

# Towards a healthy weight

How local councils  
are supporting adults  
to lose weight

# Foreword

With so much focus on childhood obesity over recent years, we can sometimes forget adults need support too. After all, nearly two in three adults are overweight or obese.

It is easy to understand why. As a nation we are eating too much of the wrong foods and not being active enough. That puts not only our physical health at risk, but it is also causing social and emotional problems too.

This has an impact on the community and economy, reducing productivity and putting more pressure on social care through the need for increased support from installing stair lifts to helping people cope with reduced mobility and independence.

Obesity is also a contributor to health inequalities with low-income groups, people with disabilities and those struggling with mental health problems all more likely to be affected. Some black and minority ethnic groups have the added disadvantage of experiencing the equivalent risk to health at a lower BMI.

Obesity is a chronic condition which requires multi-level action across all sectors, and part of this action should include local authorities and clinical commissioning groups co-commissioning weight management services across the obesity pathway.

Up-and-down the country, councils are playing an important role in supporting people through commissioning what are known as tier two weight management services.

These are targeted programmes free-at-the-point-of-access for people who are overweight or obese. Coupled with the wider tier one population-level work, work in this area can make a huge difference. Although it is not a mandatory requirement.

The standard approach to tier two services is to provide 12 weeks of support to encourage healthy eating and physical activity with follow-up support to sustain the weight loss.

Ambitious targets have been set for them with services expected to achieve 5 per cent weight loss in 30 per cent of cases. Research shows success on this scale can bring about significant benefits, reducing pressure on joints, lowering the risk of cancer, preventing type two diabetes, cutting cholesterol and easing high blood pressure.

Many council-commissioned services are achieving this and more. As the case studies in this report shows, local government is full of good practice with many programmes seeing really significant weight loss in excess of 3.4kg being recorded in the national NHS diabetes prevention programme.

Councils are achieving this by being innovative. In West Sussex and North Yorkshire, councils have worked with their districts to create flexible services that can respond to local need across large geographies.

Others have experimented with shorter courses to appeal to time-poor residents, while Southend-on-Sea's provider is teaming up with substance misuse services, sheltered housing and the local job centre to take services direct to hard-to-reach groups.

Councils are learning to do more with less. Sheffield City Council has integrated its tier two service with a tier three offer – normally the responsibility of the NHS – to help those with severe obesity.

Meanwhile, Essex County Council has created an army of weight loss advisers by training pharmacists, voluntary sector staff and parish council workers to deliver support.

The work is making a huge difference not only to individuals, but the whole communities councils serve.

**Councillor Ian Hudspeth**

Chairman

LGA Community Wellbeing Board

# Key facts

**62%** of adults are overweight or obese  
(Public Health England (PHE))

**22%** of adults are inactive  
(NHS Digital)

**71%** of adults do not eat five portions  
of fruit and vegetables a day  
(NHS Digital)

**10,660** hospital admissions directly  
attributable to obesity  
(NHS Digital)

**711,000** hospital admissions where  
obesity was a factor  
(NHS Digital)

Being overweight or obese  
is linked to a wide range of  
diseases, most commonly

- type 2 diabetes
- hypertension
- some cancers
- heart disease
- stroke
- liver disease.

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# Want to know more?

A guide to delivering and commissioning tier two adult weight management services (PHE and NICE 2017)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/737905/Tier2\\_adult\\_weight\\_management\\_services\\_\\_guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/737905/Tier2_adult_weight_management_services__guide.pdf)

Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet (NHS Digital)

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet-england-2019>

Adult weight management guidelines (NICE)

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph53/chapter/7-Glossary](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph53/chapter/7-Glossary)

PHEFingertips: a web platform that provides easy access to in-depth analysis of a wide range of health and health related data in thematic profiles

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk>

Let's talk about weight: a step-by-step guide to brief interventions with adults for health and care professionals (PHE)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-weight-management-a-guide-to-brief-interventions](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-weight-management-a-guide-to-brief-interventions)

Weight management services: insights into user experiences

Findings from qualitative research into journeys and experiences of tier 2 and tier 3 weight management service users (PHE)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/weight-management-services-insights-into-user-experiences](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/weight-management-services-insights-into-user-experiences)

Adult obesity: applying All Our Health (PHE)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-obesity-applying-all-our-health/adult-obesity-applying-all-our-health](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-obesity-applying-all-our-health/adult-obesity-applying-all-our-health)

# Case studies

# BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL: THE BENEFITS OF A CONDENSED PROGRAMME

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The London council has started piloting new ways of delivering courses. The most innovative involves shortening the standard 12-week programme to eight classes – the approach has proved popular with nine in 10 starters completing the course.

