

Great Weight Debate

London's conversation on childhood obesity

Stage 1 report



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01 Foreword

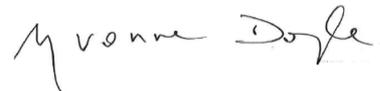
London is a wonderful city within which to raise a family. We have some of the best performing schools and access to world renowned art, culture, science, parks and sporting facilities. Children growing up in London can benefit vastly from the opportunities and experiences immediately on their doorstep. There is however, a key issue that we must tackle if we want to ensure all London's children get the healthiest possible start to life – the worrying trend towards children becoming overweight and obese.

London has a worse record on childhood obesity than most other peer global cities such as New York, Paris and Madrid. Over a third of London's children are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school. The effects from this can be devastating. Children who are overweight are stigmatised, more likely to suffer depression, less able to participate in sport or at school and are ultimately less able to thrive.

We have been examining what it is about the London environment that makes it much more challenging for families to make healthy choices. Given the scale of this obesity epidemic the problem cannot be boiled down to individual's choices alone but instead indicates that the wider environment needs to be adapted to enable healthier choices. Londoners have easy access to high fat, sugar and salty foods in abundance 24/7. Children are not

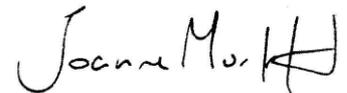
as physically active as they used to be with less outdoor play time and more indoor screen time. To protect London's children, we wanted to make Londoners more aware of this problem, hear the ideas they have for tackling overweight and obesity, understand what action can be galvanised and see what measures people may support towards legislating for a healthier living environment.

So that is why we have started this conversation with Londoners. We want everyone to join the Great Weight Debate. We have already heard some bright ideas for example, putting healthy scores on the doors of food retailers and curtailing unhealthy advertising in public venues. This first stage of the debate and report has provided us with some real insights into what a sample of Londoners think about this issue. We hope that you find it informative and invite you to join us in tackling childhood obesity in London.



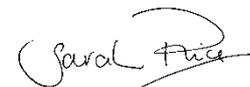
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02 Introduction

What is the Great Weight Debate?

The Great Weight Debate is a conversation to fully engage and involve Londoners in the future health of their children, and galvanise wider social action and support to tackle childhood obesity.

The Great Weight Debate is designed to be a conversation that:

- ✓ includes **awareness raising, co-production of solutions** moving toward **generating wider social action**
- ✓ identifies **proposals on the wider environment and food choices** that could be supported and delivered through London's **devolution deal**
- ✓ **draws in a wide range of sectors in London** with the potential capability to contribute to and effect solutions

In Stage 1 roundtables, an online community and a citizens' panel style event have been completed and summarised in this report. In **Stage 2**, local boroughs are joining the conversation and engaging local residents in the debate. Stage 2 overlaps with **Stage 3** in the Autumn when more city-wide conversations will take place to revisit regional plans for action alongside the launch of the national strategy for childhood obesity. **Stage 4** will be the establishment of a shared change platform for ongoing pan-London participation, learning and action on childhood obesity.

Who is leading the conversation?

The Great Weight Debate is overseen by London's Prevention Board with expert input and steer provided by the London Obesity Leadership Group. The Healthy London Partnership (HLP) has established a central resource unit for the Great Weight Debate delivering this engagement in partnership with CCGs, local government, the GLA, NHS England and Public Health England. Local government will be leading borough based conversations around the capital. London has also elected a new Mayor who will be asked to support a number of key actions needed at a city-wide level.

03 Methodology Overview

- The objective for Stage 1 of the Great Weight Debate was to gauge public opinion and support to inform future responses and crowdsource public-led solutions to childhood obesity.
- Stage 1 began with a desktop review that included incorporating findings from engagement undertaken as part of the London Health Commission in 2014. A sequence of new engagement activities were then undertaken.
- During Stage 1, we commissioned an independent insight and strategy consultancy, BritainThinks, who designed and completed the engagement activities and we ensured London media were also approach to begin awareness raising.

Sequence of Activities

Desk top review of key policies, opinion and research to inform...

2 x focus groups with Londoners
10th February

3 x roundtables with professionals
30th and 31st March and 5th April

Online community with 120 Londoners
18th April – 1st May

The Great Weight Debate
Citizen Panel Event
17th May

Participants

120 participants living in zones 1 – 7 were recruited to the online community

Participants were recruited using four qualitative recruiters based in North, East, South and West London as follows:

Sex: 48 male and 72 female

Age: 24 participants aged 18 – 29, 44 participants aged 30 – 44, 28 participants aged 45 – 59, 24 participants aged 60+

Social grade: 20 AB / 32 C1 / 32 C2 / 36 DE

Ethnicity: min. 68 BAME participants

Family status: min. 60 participants with children under 19 living at home and min. 24 participants with grandchildren under 19 who they see on a regular basis

All participants were UK taxpayers

5 participants were not comfortable engaging online, and were therefore provided with pen and paper versions of the online exercises

20 participants were unable to attend the Great Weight Debate citizen panel event. 10 of these were replaced to the same demographic profile.

