

## Hertfordshire Whole Systems Obesity Programme

This briefing note is to inform partners and stakeholders in Hertfordshire of the Whole Systems Obesity Programme that Hertfordshire County Council are adopting to address rising levels of obesity in our population.

### Key messages

- Obesity is not just a local or national concern but a global one. Nearly two thirds of adults (62%) in England were classed as being overweight (a body mass index BMI of over 25) or obese (a BMI of over 30) in 2017/18.
- The drivers of higher rates of obesity are as a result of many factors including the environment, behaviour, physiology and culture.
- An obesogenic environment refers to the role environmental factors can play in determining both nutrition and physical activity.
- Obesity is a health issue that is linked to many health conditions such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, cancer and poorer mental health.
- Obesity is an economic issue, with estimations suggesting that overweight and obesity could cost the NHS £9.7 billion by 2050.
- Nationally and locally, levels of obesity in Year 6 children (ages 10-11) is increasing.
- Obesity widens health inequalities and disproportionately affects people living in more deprived areas.
- A **whole systems approach** is being adopted in Hertfordshire to address the drivers of obesity in the local system. Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) are committed to working with our partners and the community to take steps towards making improvements to the environments in which we live, work and play in order to improve health, and prevent obesity.

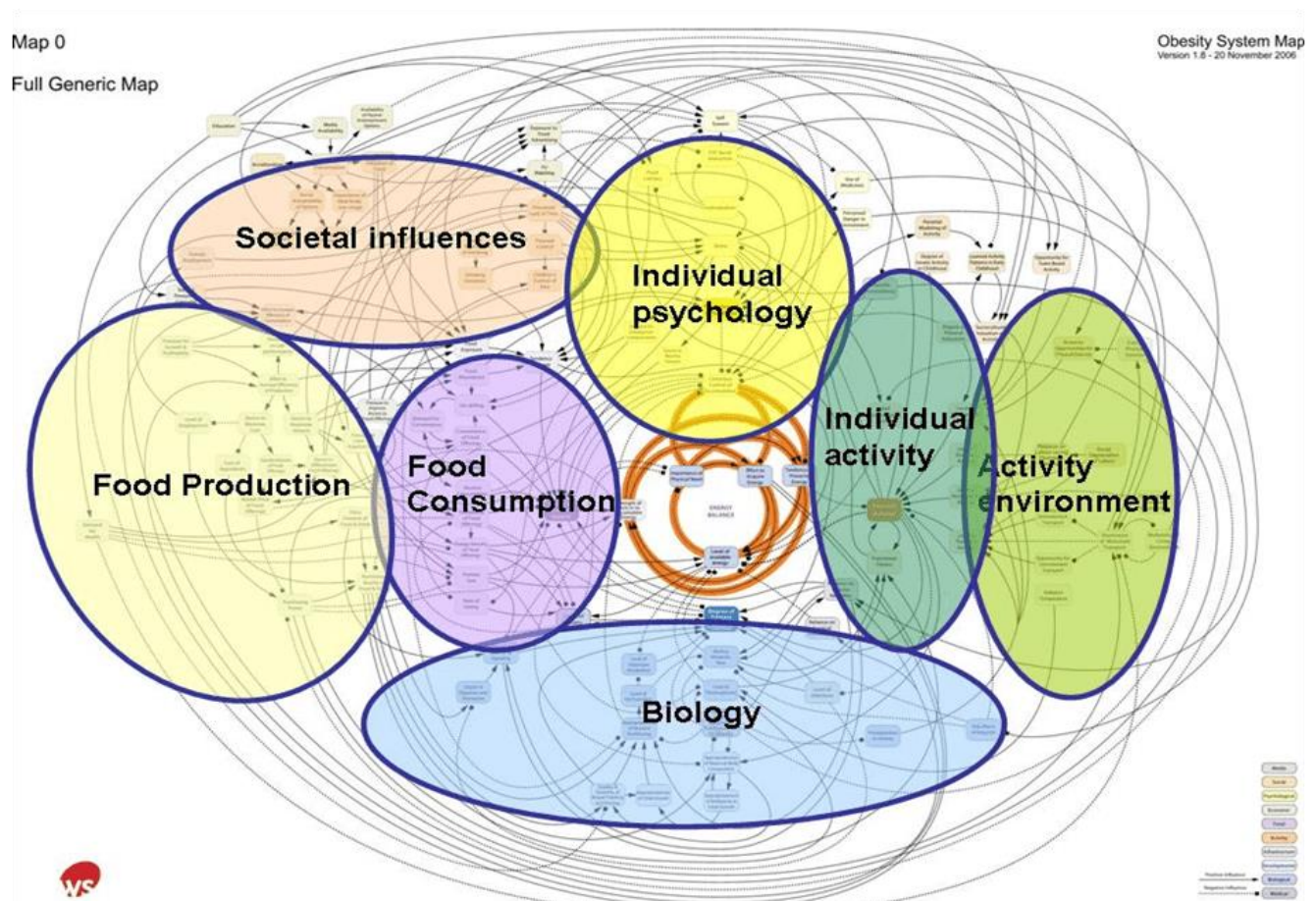
## 1. A Whole Systems Approach to Obesity

The aim of the Whole Systems Obesity (WSO) Programme in Hertfordshire is to address the factors that are facilitating obesity, and inequalities of health that can lead to obesity, through a ‘whole systems approach’.