## Local context

The borough of Barking and Dagenham is in east London and is home to around 210,000 people. Like many areas in the capital, it has a diverse population with four in 10 local people from black and ethnic minority groups.

The proportion of obese and overweight adults is just above 64 per cent, a little above the national average.

The council has been running a successful adult weight management programme for some time. The Momenta service, delivered by the council itself, is similar to many others in that it is run over 12 weeks. The sessions are focussed on nutrition and last one hour. Participants also get free access to the borough's council leisure centres.

Outcomes have been good – an average weight loss of more 3kg has been recorded for completers with more than half losing 3 per cent of their body weight. But there was a desire to do more to increase the numbers starting and completing the courses.

## The solution

This led the healthy lifestyles team to try out new ways of delivering weight management support. In April 2019 it introduced a system of rolling starts so clients did not have to all begin in one cohort. The model was piloted in one of its nine quarterly groups that got under way that month.

Health Lifestyles Team Relationships Manager, Danielle Walker, said: “One of the problems we found was that people wanted to do a specific course – maybe an evening or weekend one, or one that was closest to where they live. But if they had missed the start of the course they would have to wait another two or three months.

“You risk losing them if you don't have something available quickly. We normally do an introduction sessions at the start, so instead we invite new clients to come along half an hour earlier for a chat with the facilitator.”

The second initiative that has been piloted has involved running a condensed eight-week course. This includes a six consecutive weeks of classes followed by follow-up classes at week nine and 12.

Ms Walker said: “Some people had said 12 weeks was quite a commitment and so we thought we would explore a shorter version of the course. We know that by week six there is really good weight loss, but we have been quite strict with people – we expect them to attend all the classes to complete the course, whereas for the 12-week version nine attendances class as a completion.”

To help ensure attendance and to motivate people, the team introduced an incentive system. The client with the greatest weight loss has been given an £20 amazon voucher, while the individual with the best attendance gets a spa voucher.

## The impact

The changes have proved successful. The number of rolling classes has increased from one a quarter to four at the start of 2020.

The condensed course has also continued with plans to expand the number being run in the future.

The early results suggest weight loss is on par with the longer classes and the completion rate is much higher – nine in 10 participants who have started the course have finished it.

One of those was Arnel Sullano. He lost 8kg on the course, describing the support he received as fantastic. “I feel great now – and I will feel even better as time goes by.”

Overall the numbers taking part are rising with extra classes put on during the last two quarters, while the team has taken on extra facilitators. “I fully expect to see the numbers going through to start rising. We have got a budget for 450 so we want to get much nearer to that,” added Ms Walker.

## Lessons learned

Condensing a weight management programme into a shorter programme has required a change in the way the classes are delivered. All the shorter classes have all been run by one facilitator, Julian Whiddon, so far.

He has adapted the programme by creating more free-flowing discussions. Instead of following the scripted programme, which tends to take one theme at a time, Mr Whiddon lets the participants lead the discussions with a little direction from him.

Mr Whiddon said: “This approach helps to build rapport within the group as a unit. I steer the discussion to facilitate greater learning. I use a lot of questioning to engage the group and to try and come up with the answers between them.

“This gives them some empowerment and ownership of the lesson. I also include a lot of motivational work – I believe a truly motivated person becomes unstoppable.”

The council has also reduced the threshold for eligibility for the weight management programme. Traditionally it was only open to those with a BMI of over 30, but this has now been reduced to over 25.

Ms Walker said the benefits of this are three-fold. “It gives us a wider pool of people to try to engage with and also makes more sense from a prevention point of view. But we were also guided by evidence that showed that the black community see some of the health problems associated with being obese at a much lower BMI. We wanted to respond to that.”

## Next steps

Barking and Dagenham is keen to build on what has been achieved with the shorter classes and is now looking at running more.

Ms Walker said: “The rolling starts have worked well and now we have four of them – one in the morning, one in the afternoon, one in the evening and one at the weekend. That feels about right. People appreciate the choice and flexibility it gives them.

