Government Association website.

Food for Life in Nottinghamshire

31. Utilising the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme grant funding, the Council commissioned the national charity 'The Soil Association' to provide specialist support to seven early years settings (nurseries) to achieve the innovative [Food for Life Early Years Award](#). This award sets out criteria which when met supports settings to embed a culture of good food for children in the early years. The criteria are grouped under four themes: food quality, food leadership & culture, food education and communities/partnerships.
32. All seven nurseries are engaging well with the programme and the project team is working closely with these providers to understand the changes they are making and how these can be shared with other providers, details of which can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Objective 3 - Enabling parents to develop good eating habits with their children

Child Feeding Guide training for the sector in Nottinghamshire

33. Working in partnership with Loughborough University and utilising grant funding, staff from the Children's Centre Service and early years providers were invited to apply to gain access to this training which aims to improve practitioners' knowledge about food and nutrition of children under the age of 5 and help them better support families. 250 practitioners have been trained in good practice in child feeding. The impact of this is being evaluated in year 3 of the project.

Objective 4 - Promoting consistent messages on healthy food for pre-school children

Community of Practice

34. The project team has established a Community of Practice for those stakeholders who can have influence in developing good child eating habits in the early years. The Community of Practice is a regular session where peers can meet, share best practice, challenges, and work collaboratively to support themselves to deliver a positive change.
35. The pilot focussed on the Ashfield district and has successfully engaged with 10-15 stakeholders at each meeting and facilitated four meetings throughout April to July 2021. Each meeting focused on two topics in detail, which had been highlighted as discussion

points and areas of interest in the results of the Nottinghamshire Early Years survey (see **paragraphs 28-30**)

36. Initial evaluation of the Community of Practice pilot indicates that this methodology of engagement with partners associated with early years is valuable. It enables the opportunity to provide specialist information on food and nutrition to early years providers, which is further enhanced by group discussions. Members of the Community of Practice indicated through an evaluation survey that there is an increase in confidence in having conversations about food and healthy eating within their settings as well as with parents and carers. The project team is now working on how the Community of Practice concept can be scaled up and delivered across the County.

Wider Support to Families Facing Food insecurity and wider

37. **Appendix 2** provides further detail of the services and activities in response to supporting families in addressing food insecurity as part of the COVID Response and Recovery.

Other Options Considered

38. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

39. Access to healthy nutritious food and eating a balanced diet is essential to child physical and mental development and prevention of obesity and diet related disease in later life. The work of the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer programme is aligned with the [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and new [Best Start Strategy](#). Work thus far has demonstrated the importance of concentrated effort and partnership working towards improving access to, and availability of healthy food, and enabling parents to develop good child eating habits in the early years.
40. The COVID 19 pandemic highlighted and increased the issue of food insecurity faced by families. The response to that by the local partners has developed an approach to better support families in Nottinghamshire to not only sustain food supply but influencing and supporting families to access healthier food.
41. The continued delivery of FOOD Clubs through the Children's Centre Service offers families with pre-school children a sustainable, local, healthy, affordable food supply, removing many barriers they may face. However, these clubs are currently not open to families with older children. If the roll out continues to be successful, FOOD clubs will be well placed within new Family Hubs which are for families with children aged 0-19. In the meantime, it may be necessary to expand eligibility criteria for these FOOD clubs or to look for other venues.

Statutory and Policy Implications

42. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability

and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

43. The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme is funded by a grant from the Department of Health and Social Care and is managed by the Local Government Association. Nottinghamshire County Council has received an annual grant of £75,000 for the three years of the programme. Additionally, annually a further £25,000 is available to be utilised on specialist support. The grant is received and managed within Public Health.
44. The initial four FOOD clubs were funded by the grant. Nottinghamshire County Council, District and Borough Councils secured funding from the County Council Emergency Assistance Grant to fully fund the implementation costs of additional FOOD clubs for year 1 (April 2021 – March 2022), year 2 (April 2022 – March 2023), deficit costs (should any FOOD club make a loss) and with projected profits in year 3 (April 2023 – March 2024).
45. This fully funded model covers all associated costs of the FOOD clubs over the three-year period with no cost to Nottinghamshire County Council. It is projected that after three years all 30 FOOD clubs will have the membership and attendances required to cover all associated running costs.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

46. Volunteers who are facilitating the FOOD clubs are fully trained and have gone through the DBS check.

Implications for Service Users

47. FOOD clubs hosted by the Children's Centre service enhances the service offered to local families by offering access to affordable, healthy food on a weekly basis.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

48. The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme of work is aligned to the County Council's commitment to reducing food waste in the Environment Strategy as demonstrated through the redistribution of food within FOOD clubs.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That Committee:

- 1) approves the continuation of this partnership work by the Early Childhood Services with Public Health and wider County Council services to improve access to and availability of healthy food, and enabling parents to develop good child eating habits in the early years, and support families facing food insecurity.

- 2) approves the continued delivery of approaches as part of this work such as FOOD Clubs through the Children's Centre Service and other Council services where feasible and accessible for target groups.

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Constitutional Comments (EP 19/10/21)

49. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (NC 20/10/21)

50. The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme is funded by a grant from the Department of Health and Social Care and is managed by the Local Government Association with support from Public Health England.
51. Nottinghamshire County Council receive in total £300,000 of which £75,000 is received annually for the three years of the programme. In addition, £25,000 is available annually to be utilised on specialist support. The grant is received and managed within Public Health.
52. Provided all costs over the three years are covered by the grant funding there will be no cost to Nottinghamshire County Council.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Childhood Obesity Trailblazer - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 18 November 2019](#)

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.
C1520