



# LEARNING WEEK 2021



## **Obesity Action Scotland Session – Children in Scotland Learning Week**

### **Full transcript**

#### **Introduction**

Hello. My name is Lorraine Tulloch and I am the Programme Lead of Obesity Action Scotland. For those of you who do not know us we are an advocacy organization which aims to achieve healthy weight for all, in Scotland. We work with national and local partners to identify and pursue change in the food environment to improve our diet and therefore to prevent overweight and obesity.

Today we have three short presentations for you about our work and its relevance to children's health. Firstly I will give an outline of the impact Covid has had on improving rates of childhood obesity in a presentation entitled "Childhood Obesity an Ambition in Tatters"

Then my colleague Fran Eatwell Roberts will provide an outline of some work being carried out by some early adopter local authorities in Scotland who are exploring how to create a whole system approach to tackling childhood obesity.

Finally I will provide a summary of our findings and vision on School Meals in Scotland

#### **Childhood Obesity an ambition in tatters**

What is the challenge we face? Our weight as a nation has been in the headlines for a number of years to the point where many people will say to me well we have already fixed that issue haven't we as it has had so much attention.

Unfortunately, we haven't. Unfortunately, there have been no notable improvements in adult or childhood overweight and obesity. In fact, there is actually a lot of cause for concern.

In Scotland, 65% of the adult population is overweight or obese. This has remained stubbornly and unacceptable high for the last decade.

In children 30 % of children are at risk of overweight or obesity. Considering at risk of obesity alone that is 16%. That is 131,000 children in Scotland. 131,000 thousand children who face potential mental and physical health problems associated with their weight and who are very likely to carry that excess weight into adulthood.

Another concerning aspect of children's weight is the growing inequalities gap. If we consider the data from the Primary 1 data we can see that the gap between the least and most deprived has been widening over many years

This is highly likely to be driven the increasing public awareness of the fact that obesity can be harmful to health, and that so far most messaging has focused on what individuals can do. This type of approach tends to widen the inequalities gap because the people with the most financial resources tend to be the most able to make changes to their lifestyle and immediate environment to help them achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

And that is why messaging and education alone are not enough. Education is important but not sufficient.

So what are the government doing about this challenge.

Well in 2018 they committed to an ambition to halve childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030. And later that year they published a Diet and Healthy Weight Action Plan that would aim to achieve this ambition.

How are we progressing?

Not very well. By our calculations since the ambition was announced over 18,000 more children have fallen into the category of 'at risk of obesity'

What actions do we need to see?

Obesity Action Scotland are particularly interested in the progress on three main commitments within the Diet and Health Weight Delivery Plan. These are around tackling promotions and advertising of unhealthy foods and improving the out of home sector. These actions are important as they will start to change the food environment around us. It is very important in

ensuring healthy weight is achievable for everyone, not just the least deprived, that structural changes are made and the environment itself is modified to make the accessibility, affordability and acceptability of unhealthy foods less but improved and increased for healthy foods.

The Diet and Healthy Weight Action Plan had commitments to progress promotions advertising and out of home. However, Covid has stopped any progress in its tracks. All was progressing well through 2018 and 2019 with consultations and proposed introduction of a Bill on Promotions of Food . However, the Bill was paused due to Covid and other policies have also stalled.

Whilst this is understandable the rest of the UK have taken a different approach. The recognition of the fact that people with obesity are seeing worse health outcomes from Covid-19 has encouraged the UK Government to move ahead at speed with the interventions they had planned for England and we have seen progress on TV watershed for HFSS adverts, a consultation on a proposed ban on online advertising of HFSS foods, mandatory calories labelling in out of home sector and a consultation on front of pack labelling.

Whilst the advertising restrictions and food labelling proposed at UK level are UK wide on the other elements of promotions and out of home labelling the powers are devolved. In Scotland we will now not see any progress or action this side of the Parliamentary election.

And what about the impact of the pandemic control measures on our weight. Well it is difficult to know exactly what will have happened. Everyone has their own story of how their weight has changed during lockdowns some positive, some not so positive. We have a first indication from the Scottish health Survey that was carried out by telephone during last summer. It indicates that 39% of adults self-report an increase in their weight between lockdown starting and the date of the interview in the summer. We have no data for children but previous studies have found that children tend to put on weight during school holidays.

Where next?

If we want to get back on track and we want to achieve the ambition of halving childhood obesity by 2030 we will need urgent and bold action from Scottish Government and support from the wider Scottish parliament immediately following the May election. At the moment that ambition lies in tatters but there is an opportunity to repair and progress after the May election.

### **Whole Systems Approach to Obesity**

Hi there,

My name is Fran Eatwell-Roberts.

I'm employed by Obesity Action Scotland where I work with the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and public services in 8 Local Authority areas to Pilot "Whole System Approaches" to obesity prevention.

Our pilot areas, including Dundee, North Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, the 3 Lothians, Fife and the Borders are known collectively as "The Early Adopters". And, we may well be a sign of what's to come in terms of the way that Scotland works locally to prevent ill-health and reduce its health inequalities.

So, what are we doing and why?

Our purpose is to ensure that local areas afford their residents, particularly children, the opportunities they need to eat healthily and take regular exercise.

Our holistic approach means we don't just look at someone's behaviour in isolation, but also work hard to understand the social factors and environments that determine our health.

We therefore work in inclusive partnerships, utilising data, community insight and existing assets to initiate new activity and make incremental and iterative improvements to the systems that influence the lives of those most at risk of obesity.

Each of our 8 pilot areas are midway through their 24-month experiments.

What each pilot is doing exactly, is determined locally.

However, what they all have in common is that their whole system approach starts with two consultative workshops.