“But we are now looking at doing more shorter courses. We won’t get rid of the 12-week classes altogether, but we certainly want to do more. Julian is going to start working with some of the other facilitators and writing up information about running them based on what he has learned.

“The approach is quite different so we need to be careful how quickly we roll it out. But we have great faith that this is a really good option. We have a very diverse population so we have to make sure our programmes are tailored to what people need.”

## Contact details

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# BARNSELY COUNCIL: MAKING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES SUSTAINABLE

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Barnsley has refreshed its approach to weight management. Local communities have been given funding to set up activities that encourage physical activity and promote mental wellbeing, while support is provided through a 12-week programme provided by the local leisure provider.

## Local context

Barnsley is home to around 240,000 people. Nearly 70 per cent of adults carry excess weight – well above the national average.

South Yorkshire has high rates of deprivation and is ranked the 39th most deprived local authority area in the country. Life expectancy is lower than the national average and people growing up in the area can expect to have six fewer years of good health during their lives.

With this in mind, and as part of a review of the provision in 2018, the council's public health team was keen to shift the focus towards reducing health inequalities and doing more to encourage clients to continue making progress once they had completed the 12-week programme.

## The solution

Barnsley Council launched the Barnsley Wellbeing Service as a pilot programme in January 2019. It included two elements. The first part involved commissioning the leisure provider Barnsley Premier Leisure (BPL) to run a 12-week weight management programme, the Barnsley Wellbeing Support Programme.

The second part offered wellbeing grants worth £130,000 to the six area teams that operate in the borough to help fund local projects that improve mental wellbeing, encourage physical activity and promote wider healthy lifestyles.

Public Health Principal, Cath Bedford, said: "We wanted to move to a more whole system approach whereby we promote and create support groups in local communities to encourage people, as well as clients who take part in the weight management programme, to remain active and healthy.

"The aim was to do more to address some of the root causes of ill-health and the barriers people may face that prevent them losing weight. Part of this is to provide social and emotional health support alongside the traditional activities."

## The impact

It is still early days, but already the signs are encouraging. Over the past year more than 260 people have taken part in the 12-week programme with an average weight loss of 4.2kg recorded for those who have completed it.

Meanwhile, the wellbeing grants have been used to fund more than 30 different projects with an emphasis on projects that support the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' framework. These include a learning support hub for isolated adults, a dance project and cook-and-eat sessions.

Ms Bedford said: "The results we are getting are really positive, but it's not just the programme itself. There are some really encouraging signs in terms of sustaining physical activity through gym membership, for example, as well as the feedback we have received from the local projects that have been funded.

"We hope to see the benefit of this in the coming years with people living healthier lifestyles."

## Lessons learned

The service pays close attention to mental wellbeing. At the start and end of the programme assessments are carried out using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.

Ms Bedford said: “We’ve realised one of the key barriers people can face in terms of getting engaged with weight management and becoming healthier more generally is linked to wellbeing and confidence.

“So our BPL advisers will meet the clients before they start the programme. They spend some time listening and understanding the needs and confidence of the client. This can involve showing them how the gym equipment works. The support can last for up to 12 weeks – it really depends on the individual.

“If you are going to address inequalities and engage the people who need support, you have to be prepared to provide extra help to build trust, confidence and self-esteem.”

## Next steps

Barnsley is planning to carry out a full evaluation of the new approach to help inform future decision-making and continue to ensure there is both good support for clients and step-up and step-down arrangements for those who need more intensive help from the tier three service commissioned by the clinical commissioning group (CCG).

The new approach to weight management is, however, just one part of the new whole system approach adopted by Barnsley.

The council has published a food plan in the last year as well. It is aimed at changing the food environment and culture within the borough as well as improving access to quality food.

Successful achievements to date include the introduction of new planning guidance on hot food takeaways, which details when it is appropriate to curb the proliferation of new ones. The council has also removed the sale of full sugar drinks from council buildings.

Senior Public Health Officer, Anna Stobbs, said: “There is plenty more we want to do. We want to make sure that healthy eating is a consideration in the decisions that all parts of the council take. We believe we can have the greatest impact this way.”

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# ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL: CREATING AN ARMY OF WEIGHT LOSS ADVISERS

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Essex County Council and its weight management provider have trained a whole network of new informal weight loss advisers. Hundreds of pharmacists, parish council workers and voluntary sector staff are now delivering advice and support to thousands of people.