04 Summary of Key Insights

There is a need to raise awareness of the scale of the problem

- Spontaneous awareness amongst Londoners of the extent and severity of this problem in London was limited but information on the scale of the challenge was deeply shocking for Londoners, and led to them demanding change
- Londoners felt it was important that this information is provided in a simple format, using facts and figures that all Londoners can understand and in a location (for example, public transport) where all Londoners can see it. They wanted information to strike a balance between shocking Londoners into realising the scale of the problem, and avoiding further stigmatising children who are overweight or obese
- Finally, Londoners agreed it will be important to frame the problem in environmental and social terms to avoid this issue being dismissed as being about personal responsibility and / or poor parenting

There is a strong appetite for direct and far-ranging interventions

- Given the scale and severity of the challenge facing London, both Londoners and professionals were willing to tolerate – and indeed called for – direct interventions by government at national, regional and local levels
- Strong support for the involvement of the private sector in solutions to this problem both because the private sector was considered to have a moral responsibility to engage with and improve society and, on a practical level, be likely to be able to bring about considerable change
- In light of the seriousness of the issue London is facing, Londoners' over-riding concern when thinking about how best to tackle childhood obesity was the probable effectiveness of the range of ideas. How fair the idea is (i.e. is it likely to help all Londoners, including those in deprived areas?) was also an important consideration. Cost and ease of implementation, though recognised as factors, were deemed secondary.

05 Summary of Ideas Identified

Londoners engaged in Stage 1 identified their top 5 ideas.

1. Change the way fast food outlets operate (including working with business to produce healthy alternatives to existing options, limiting opening times and restricting the opening of new outlets)
2. Banning advertising HFSS foods to children
3. Keeping a fixed proportion of TfL advertising space for public health messaging
4. Using TfL signage to encourage active travel (e.g. by advertising the amount of time it would take to walk to the next bus stop, and the number of calories that would be used)
5. Making London's green spaces safe and appealing for families (e.g. by providing a range of child-friendly activities, like green gyms)

Other ideas surfaced throughout Stage 1

Healthy scores on the doors of food retailers to kitemark them for healthy menus and healthy portion sizes especially for kids

Extend the healthy schools initiative into early years settings

Every primary school in London to embed the 'Daily Mile' initiative at the start of the school day (1 mile or 15mins of exercise – walk, run, dance!)

Make London a baby and breastfeeding-friendly city

Proportion of public venue advertising space to be reserved for public health campaigns. E.g. TfL advertising budget to encourage more Londoners to walk 10,000 steps a day, and TfL should change signage to encourage people to walk-up stairs and escalators.

Establish a CSR scheme for large corporations in London to invest in making London's communities and the city healthy and in addressing health inequalities.

Begin the pedestrianisation of London's streets, allocating some London streets on weekends for pedestrian use only and to promote play streets.

Ban adverts in public places for foods high in fat, salt and sugar - including banning sponsorship as a means to advertise these products to children.

Banning price promotions in London on foods high in fat, salt and sugar

All London restaurants to provide water at every table before serving customers.

Mandatory traffic-light labelling and nutritional information on menus in all restaurants and food outlet chains

Restrict opening times between 15:30 and 17:30 for any fast food venues serving children that are not offering healthy choices. Retailers engaging in improving their offer can be rewarded by staying open.

More PE lessons and PE homework for primary school children to involve families in getting more active

Schools sport facilities and other trusted spaces (e.g. mosques) to be opened up for parents and children to participate in physical activities at weekends and after school hours

Employers to incentivise their employees to walk to work through the Oyster or a contactless scheme.

More water fountains in public places to increase hydration in a healthy way

Make promoting healthy behaviours part of a legal planning requirement preventing fast food outlets from opening within 400 metres of schools.

Make high in fat, salt and sugar items inaccessible to children in supermarkets

Re-introduce cycle paths or new protected cycle paths within parks so that children can cycle with their families particularly at weekends.

05

Detailed Findings

- Perceptions of childhood obesity
- What ideas did Londoners have for change?
- How do we galvanise Londoners?