“A local **whole systems approach** responds to complexity through an ongoing, dynamic and flexible way of working. It enables local stakeholders, including communities, to come together, share an understanding of the reality of the challenge, consider how the local system is operating and where there are the greatest opportunities for change. Stakeholders agree actions and decide as a network how to work together in an integrated way to bring about sustainable, long-term systems change” (PHE, 2019).

**Figure 1** below demonstrates the complexity of obesity in the Foresight Systems Map. The key factors associated with energy balance are grouped into themes that relate to the physical environment, the food environment, societal influences (culture), and psychology (behaviour).

Figure 1: Foresight map summary factors associated with obesity (Government Office for Science, 2007)





## 2. The Ten Pillars of Action

Amsterdam has seen some success in reversing the upwards trend in childhood obesity (City of Amsterdam, 2017). The Hertfordshire whole systems approach to obesity is based on Amsterdam’s ‘**Ten Pillars of Action**’, for obesity prevention and promoting healthier weights, see below.

The ‘Ten Pillars of Action’ for Healthy Weight Promotion	
<b>Prevention</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>A healthy environment</b> - positive changes to the environment that can address obesogenic environmental factors and have a greater population impact</li> <li>2. <b>Engaging with neighbourhoods and communities</b> - bring together residents, services and professionals to engage with communities to understand the main issues for them and coproduce solutions</li> <li>3. <b>A ‘first 1000 days’ approach (from the start of pregnancy to age two)</b> - shape parents and children’s eating, physical activity and oral health at a time when behaviour patterns are being established</li> <li>4. <b>Healthy workplaces</b> - improve food environment in workplaces, policies that promote physical activity and active travel</li> <li>5. <b>Schools and young people</b> - improve to the food environment and policies that promote physical activity/ active travel. Work with young people to challenge the local food offer, leisure providers, and their educational settings to provide healthier options that meets their needs.</li> <li>6. <b>Focusing on children and adults with special needs</b> - prevent the emergence of obesity among children with disabilities and associated obesity related conditions by increasing opportunities, access to services and developing behaviourally informed interventions that are sensitive to the needs of families and carers</li> </ol>	
<b>Support and Intervention</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Helping people to regain a healthier weight</b> - Deliver a range of interventions that meet the needs of our communities to help children, young people, families and adults to regain a healthier weight and improve emotional wellbeing, connecting to community assets. The NHS and other public services are integral to the success of this work.</li> </ol>	
<b>Facilitators</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. <b>Learning from research, evaluating what we do</b></li> <li>10. <b>Behavioural science</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. <b>Digital technology</b></li> </ol>

### 3. Obesity in Hertfordshire

#### Childhood obesity in Hertfordshire

In Hertfordshire, overweight and obesity rates are lower than the national average. However, levels are still cause for concern, representing a high proportion of the population and disproportionately affecting those in areas of deprivation.

Latest data from 2018/19, from the Public Health Nursing Team and the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) tells us that:

#### Aged 2

- **24.6%** of 2-year olds were of excess weight

#### Age 4-5

- **19.4%** aged 4 to 5 years measured as overweight or obese (lower than the national average, 22.6%)
- Highest proportion of excess weight in 4-5-year olds were found in Broxbourne (22.1%) and Stevenage (21.6%) - East and North Hertfordshire had the lowest (17.0%)

#### Age 10-11

- **28.8%** aged 10-11-year olds measured as overweight or obese (lower than the national average of 34.3%)
- Highest proportion of excess weight in 10-11-year olds were found in Broxbourne (35.6%) and Stevenage (34.5%). St. Albans has the lowest at (21.8%).
- The proportion of year 6 males classified as excess weight or obese is significantly higher than females.

For both England and Hertfordshire, over time rates of overweight and obesity in year 6 children have continued **to increase**.

#### Obesity in Adults in Hertfordshire

Figures based on the Active Lives Survey in 2017/18 indicates that:

- **60.4%** of Hertfordshire adults aged 18 or over were overweight or obese lower than the England average (62%)
- Broxbourne (70.2%) and Watford (67%) have significantly higher rates of excess weight than the Hertfordshire average, while St Albans (48.9%) has the lowest
- **67%** of adults are doing enough physical activity
- **20.3%** of adults are inactive



Data sources:

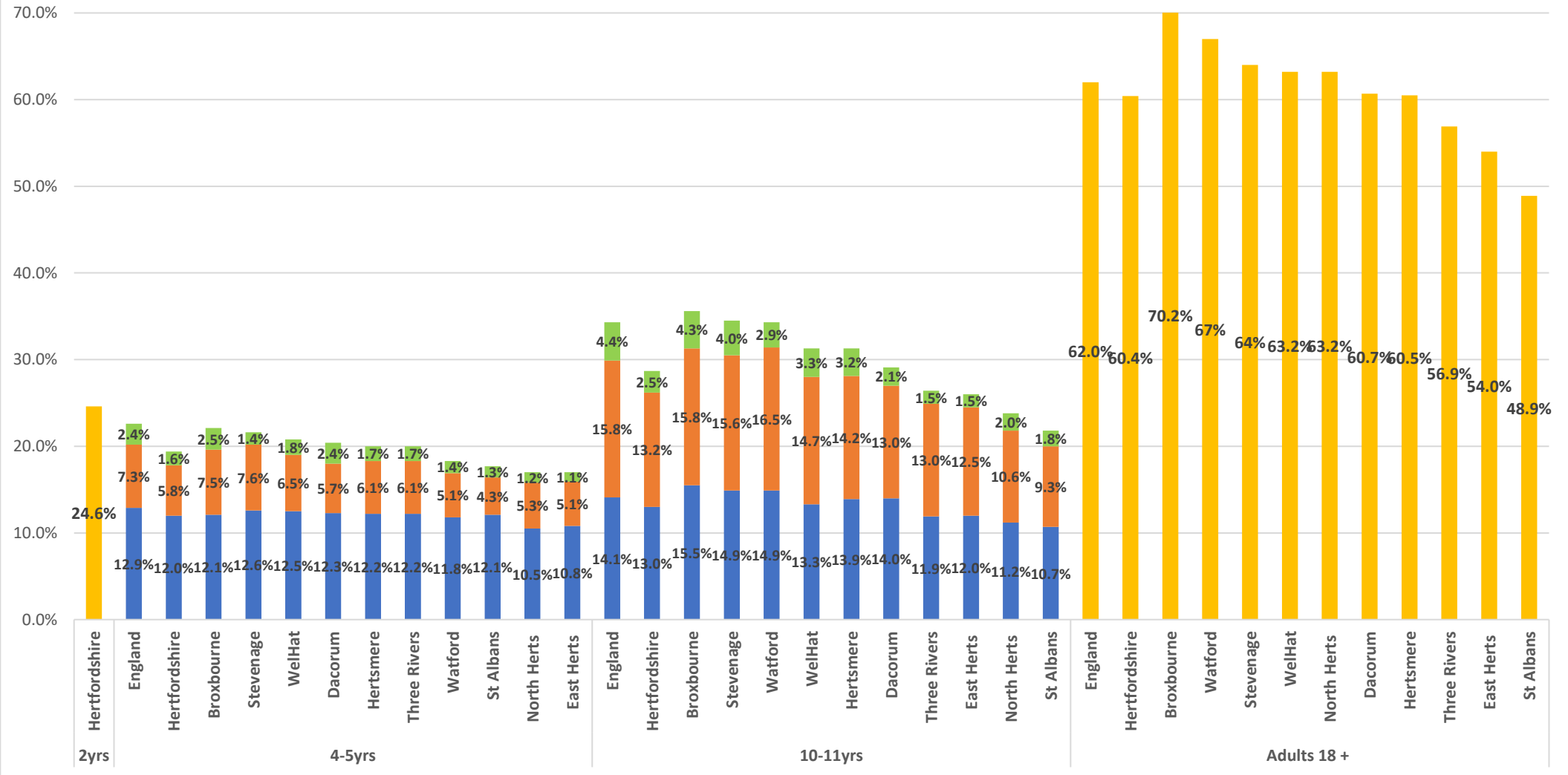
2-year old data: HCT PH Nursing Service 2018/19

4-5 and 10 11-year-old data: NCMP 2018/19

Adult data: Active Lives Survey 2017/18

Excess weight in Herts

Overweight Obese Severely obese Overweight inc. obese



### 3. Achievements to date and next steps

HCC Public Health have recruited a dedicated Project Team to take forward the WSO Programme. The Programme builds on the previous systems mapping exercises, of the local obesity causes (carried out with East Herts and Hertsmere councils in 2016/17) and will adopt the Ten Pillars of Action Approach.

Developing understanding of the gaps and opportunities to address obesity and subsequent actions taken forward will be a collaborative effort with a range of stakeholders and partners.

#### Next steps

1. Launch the **Hertfordshire Obesity Partnership**, a new partnership between HCC, the Ten District and Borough Councils, the University of Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire NHS Clinical Commissioning groups to work together on the WSO Programme.
2. Develop a shared vision for the WSO programme.
3. Coproduce solutions around the ten pillars of action that aim to prevent obesity, through facilitating healthier eating and physical activity, and making improvements to reduce the obesogenic environment
4. Develop and carry out engagement activities with stakeholders and with communities.
5. Updates to continue to stakeholders with a further update planned for September 2020.

**For more information please contact the WSO team on email:**

[WholeSystemsObesity@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:WholeSystemsObesity@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

#### References

City of Amsterdam. Summary Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme 2018-2021. 2017. Available from: <https://amsterdam.nl/zoblijvenwiigezond>

Government Office for Science. Reducing obesity: obesity system map. 2007. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-obesity-obesity-system-map>

Public Health England (PHE). Whole systems approach to obesity: A guide to support local approaches to promoting a healthy weight. 2019. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whole-systems-approach-to-obesity>