## Local context

Essex is home to nearly 1.5 million people across 12 districts. There is only one city, Chelmsford. The health of the local population is generally better than the England average, although the proportion of people who are overweight and obese is higher.

The council has been running a traditional adult weight management service for a number of years. But like in many areas the service only had capacity for a tiny proportion of those carrying excess weight.

Around 4,000 people a year were being supported – less than 1 per cent of those who are overweight or obese.

## The solution

Working with the weight management service provider Anglian Community Enterprise (ACE), Head of Wellbeing and Public Health, Adrian Coggins, began to explore new ways to deliver services three years ago.

Mr Coggins said: “We started with a focus on outcomes – we wanted to radically increase the number of people who we supported so we could have a great impact. I had responsibility for funding the Council for Voluntary Services at the time and so started having conversations with them.”

The solution they came up with was to expand provision of weight management support to other partners, including pharmacists, parish council staff and third sector workers and volunteers, and grow the number and type of venues in which support was offered.

The training has been provided by ACE and is tailored to the individual settings. It is either delivered on site or via group workshops, while one-off extra training has been arranged for new volunteers and staff members.

The new advisers have been taught how to provide a ‘light-touch’ weight management service with ACE concentrating on the most complex cases. The partners are given a range of materials and leaflets as well as scales and provided with information about where to signpost people on to take part in physical activity.

Mr Coggins said: “Light-touch means we do not have a set amount of sessions. It is more informal than that. Part of it is simply having nice conversations and providing proper support in the right way. The instructors guide the conversations and help organise physical activity opportunities. Weight measurements are taken so ACE can monitor progress.

“Every client is triaged. It is not just about BMI. We consider their emotional health and social networks alongside any health conditions they may have. ACE then focus on those more difficult cases, while our partners pick up the others.”

## The impact

Since the start of 2018, more than 500 new advisers have been trained and there are now more than 80 different clinics in operation. Unsurprisingly, it has increased the reach of the weight management programme with numbers going up by 30 per cent to more than 6,500 in the first full year of operation.

The performance in terms of weight loss has been maintained with an average weight loss of 3.7kg, while costs have dropped by 50 per cent.

The clients who have benefitted say they love the convenience and ease of using the new services. Caroline (not her real name) lost more than 12kg after getting support from the Castlepoint and Rochford Community Voluntary Service. She said: “I looked into several different weight lost programmes, but none of them fitted around my child and our weekly routines. Then I found this programme. It was perfect.”

There have been additional benefits too with partner organisations reporting an increase in people using their services and coming forward to volunteer.

Lisa Andrews, from Community Voluntary Service Tendering, said she is delighted to be part of the programme. “It has proved really popular with staff who are running the sessions. We have received positive feedback and it is creating a great new stream of people into our organisation.”

## Lessons learned

Overhauling service in this way took time – about 18 months from start to finish. Mr Coggins said: “We had meetings between the provider and CVS. We had to set up the training and we had to spend time reassuring colleagues at the council and in partner organisations.

“In local government it is easy to become too obsessed with wanting to over professionalise things. We are cautious – we worry about litigation.

“Moving in this direction requires letting go. If we are going to have an impact on a wider population level, we have to realise we cannot just rely on the specialist service approach.”

## Next steps

Mr Coggins acknowledges this is just the start of the process. “We want to keep increasing the reach. We haven’t set any targets but it could be 100 per cent, 200 per cent, 10,000 per cent. Who knows where this could take us?”

To help keep building on this, Essex is looking at digital approaches by exploring using its Facebook communities to provide support and setting up an online version of the traditional face-to-face offer.

“We are part way through this journey – interventions with delivery partners have undoubtedly become less traditional and less professionalised and focussed solely on weight management as a more generic social element has been introduced.

“The culmination of this approach is self-organising, self-directed and self-helping groups with zero or very little input from professionals other than acting as the occasional reference point for support and advice. It is a big leap, but we are convinced it is the right one,” added Mr Coggins.

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# ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON COUNCIL: THE BENEFITS OF USING THE BIG BRANDS

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The Royal Borough of Kingston revamped its weight management, opting to work with the big commercial providers Slimming World and WW (previously known as Weight Watchers). It has meant more choice for clients and better value for the council.

## Local context

Kingston is a London borough in the south west of the capital. It is home to 175,000 people. The area is relatively affluent and while rates of excess weight among adults are lower than the national average, over half are still overweight or obese.