Perceptions of childhood obesity

But were less aware of the scale of the problem

- Londoners recognised childhood obesity as an important issue for the country but did not spontaneously identify it as a particular challenge for London
- When statistics on childhood obesity were shared with Londoners they were deeply shocked and surprised that there is not more awareness of this issue
- Professionals were much more familiar with the scale of the problem facing London

1 in 4 4-5 year olds in London are overweight or obese

2 in 5 children in London are overweight or obese when they start secondary school

When this information was shared in the context of a quiz, all Londoners (and even some professionals) under-estimated the scale of the problem.

"I knew obesity is a major problem for London, but I didn't anticipate the severity [of childhood obesity]."

"[I was really surprised by] the number of children who are obese. They don't all look obese, but I suppose they must be."

Londoners initially felt that childhood obesity is the result of bad parenting and poor choices

- Londoners spoke of the health of their child as one of their top priorities
 - And something they think about a lot more than their own health
- And they felt that they have a strong understanding of how to give their children a healthy diet
 - Parents spoke of avoiding processed or sugary foods and banning fizzy drinks at home
- As a result, Londoners began by saying that childhood obesity is the result of poor parenting
 - Parents don't want to cook healthy, fresh options
 - If children do not want to eat healthier options, giving them junk food is "the easy way out"
 - Parents allow children to spend too long playing video games / watching television instead of encouraging them to be active

"Their health is much more important than mine. I don't care about my own health as much as theirs."

"It's parents. I see kids with a can of Coke in the mornings walking down the street."

In particular, the constant availability of unhealthy food was felt to pose a major challenge to staying healthy

- Londoners spontaneously spoke of fast food as a central part of London life
 - Prevalence of fast food outlets felt to be higher than in most other cities
 - Many said that avoiding this temptation is something they personally struggle with on a daily basis
- They also felt that the prevalence of fast food is often highest in deprived areas
 - In some areas it can feel like the only option
 - And it's so cheap that it's easy to see how busy families on a budget might end up relying on it

“When there’s a McDonald’s on every corner, it’s easy access. It’s always there.”

“It’s unbelievably cheap, isn’t it? £1.99 for a chicken burger is way cheaper than paying for fruit and vegetables.”

Professionals saw the growth in fast food outlets as one of the biggest changes in London’s food environment in recent years

Avoiding unhealthy options was felt to be particularly difficult for children and young people

- Londoners spontaneously expressed concern that fast food outlets are targeting schoolchildren
 - Clustering around schools
 - Offering discounts and deals to schoolchildren
- They also observed that fast food has become embedded into young people's culture
 - Fast food outlets - especially chicken shops - act as important social hubs

“Kids don't get that much pocket money, so they get the most they can out of it. If they can get their meal for £1, that's the one they'll go for.”

“[Young people] go and hang out in the chicken shops. It's a big part of the culture.”

These concerns were echoed by professionals, who identified the targeting of children by fast food outlets as a key driver of childhood obesity in London

Londoners said that in current circumstances it is hard for parents to retain control over what their children are eating

- Parents often work late so children have unsupervised time after school
- Parents feel they have no way of controlling what their children do in this time
 - Fast food is so cheap that almost everyone can afford it
 - And made more tempting still because children are hungry after school and don't want to wait until dinnertime to eat
- Londoners felt this represents a generational shift in family life
 - It used to be that children would go straight home after school to a home cooked meal

"I think a lot of the time if the parents are out at work all day, then the kids are left to their own devices."

"My mum to this day doesn't know how it started. She says I taught you all to eat home cooked meals but we as kids made the decision to eat like this. It started off as treats and now it's convenience."

Alongside these challenges, London is also seen as a difficult place for children to be active

- Londoners said that the city is not cycle or pedestrian friendly
 - Parents saw safety as a major barrier to allowing their children to cycle or walk to school
- Exercise can also be expensive, particularly for families
 - Perception that budget cuts have meant that local authorities provide fewer free activities
- Gym and sports facilities aren't always child-friendly
 - Activities aren't necessarily orientated towards children
 - And crowded facilities can be off-putting for families

"It's all very well talking about children walking to school, but they can't as it's not safe. The roads aren't safe."

"At my local pool it's £4 to go for a swim. If you're a family that's really expensive. And then they want a drink and a snack as well."

Professionals felt that the problem was in part driven by focus on a high density housing model, which tends to sacrifice communal outdoor space

These problems are compounded by the stigma attached to childhood obesity

- Both Londoners and professionals expressed concerns that perceptions that childhood obesity is the result of lax parenting and a lack of self-control mean that there is considerable stigma attached to this issue
- This means that the word “obesity” puts parents on the defensive, and makes them less likely to accept that their child has a problem
- Furthermore, because of this stigma, there was considerable concern that obese children are regularly bullied and mocked
 - Parents told stories of how their own children had been mocked by both peers and teachers for not being able to control their weight
- Parents and professionals were clear that this stigma will need to be addressed, if childhood obesity is to be tackled

“My daughter has had to change school she was getting bullied so much. A PE teacher once told her it was her own fault for eating so many burgers. Kids these days are evil.”