These two workshops aim to bring together almost anyone who could possibly influence the way local people, particularly children, eat or exercise.

So, from small business owners to park-keepers; from transport planners to school caterers; this can make for an impressive coalition of people,

The first of these workshops is designed to gain a shared understanding of the causes of obesity. That's to say: "we identify the inter-connecting factors that work to put populations at particular risk of obesity".

The second workshop builds on evidence generated at the first event to help identify and prioritise opportunities for change, and agree priorities and actions for the future.

We're still a few months off publishing the first of these workshop's resulting action plans. And yet the early signs are that, as anticipated, this approach may well be generating the important, upstream and long-term ideas we're looking for. That's to say, local partnerships seem keen not just to treat the individual but rather to improve the environments at the root of ill-health. That means oftentimes proposed actions may well include efforts to improve: food and exercise environments, food insecurity, housing and community development, for example.

I thought I'd conclude by outlining next steps.

Local areas are progressing their activity and most still have a long way to go. Then, in mid-2022 we anticipate Public Health Scotland to return the findings of our pilot's independent evaluation. The Evaluation's insights will be used by the Scottish Government in its Public Health Reform and its implementation of our nation's diet and healthy weight delivery plan.

For anyone who's interested in finding out more please do get in touch through our webpage on <httpsthis://obesityactionsotland.org/>

### **Primary School Meals in Scotland 2020: a snapshot and a future vision**

Overall, Scottish children's diets have not improved in recent years. The most recent data from the Scottish Health Survey show that children in Scotland aged 2-15 eat on average only 2.8 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, well short of the 5-a-day recommendation. Furthermore, only 19% of children aged 2-15 ate oily fish every week. Meanwhile, 30% of children aged 2-15 (around a quarter of a million children) are at risk of overweight or obesity,

with 16% being at risk of obesity specifically. The Scottish government pledged to halve the childhood obesity rate by 2030, which we interpret as a target of 7%; the evidence does not suggest that progress has been made to meet that target yet.

Primary schools provide a unique opportunity to influence children's diets through their provision of healthy and delicious food to children four or five days a week. The introduction of Universal Free School Meals for children in P1-3 in 2015 increased school meal uptake. Therefore, the quality of these meals is important for both the physical health of Scotland's growing children and for their developing relationship with food, in terms of preferences, behaviours and skills.

### Our research

In 2017, we called for Scotland's policymakers and local authorities to help transform our school feeding culture into an eating culture. To achieve this, we made four recommendations for action, based on the findings of our review of Scottish Primary School menus.

In 2019, we conducted a follow-up to this review. Although there was still room for improvement, overall, primary school meals had improved and we were encouraged by the results. In particular, we saw less red and processed meats on menus, alongside fewer puddings. We saw more oily fish offered than in 2017, and fruit and yoghurt were more frequently offered as pudding options.

In the time between the two reviews, the Scottish Government consulted on improving school food standards and committed to introducing new regulations to make school food healthier. The changes were to include the setting of maximum limits for consumption of red processed meat, increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables served, reducing the amount of sugar available throughout the school day, and encouraging the use of fresh, local and sustainable produce.

So, in February 2020, we repeated this research to find out what progress had been made since our earlier reviews. We searched the websites of the 32 local authorities in Scotland and identified primary school lunch menus. All but three councils provided this information. We then selected one week at random for each menu, which was then evaluated against pre-set criteria to assess the frequency of which certain food types were being offered. Nutritional information from the selected week was assessed, where available, however, this information was only provided by seven local authorities.

So the results of our latest analysis shows that primary school meals continued to improve in certain areas since our first report in 2017. This year, we found that:

- Provision of red meat continued to reduce: there was a 31% reduction in the number of occasions red meat was offered on menus during the week studied, compared to 2017
- All local authorities offered soup on their menus: 10 local authorities offered soup on their menus every day of the school week
- Fruit and yoghurt continued to be offered as pudding options: Edinburgh and Glasgow City Councils only offered fruit and yoghurt as pudding options in the week studied, with no less healthy options

Whilst we also found that puddings are served more frequently and there has been no reduction in the number of local authorities serving chips and pizza since our 2017 report, we remain encouraged by the improvements noted in our recent review, and hope that local authorities will continue to build on their commendable progress

This year, we included school meals uptake analysis for the first time. Around 60% of primary school children in Scotland eat school meals, down from a high of 66% in 2016. School meals provide a unique opportunity to drive the dietary change we need in Scotland and act as an exemplar for healthy eating.

### Impact of COVID-19 on School Meals

Following our data collection – the coronavirus pandemic hit. From Friday 20th March, all schools in Scotland closed in an effort to control the spread of coronavirus. The Scottish Government quickly set in place guidance and funding for the continued support of school children entitled to school meals, throughout the school closures. Several issues were recognised for each type of provision, whether it be cash payments, vouchers, or meal deliveries, and implementation of the new regulations for school food standards had to be pushed back to allow extra time to prepare.

COVID-19 has affected every aspect of our lives, including our schools and school meals. Data in this report was collected prior to the pandemic, and at time of publication, there was little certainty of the format school meals will take moving forward. Some Local Authorities in Scotland were temporarily offering only cold school meal options, often in the form of 'grab-and-go' bags. As we move on from COVID-19, we should strive to not only return to, but build upon the progress noted in this review, to support Scotland's children.

### A Future Vision

In our 2020 report, we describe our 'future' vision' of a primary school in Scotland. This vision encompasses positive, vibrant physical and social environments, alongside the provision of the best nutrition to support the growth, development and health of Scotland's children.

As we move on from the challenges and obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, towards recovery and rebuild, we can begin to bring together the ideal dining experience for children in primary schools in Scotland.