When responsibility for weight management services was transferred to Kingston Council in 2013, there were 18 separate weight-management clinics run from GP practises and community pharmacies under the banner of Weigh-2-Go.

But faced with cuts to the budget and a desire to commission the most effective services, Kingston's public health team began to explore new ways to provide the service.

## The solution

The council negotiated contracts with the two leading commercial providers in the market – Slimming World and WW – while contracts with the majority of the primary care-led clinics ended.

The contracts with Slimming World, WW and the remaining Weigh-2-Go clinic were all negotiated as paid-per-person participating.

Residents with a BMI of over 28 – or over 25 if they have other health conditions – are entitled to free access to a 12-week programme of weight management support. The focus is on healthy eating, the importance of physical activity and motivational techniques. The services also provide detailed information and links to the physical

activity options available locally.

Council Public Health Principal, Martha Earley, said: "One of the benefits of using the big national brands like WW and Slimming World is that we have been able to tap into some successful, evidence-based services that would simply not be available if we were trying to run support in-house, due to the costs associated with delivering these services."

This includes a range of specialist services for pregnant and breastfeeding who have experienced weight changes. These services help them to respond in an informed and positive way, preventing overeating, promoting exercise and continuing to breast-feed whilst getting the right level of nutrition needed.

People referred to these services can also use any of the WW and Slimming World services anywhere in the world – so if they are visiting a family member in another part of the country, at work or even on holiday they can still attend a group.

Kingston has also been able to extend access to the service to people who work or study in the borough. Ms Earley said: "People who live, work and study in our borough all play a vital part in community life and enabling one another to be as healthy as they can be. Enabling people to maintain a healthy weight avoids the adverse impact on our local economy that preventable weight-related ill-health can bring.

"We encourage neighbouring boroughs to do something similar – so it is reciprocated. We believe it is important to provide access like this as it extends the choice people have – you need to make services accessible if you are to engage people," added Ms Earley.

## The impact

The three services are consistently reaching high numbers of people. More than 300 people are supported each year, achieving an average weight loss of 4.4kg for those who

complete the course. Some 32 per cent of completers in 2018-19 achieved a 5 per cent weight loss, above the national target for such services.

One of those is Rachel (not her real name). She was 43 when she completed the Slimming World programme, losing 8kg.

“I was nervous when I went to join the group for the first time, but the people were lovely and my consultant was just fab. I liked that there’s a bit of variety with food optimising – you can adjust most recipes to be Slimming World-friendly.

“Before I started my journey my feet and knees hurt, but this has eased since losing weight. I’m more agile than I was and I feel stronger.”

This success has been achieved at the same time as a significant saving on spending. The annual budget for weight management services has reduced from £32,000 2013 to £20,000 in 2020, while treating more patients.

## Lessons learned

Kingston has paid close attention to how it promotes these services. At the same time as it has overhauled the delivery of weight management services, the public health team has also looked to change the way it engages people.

A new social prescribing platform – Connected Kingston – has been set up which details all the health and lifestyle services available in the borough, including the weight management options. People can refer themselves directly using the website and will then be triaged by the Healthy Lifestyles Hub. There are also five social prescribers, who work closely with GPs.

Making Every Contact Count training is also being provided to more than 200 Connected Kingston Community Champions drawn from the local community. They include everyone from librarians and voluntary sector staff to social workers.

The champions have been given behavioural change training so they can engage people in conversations about lifestyle and in turn refer on to support, like the weight management services.

Ms Earley said: “We have tried to make sure we have good reach into all sections of the community, especially those who experience health inequalities. We need to take action, across the system, to ensure that those who need support the most know what’s on offer and are encouraged to access it.”

## Next steps

Kingston is in the process of commissioning a digital weight management service. It has chosen to use Our Path, an online service that has been used by the NHS for diabetes-focussed programmes.

The aim is to provide support via a bespoke online programme. The work with diabetes patients shows good engagement – eight in 10 complete the course.

Public Health Nutritionist, Francesca Millar, said: “Not everyone is able to access the face-to-face groups and some people may not feel comfortable in them.

“Kingston data has consistently shown under representation, both for those referred and enrolled in the programme, from men. This inequity of access to services means that men are not routinely receiving the same support with their weight as women.

“Our Path have a good record on recruiting men. We think having a good digital offer will enhance the choices we provide people with and help reach those we are currently missing.”