“It’s really hard. How can we identify that obesity is a problem, without being negative?”

Having considered the issue, Londoners and professionals drew similar conclusions as to the drivers of childhood obesity in London

1. The size and scale of childhood obesity in London is such that it can't be explained by poor parenting alone

"Kids today are rebelling...they don't listen to their parents, they get their information from each other. And a lot of it is from the media, which can be so influential in terms of what you want and don't want."

2. The number of fast food outlets in London has been increasing at an alarming rate and this is particularly affecting children and young people

"At my school you couldn't walk two minutes out without seeing fried chicken shops. And there are more all the time."

3. London can be a difficult place for children to be active

"Of course you can do exercise on five-a-side pitches, but they don't come cheap."

4. London is unequal in the opportunities it offers to live healthily, with some areas having much better access to healthy food and open spaces than others

"Unless we can find safe spaces for children to be active which are immediately accessible we're not going to make much progress. Not everyone lives near a green space."

What ideas do Londoners have for change?

We used the London Association of Directors of Public Health framework as a structure for developing ideas to tackle childhood obesity

1: Early years

- Breastfeeding
- Weaning
- Knowledge

2: Being active

- Journeys by foot or by bike
- Supporting people to be active

3: Public services

- Health services
- Public and community settings
- Schools
- Engagement and commitment

4: Local environments

- Accessibility of healthy food
- Physical environment
- Workplaces

We designed a three stage process to develop, refine and prioritise ideas for change across the four overarching categories

1) Idea Generation:

In the morning session both Londoners and professionals were asked to develop ideas for change in one of the four overarching categories, with a particular focus on one of three levels:

- National
- London wide
- Borough / local community



2) Stretch and Build

In the combined afternoon session Londoners and professionals were assigned a new category and level and were given all the ideas developed in that category and level in the morning session. Tables were asked to “stretch and build” the ideas to arrive at a top idea in that category which they then fed back to the room



3) Prioritisation

Tables were asked to choose the idea which they felt should be the priority for London

1. Early Years: Insights from participants

- Londoners think there is currently a gap in advice and support for parents of young children
 - Closure of Sure Start centres and pressure on midwives means there is no longer the support that there used to be
 - And what support there is varies considerably by area
- Often those most in need of advice are the least likely to seek it; support therefore needs to be carefully targeted
 - Teenage mothers often don't feel comfortable going to parenting classes
 - Fathers can feel detached and left out of the process of breastfeeding / weaning
- It is really important that information provision and support is delivered in a non-judgmental, inclusive way
 - In particular, mothers highlighted the importance of not stigmatising women who aren't able to breastfeed

"We need to teach new mums about healthy eating, when to wean, what exercises toddlers need, it would be much better. Nobody knows!"

"Breastfeeding is a mother's thing, right? I'm not sure dads know how to get that strong bond with the child so mothers end up making the decisions about what the child needs. Dads need to get involved."

"I couldn't breastfeed and I think it's a bit unfair that people like me are made to feel like bad mums. They need to be careful how they talk about it."

1. Early Years: Ideas from participants

Borough:

Drop in advice sessions for parents

- In local children's centres
- Tailored to suit different groups e.g. first time mums/ teenage mums
- Providing non judgmental advice
- And a space for parents to talk to each other

Parent / child cookery classes in nurseries

- Engage children in food production early on
- Reinforce the message that cooking should be a fun, family activity

"We need something like they have in 'Call the Midwife'. Somewhere where they could bring all the mums together and help them."

London-wide:

Extend Healthy Schools London programme into early years settings

- Include children's centres, nurseries and child minders
- Agree set standards for all
- Specifically target low income communities

Campaign spearheaded by the mayor to make London a breast-feeding friendly city

- Including signage to encourage breastfeeding
- Would help to encourage a cultural shift
- And also be relatively low cost

"I don't think there should be designated [breast feeding] areas. We should be encouraging women to do it everywhere - not just shut in a corner."

National:

Trusted national information forum

- Curated by professionals with GPs hosting discussion threads
- Tailored to different discussion topics
- And to different audiences e.g. dads / first time mums / teenage mums

Ban adverts directed at children for foods high in fat, salt and sugar

- To protect children who are easily influenced by adverts
- Likely to face opposition from the food industry

"They introduced the watershed on TV, they just need to do something similar for food ads."

2. Being Active: Insights from participants

- Need to raise awareness that being active is not just about sports but also about walking and moving more e.g. dancing
- Need to make it fun!
 - Concern that in the past, use of exercise as punishment in schools has made it off-putting for young people
- Important to involve the whole family to maximise impact
- Lack of appropriate facilities is a major barrier to increasing activity levels
- As are concerns about safety
 - Both in relation to traffic and personal safety

“At the moment, green gyms are very adult-focused. You see kids playing around them, but nothing ever fits them.”