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# LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT

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Luton's weight management team is now part of an integrated service, Total Wellbeing Luton, involving a range of programmes from stop smoking support to talking therapies. It has allowed the weight management team to provide a more comprehensive package of support to clients with a particular focus on emotional health.

## Local context

Luton is in the county of Bedfordshire and is primarily urban. It has a population of just over 200,000 and is the 59th most deprived local authority area.

Life expectancy is lower than the national average although the population has low rates of physical activity and just over 60 per cent of adults are carrying excess weight – in line with the national average.

Like all areas, Luton provides a range of healthy lifestyle support from stop smoking services to weight management and talking therapies. These used to be run by individual providers. However, four years ago the council's public health team and the local CCG began re-thinking this approach.

## The solution

The decision was taken to create a more integrated service, leading to the formation of Total Wellbeing Luton. The service is delivered by social enterprise Turning Point in partnership with community wellbeing trust Active Luton.

All referrals are given an assessment within a single point of access and then the most appropriate support is arranged. It means as well as getting weight management support people can also be offered other interventions and programmes at the same time with a coordinated bespoke plan for the individual.

Like before, the weight management course lasts for 10 weeks and is aimed at people with a

BMI of over 25. The sessions involve 45 minutes of physical activity and 45 minutes of nutritional advice, covering everything from food labelling and snacking to the 'Eat Well' plate.

But one of the major benefits of the integrated approach is that the service has been able to incorporate the emotional and psychological elements of excess weight into the programme.

There is a workshop called food and mood, which is co-delivered with a member of the talking therapies team, while the five ways to wellbeing and mindfulness have both been incorporated into other elements of the programme.

Alongside the core weight management programme, there is a bespoke scheme for people with long-term conditions. The team of level four exercise specialists can combine weight loss support with rehab and tailored exercise programmes depending on the health conditions they have.

Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Councillor Khtija Malik, said: "The new service recognises that improving both physical and mental health is instrumental in improving our overall wellbeing.

"The Total Wellbeing approach is about motivating people to take control of their health and recognises that health behaviours are complex and need a holistic approach. The integrated health and wellbeing service is already making a positive difference to the lives of Luton's residents."

## The impact

The weight management service has been getting good results. Last year more than 270 adults went through the service with 68 per cent completing the course.

Total Wellbeing Luton Health Specialist Manager, Layla Ravey, said: "The ability to do more on the psychological side of diet

and obesity has been a real bonus. Excess weight is so often tied up with our emotional wellbeing – it can be just as important as encouraging people to become physically active and getting their diet right.

“Another benefit of the integrated service is that referring on to other support programmes such as stop smoking services and talking therapies is so easy and seamless. It has enabled us to wrap support around the individual depending on what they need.”

One of those who has benefited is Justine. She had been struggling with weight and low mood issues for years before she was referred on to the programme. She said the advisers who support her were really knowledgeable and made the sessions fun.

“I learnt a great deal, such as just how important breakfast is, how to spot hidden sugars on food labelling and portion awareness. There was an exercise component too which enabled me to try different forms of exercise, such as Zumba, combat and Pilates. My confidence and stamina grew.”

By the end of the programme she had lost 11 per cent of her weight and over 10cms from her waist. Following the programme, she bought membership for her local leisure centre and now swims and use the gym regularly.

She added: “I feel amazing. I have transformed into someone I don’t recognise to be honest. I feel better than I have done in over a decade. I eat well, feel well, sleep better and rarely feel anxious.”

## Lessons learned

As the integrated service has bedded in, Luton has been able to tweak and improve its offer. An example of this is the drop-in sessions that are being run at two of the seven Active Luton facilities.

These are open to people who are doing a course or who have finished one. The aim is to provide support and encouragement when it is needed.

Ms Ravey said: “It has proved to be a good

way of keeping people engaged and it has certainly been a key factor in why we have seen such good completion rates.

“There are also other things we have done to make it easier for people to keep coming. The session times are staggered across the seven leisure centres so if people cannot make their regular one for some reason – either because of childcare or work commitments – they can go to another. You have to look at ways to make it easy for people to keep coming.”

## Next steps

The service is constantly looking at new ways to increase its reach. It has just produced some bite-sized videos covering nutrition and physical activity. The aim is to produce an online resource for people who cannot make it to the classes or to supplement the work being done in the classes.

The service is also keen to do more bespoke work for employers. Last year it ran a course for NHS staff from Luton and Dunstable University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. Funding was provided by the trust and NHS Improvement and paid for 70 places on a weight management course and a three-month free activity pass for the leisure centres.

Half of the participants reduced their BMI by at least 10 per cent, while increased in fruit and vegetable intake, physical activity levels and reduced levels of depression and anxiety.

Ms Ravey added: “It was really successful. Employers are showing an increased interest in their staff’s health and wellbeing and we think we can help them with that. We have also delivered similar services in schools and run courses to pupils, parents and staff. The range of expertise we have mean we can tailor programmes to a wide variety of needs.”

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# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL: COORDINATING SUPPORT ACROSS A LARGE AND DIVERSE AREA

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North Yorkshire County Council has set up an adult weight management service with multiple providers to allow services to cope with the complexity and diversity of needs across its seven districts. It is proving to be an effective way of working with weight loss at double the rate that is expected.

## Local context

North Yorkshire is the largest county in England at more than 8,600 sq km. There are seven districts stretching from the coastal area of Scarborough to towns including Selby and Harrogate and large expanses of rural land.

The county is home to more than 600,000 people excluding those living in the unitary authority areas of York, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland.

The proportion of adults who are overweight or obese have crept up in recent years, although at 61 per cent they remain broadly in line with the national average. The rates vary from area to area with the highest numbers seen in Selby where close to 70 per cent have excess weight.

Following the transfer of public health responsibilities to local government, the public health team started exploring providing a tier two weight management service to adults in 2014.

## The solution

Faced with the challenge of reaching out across such a large and diverse area, the council set up a pilot programme, which saw services set up across the seven districts.

These were then evaluated in 2017 by Teesside University, which made a number of recommendations for how services should look in the future. These included the flexibility to tailor approaches to the different areas, while retaining a consistent approach in areas such as staff training, referrals routes and offering choice and support in terms of physical activity.

A single specification for the whole county was then developed and the services launched. There are actually six different providers – two districts share a provider. All are provided either by NHS or district council teams.

The programme offers adults with BMIs of over 25 access to support. Following referral they are given a health assessment before starting a 12-week programme. At the end of the programme they are again assessed and then provided with a maintenance programme to ensure the weight loss is sustained up to the 24-week mark.

If they have not achieved the goal of 5 per cent weight loss, they are given the opportunity to restart the programme after a 24-week gap.

North Yorkshire Health Improvement Manager, Ruth Everson, said: “We did explore different models, but it became clear that provision of the service required district level provision. We have multiple providers delivering the same service across seven areas.

“Given the geography, differences and complexity of delivering services across such a large region, it was the right option.

“The providers have a network together – they meet and share best practice and research. Although the providers deliver tightly according to the service specification, there are flexibilities in the model.

“For example, some providers timetable the physical activity opportunities at the same time as the nutrition and diet classes, while others timetable them at separate times. It just depends on the local circumstances and what works best. The variations are shared across providers to ensure continuous improvement.”

## The impact

The first full year post the pilot stage was 2018. During the 12 months, there were 3,040 referrals across the seven areas. Around 95 per cent came from self-referral or GP with the rest split between a variety of other sources including social care.

The number of clients completing the 12-week programme – defined as clients who attend nine of the sessions – averaged 41 per cent.

Two-thirds of those achieved the 5 per cent target weight loss – more than doubled the expected level. Just under half sustained that weight loss at the 24 weeks mark.

Public Health Improvement Officer, Jess Marshall, who delivered classes in a previous role, said one of the key ingredients to the success has been the peer-led approach that has been adopted in the nutrition and diet sessions.

“We let the participants lead the discussions – we’ve found that is a good way to get participants engaged. They’re steered towards certain themes by the people who run the groups – we want to make sure the full range of topics are covered – but it’s the participants who decide where it goes from there. It makes it very interactive for the group.”

## Lessons learned

The pilot period taught North Yorkshire and its partners some valuable lessons that were used to develop the service specification. One of the most interesting was related to the need to get people on to the programme quickly.

Mrs Everson said: “In some of our districts they started out by having a fixed cohort who would all start the programme at the same time. But that meant that people could be waiting several months before they would begin their weight management programme.

“That is too long and you risk people losing enthusiasm. What we found worked better was a rolling programme so that people could join at the time that suits them.