“The streets in Holland are completely different. There is an actual pavement for cyclists...I don't think there is enough being done to protect the cyclists.”

“We just need to find ways to make activity fun and affordable.”

2. Being Active: Ideas from participants

Borough:

“Walking buses” for schools

- A walking route to pick up children and take them to school
- Would overcome parents’ concerns about the safety of children walking to school
- But questions about who would lead the walk, and viability in winter

Free family activity in communal spaces

- Engaging the whole family is more likely to encourage overweight children to take part than exercising alone
- Will bring families together and support mental well-being as well as physical health

“We should organise instructed activities for families in parks. The whole community could come.”

London-wide:

Use TFL signage to encourage active travel

- For example, bus stops showing the time to walk to the next stop and calories you would burn
- Concentrate measures around schools to encourage a more active school run

Mayor’s Transport Strategy should set targets to increase proportion of children and adults walking or cycling

- Would ensure all funding and policy decisions in London are made to help more Londoners be active everyday

“Advertise at bus stops and on the tube, when you are one stop before a school station, if you walked the rest of the way, it would take you a certain amount of time and would burn a certain amount of calories.”

National:

Daily Mile rolled out across all schools

- Proven impact on health and concentration of children
- Low cost measure

Change curriculum to increase the amount of PE in schools

- And also include PE homework for children
- This would increase physical activity and help to embed healthy habits

Make school sports facilities available to local communities outside school hours and at weekends

“More PE lessons, including homework and nutritional facts, learning what exercises do what, learning how to stay in shape...Children need to know more.”

3. Public Services: Insights from participants

- Londoners and professionals place great emphasis on the need for education and consistent messaging around healthy living, and healthy eating in particular
 - There is currently a sense that this is lacking, and that public services do not lead by example
 - For example, public services, including hospitals, were criticised for selling unhealthy food on site
 - Professionals were particularly concerned about this
- Thinking specifically about young people, the school environment is seen as a critical influence
 - Whilst Londoners and professionals recognised that huge improvements have been made in some schools, they feel this is not being achieved consistently across the city

“There needs to be agreement between schools and nutritionists and parents.”

“Public places should lead by example. It’s about role modelling.”

“They get unhealthy, disgusting school dinners but we have no choice over that, our hands are tied. So my daughter has five bad meals a week.”

3. Public Services: Ideas from participants

Borough:

Schools to engage with parents on healthy living

- Cooking lessons in schools
- Work with parents who send their children to school with unhealthy food to engage them on the alternatives
- Include healthy living in literature that is sent home
- Invite parents to talks from healthcare professionals
- Have information and guidelines on school website including support on budgeting

“You could do cooking workshops in schools – everyone would get involved; teachers, parents, children and local chefs.”

London-wide:

Encourage healthy alternatives to fast food outlets near schools

- For example, promote “healthy food vans” which could park outside school gates as schools are finishing for the day
- Make it easier for children to make the healthy choice by putting the option immediately in front of them
- Price of food would need to stay at a similar level

Retain a proportion of advertising space in all public spaces for public health messaging

- Would increase awareness of the issue
- Should be easy to implement

“Some of all the advertising [on public transport] should be saved for healthy living information. That way everyone will see it.”

National:

Ban on sponsorship of public spaces and events by companies selling HFSS foods

- High visibility initiative that would change social norms and the food environment
- Easy and quick to introduce if there is the political will

Make healthier foods more available and accessible in all publically funded areas

- Including schools, hospitals, police stations, care homes etc
- Would send an important signal about how seriously the issue is taken
- And make it easier to make healthy choices

“Vending machines need to still be there, but the contents of them need to change...It’s what we see that makes us buy things.”

4. Local Environment: Insights from participants

- When considering the local environment, Londoners' overriding concern was that urgent action must be taken to address the rise in the fast food sector in the city
- This should be supported by initiatives to make fresh fruit and vegetables readily available and affordable, especially in more deprived areas
- In addition, Londoners pointed out the the city has extensive green spaces – more should be done to encourage people to use these

"I think [chicken shops] need to be curbed. I'm worried for my children's future."

"If that was cheaper, fruit looks attractive. It's the colours, the vibrancy, but it's expensive."

"We need to get kids into parks. It's a win-win, engaging for them and good for health in general."

4. Local Environment: Ideas from participants

Borough:

Advertise healthy travel options or activities in the area

- For example, signpost walking routes to schools

Make green spaces safe and appealing to families

- Tackle concerns about safety of green spaces by ensuring they are clean and staffed
- Help ensure that exercise is seen as fun by providing family orientated spaces and activities e.g. child-friendly, green gyms
- Ensure access is equitable for all Londoners

“If it’s a green gym, you could all go as a family and you don’t have to worry about looking after the kids.”

London-wide:

More water fountains in public places

- To provide a healthy, free alternative to fizzy drinks

Change the way London’s fast food outlets operate

- Work with existing ones to make them healthier
- Implement a traffic light scheme to show how healthy their food is
- Restrict opening times and / or when certain food can be served to limit availability to schoolchildren
- Limit the opening of further outlets, especially around schools

“At the end of the day, you don’t want to shut down people’s livelihoods, so you need to show them another way. Tell them that if it’s between certain times, they can only serve this or that.”

National:

Make promoting healthy behaviours part of planning laws

- For example, all new developments to be designed to encourage walking or cycling

Supermarkets to change the way they position unhealthy foods

- So HFSS foods are no longer at children’s eye levels in check-out queues

“Planning for new developments should include allotments and green spaces.”

When selecting their preferred option, participants looked for impact above all else

- Given the severity of the issue being faced, Londoners were clear that the most important criterion that should be used to evaluate the ideas generated is their probable impact
 - Indeed, eagerness to tackle childhood obesity was such that some Londoners criticised the ideas generated by their peers as insufficiently radical
- After impact, Londoners placed significant emphasis on the fairness of ideas: they should affect all Londoners equally
- Whilst cost was also recognised as a factor – particularly given the current financial environment – Londoners tended to feel that childhood obesity is too serious to allow purely financial considerations to determine the course of action
 - A common suggestion was that the private sector might be approached to work in partnership or provide funding for schemes
 - Or that volunteers might be sought if there is not funding available for paid staff
- Similarly, concerns about how difficult an idea would be to implement were felt to be less important, if the view was that the idea itself would have considerable impact

Londoners' preferred idea was changing the way fast food outlets operate

- Asked which of the ideas should be a priority for London, the most common suggestion was **changing the way fast food outlets operate**
- This was because they felt that, of all the ideas suggested, this was the one that would have the biggest impact
 - Londoners in particular had been profoundly shocked by the number of chicken shops in the city – and over the course of the day came to see this as a key driver of childhood obesity
 - They felt that encouraging healthier food in these outlets, limiting when they can operate, and preventing additional outlets from operating would tackle the issue at its source
 - It would be particularly beneficial for poorer areas, where there tend to be a higher number of fast food outlets
- Londoners recognised that this might be a difficult change to bring about, not least because of the complexity of the planning laws and because of a need to ensure that small business are still able to operate
 - However, they were hopeful that difficulties could be overcome by partnership working between the agencies involved

“This is the most urgent problem, and it’s a big part of the culture of young people and it needs to change...The impact would be huge.”

“tackle the number. If the local community said there can’t be more than 50 chicken shops in the borough, if you have to get a bus to get to a chicken shop, you would think about it.”

Changing the way advertising is used was also a popular

- Many Londoners and professionals identified a **ban on advertising HFSS foods** to children as one of the top priorities for London
 - It was felt this this would tackle “pester power” and put parents “back in control” of what their children eat
 - It would also help to prevent the formation of bad habits early on in life
 - A ban of this nature would also be fair, as it would affect all Londoners equally
 - Professionals, however, anticipated fierce resistance from the food industry to a measure of this kind
- In addition, many also were very supportive of **using a fixed proportion of TfL advertising space for public health messaging** This would tackle many Londoners’ main concern: that there is not enough awareness of this issue
 - It would also provide an opportunity to share helpful healthy living tips with Londoners
 - In contrast to banning advertising of HFSS food, most also felt that this should be relatively straightforward to implement

“It’s amazing how receptive kids are to advertising. This could have a huge impact and would reinforce the culture change message that we want to promote.”

“More health advertising would promote the issues and is easy to do.”

As were using TfL signage to encourage active travel and making better use of green spaces

- **Using TfL signage to encourage active travel** – for example saying how long it would take to walk to the next bus stop – was also very popular amongst many participants
 - This was seen as way of normalising physical activity and a “common sense” response to the problem
 - It would also act as an important visual cue, demonstrating that action is being taken
 - Finally, Londoners also felt that this should be relatively easy and cost-effective to introduce, as the infrastructure that would be needed to implement it is already in place
- Finally, many also supported **making London’s green spaces safe and appealing for families** by putting on family-friendly activities and child-friendly facilities e.g. green gyms for children
 - This would encourage Londoners to use green spaces more
 - And would ensure that all Londoners, regardless of their financial status, could afford to lead a healthy lifestyle
 - It would also mean that parents would be more comfortable allowing their children to play outside – getting them away from computer screens and tackling one of the key barriers to healthy living in London

“This would take advantage of existing facilities to encourage people to have active lifestyles. It would make it normal.”

“It would encourage family activities that are affordable and inclusive.”

There is widespread appetite for the private sector to play a role in reducing rates of childhood obesity

- Many participants – both Londoners and professionals - felt that the private sector has a crucial role to play if change is to be achieved
 - Morally, it has a responsibility to engage with this major social issue
 - And practically it is likely to be able to have a considerable impact
- For Londoners, the role of the private sector was often thought of in terms of supermarkets - both where they position food and supermarket voucher schemes
 - Although they were also interested in partnerships with other private sector organisations
- In contrast, professionals often stressed the importance of reformulation and regulation
- The perceived importance of the private sector led to calls for it to be included in discussions moving forward

“There’s been nothing mentioned about supermarkets and the people that manufacture food. Where is their responsibility?”

“Even the chicken shops, they should have a part to play. There are 8,000 of them, they should be aware of their social responsibility in their local area.”

The priorities identified in the Great Weight Debate correlate with the London Health Commission's recommendations relating to healthy living

LHC Recommendation 4

“London boroughs should introduce a mandatory traffic light labelling and nutritional information on menus in all restaurants and food outlet chains in London, by using their byelaw and licensing powers”



- Whilst this specific suggestion was not identified as a priority by Londoners, there was support for traffic light labelling of fast food outlets

LHC Recommendation 7

“The Mayor should invest 20% of his TfL advertising budget to encourage more Londoners to walk 10,000 steps a day, and TfL should change signage to encourage people to walk up stairs and escalators.”



- There was strong support for using TfL signage to encourage active travel – including up stairs and escalators
- Similarly, Londoners also wanted to see TfL advertising space used for public health messages

The priorities identified in the Great Weight Debate correlate with the London Health Commission's recommendations relating to healthy living

LHC Recommendation 8

"The NHS, Public Health England, and TfL should work together to create a platform to enable employers to incentivise their employees to walk to work through the Oyster or a contactless scheme."



- The specific focus here on adults puts this recommendation outside the scope of the Great Weight Debate

LHC Recommendation 14

"The Mayor should use the 'London Plan' planning guidance to support Local Authorities in protecting London's children from junk food through tighter controls within 400 metres of schools and to promote access to healthier alternatives."



- Londoners were extremely concerned about the accessibility of fast food in particular
- There was strong support for limiting the operations of fast food outlets, and for encouraging the development of healthier alternatives

How do we galvanise Londoners?

Londoners were clear that urgent action should be taken to tackle childhood obesity

- Londoners were extremely concerned about the issues raised in the Great Weight Debate
- There was agreement that urgent action should be taken to tackle childhood obesity
- And that Londoners themselves should be – and would want to be – mobilised in support of this action

“There really needs to be a change in the approach against childhood obesity. You can’t just be neutral, you have to actually be against it, otherwise you are part of the problem.”

“We have to do anything we can to reduce this catastrophe.”

Participants identified 4 key criteria for any campaign to galvanise Londoners

1

A clearly identified leader, who assumes ultimate responsibility

- To ensure accountability, and a clear end goal
- Some felt that the Mayor would be best placed to assume this role, because of his high profile, influence and responsibility for Londoners

2

Incorporate learnings from previous behaviour change campaigns

- Including both successful and less successful ones, to maximise chances of success

3

Involve London's children

- Including harnessing “pester power” to amplify messages and encourage parents to change their habits
- This will mean that any campaign needs to be visually-driven and “cool”

4

Focus on solutions

- Need to go beyond just raising awareness to showing and / or involving Londoners in practical steps to tackle the issue

In addition, there are two tensions that any campaign will need to address

“Shock and awe”

- As noted, Londoners were struck by the statistics on childhood obesity shared at the event
- This led many to the view that the most effective thing any campaign could do would be to provide Londoners with hard-hitting facts and arresting images
- This, it was felt, would shock them into awareness
- However, it was not always clear whether Londoners felt that this, on its own, would lead to change

“You need to shock us using statistics or imagery. Like the skeleton of a fat person next to a skinny person.”

VS

Risk of stigma

- Some Londoners and professionals were worried that a “shock and awe” campaign would further stigmatise obese children
- And potentially increase problems like bullying
- This group felt that a campaign should have a positive, motivational tone, and should focus on the importance of being healthy
- And avoid sounding judgemental

“People know they are making bad choices...They already feel guilty. If you feel judged you won't want to engage.”

In addition, there are two tensions that any campaign will need to address

Speak to London as a whole

- Many Londoners felt that this is an issue that affects all Londoners
- Plans to galvanise Londoners should therefore speak to all communities in the same way
- Addressing individual communities will cause the campaign to fragment, and reduce its effectiveness

“If you start to go to this race or that race, it might divide things.”

VS

Account for London’s diversity

- Many Londoners pointed to the vast range of cultures and communities in the city
- This group felt that a “one size fits all” approach to raising awareness would simply not work
- And therefore that any campaign to galvanise Londoners should be tailored to individual communities

“Basically make the conversation community specific. What works in one community doesn’t work in another. What works in Islington might not work in Brixton.”

An information campaign will need to be at the core of any attempt to galvanise Londoners

- There was widespread agreement that the first step in any attempt to mobilise Londoners should be a widespread information campaign to raise awareness of the issue
- This campaign should include the following components:
 - Advertising on public transport
 - Leaflets through people's doors
 - Accessible and honest
 - A high profile "face" for the campaign
 - This should be someone who can secure media attention, is themselves healthy and, crucially, does not have personal links to the food and drink industry.
 - Suggestions included a player from a London football team, David Beckham or the Duchess of Cambridge

"You need people to know about the issue – and make them realise they can solve it."

"We want to make them laugh, we want celebrities in it, BOOSH, BAP, BOLLOP! We've got them!"

"We need somehow to create a cool, fit, healthy role model. Someone in the public eye."

But it will also be important to engage Londoners directly – and there are several ways to do this

1. Gamification

- There was strong support for using Londoners' competitive spirit to motivate them to demand change
- Participants suggested publishing and regularly updating national or international childhood obesity rankings so Londoners can see how they are doing relative to others
- And giving children Fitbits and setting up intra-school competitions (e.g. whose students take, on average, the greatest number of steps per day), with prizes for the top-ranking schools. Children could also track their school's progress on an app, to see how they are doing

2. Healthy living events

- Events themed around healthy living would both attract media attention and be an opportunity to bring Londoners together around a shared issue
- Suggestions included a free "Healthy Living Festival" held in a central location, e.g. Trafalgar Square, where low-cost, healthy food would be available, alongside information on the scale of the problem and advice on how to live healthily and recipe tips
- At a local level, they suggested cooking events focusing on the diverse foods available in local areas, and demonstrations showing how to prepare healthy versions of world foods

3. Online campaigns and petitions

- Numerous participants were aware of recent petitions that have received considerable media attention. This led them to suggest that a petition demanding action on childhood obesity should be created
- This could be supported by a hashtag that Londoners could use to share their thoughts on childhood obesity
- Together these would generate press attention and show policy makers that this issue is important to Londoners
- And would also be a tangible action that Londoners could easily take

4. Involve the private sector

- Londoners were clear that in order to succeed, any drive to tackle childhood obesity in London will need to involve the private sector
- Supermarkets in particular were felt to have a role to play - for example by allowing Londoners to accumulate vouchers that their schools could then use to buy Fitbits
- In addition, the private sector could share its skills (for example, app development) or provide funding where the public sector is unable to do so

But it will also be important to engage Londoners directly – and there are several ways to do this

1. Gamification

“Gameify it. Have online competitions, competitions on apps. Have a fun approach to encourage more activity.”

2. Healthy living events

“You could have cooking workshops. Have food people, nutritionists, chefs talk about food, portion sizes and how to cook meals on a budget.”

3. Petitions

“The lady who had to wear heels in the workplace had a petition and now it is going to Parliament. The same would need to happen to childhood obesity. Call for no sugar at all in drinks.”

4. Involve the private sector

“There should be reward incentives – Tesco vouchers have got me to Disneyland! Instead of reward points for shopping, do stuff to do with children, sportswear, sports for children.”

06 Next steps

Many great ideas were put forward in Stage 1 of the Great Weight Debate which will continue throughout 2016/17. Over the coming months, the delivery unit for the Great Weight Debate within Healthy London Partnership will:

- Continue to engagement with Stage 1 participants through a planned “Voice of Londoners” group, which will work with the London Prevention Board to steer the Great Weight Debate by ensuring that Londoners views are heard and responded to.
- Develop a hub of tools and resources for local boroughs and CCGs to use in order to support them in engaging their local communities as part of Stage 2
- Work closely with the London Mayor’s office and devolution team to identify London-wide opportunities for delivering policy or legislative changes.
- Continue to work closely with the London Obesity Leadership Group, sharing findings from the Great Weight Debate and reviewing borough sector-led improvement work to identify best practice that can be shared to enable London-wide learning and improvement.

Contact the Healthy Londoner Partnership to get involved:
<https://www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk/healthy-london-partnership>

Twitter: @HealthyLDN



The Great Weight Debate...a London conversation on childhood obesity

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