“That fits in nicely with the peer-led element. When people first join, they become inspired by those that are already part way through. It’s something that has been adopted across all seven services. It means the groups can get quite large at times – up to 30 people – but it still works well.”

## Next steps

The programme has become a victim of its own success. The high success rate, in terms of completers losing 5 per cent of their weight, has resulted in pressures on the budget.

Mrs Everson said: “We’re having to look at how we can manage the service within budget. We have thought about capping the number of referrals, but that would mean some of the services will have to stop accepting referrals for large parts of the year.

“That doesn’t seem appropriate so we are beginning to look at how we can target the service more. It is likely we will increase the BMI threshold at which people become eligible for support.”

Beyond the weight management service, there is plenty of other work going on under the ‘Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategy’ too.

There is a particular stress on tackling what is called the obesogenic environment. This includes steps such as a healthier choices award schemes for food businesses and healthy vending machine criteria.

One of the newest projects that is under way involves the piloting of the Moving Medicine scheme in one of the local primary care networks. The PHE tool helps healthcare professionals talk to their patients about the benefits of physical activity for their particular circumstances – research shows many do not speak to their patients about how exercise can help.

The GPs taking part have been linked in with the local sports partnership so they can signpost patients to local opportunities to get active.

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# PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL: HELPING THOSE WHO LACK MOTIVATION

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Portsmouth's weight management service has been achieving good results since it was launched. But the service has started exploring new ways of engaging those clients who lack motivation by launching a pilot scheme involving six-week workshops with the aim of using the power of peer support.

## Local context

Portsmouth is home to nearly 240,000 people. The port city has high levels of deprivation – the local authority area is ranked 63rd most deprived.

Life expectancy levels are lower than the national average, while just over 64 per cent of people are overweight or obese – a little above the national average.

## The solution

To support residents, Portsmouth City Council's public health team set up an integrated healthy lifestyle service in 2015. It is run in-house by a team of wellbeing workers, providing support to help residents quit smoking, drink less alcohol and achieve a healthy weight through eating well and moving more.

The Portsmouth Wellbeing Service operates from venues across the city and is a free service. It offers one-to-one appointments, group sessions and drop-in clinics. The focus of the service is on education and achievable goals, which can enable long-term change.

The weight management element involves a 12-week programme, which combines nutritional advice with physical activity opportunities. It is open to those with a BMI of over 30, or over 28 depending on ethnicity, and to children who are above the 90th percentile.

At any one time there are five different courses running, involving around 100 people in total. One-to-one support is available for those who need it, while follow-up help is provided for up to 12 months. This involves drop-in sessions with the wellbeing workers to discuss progress and challenges.

Around a third of referrals come from GPs with a similar proportion made via self-referral. The rest come from other sources, including the local hospital and midwifery team.

Wellbeing Service Manager, Helen Simmons, said: "We tailor the support to individuals. The different referral routes mean there is real variation in how motivated clients can be. Some will need more support than others – that is why we do provide one-to-one support where needed."

## The impact

The approach has served the team well with good results being consistently achieved. Support was provided to 475 people over the past year with more than 300 recorded as having finished the course. One in 10 achieved over 20kg weight loss.

One of those who has benefited is Paul Tonkins, 63. He lost more than 30kg during the programme – and plans to lose even more now.

He found he started to put on more weight after retiring 18 months ago, describing himself as a "couch potato". "I found myself needing to nap as I had no energy. Walking upstairs was difficult too."

But he said his life was turned around by the support he received. "The service was amazing. One of the best things I learnt with them was portion size. I'd never really thought about this before and found out that I was having about four times as much cereal for breakfast as you're supposed to.

“I massively reduced my drinking as I wasn’t thinking about how many calories that was adding. I used to drink most days but I don’t now and when I go to the darts I have diet coke. I’ve stopped having treats and alcohol in the house and don’t snack anymore.

“I cycle all over the city and have joined the gym so that I can exercise when the weather is bad. I’ve definitely got more energy and don’t find myself falling asleep in the afternoon. I can also keep up with my granddaughter more, which is brilliant.

“Before using the service my doctor was going to refer me to the specialist obesity service at the hospital where I’d possibly need surgery to fit a gastric band to get my weight down but I don’t need to go through this now.”

## Lessons learned

While there are plenty of success stories like Mr Tonkins, Portsmouth has taken a close interest in the cases where there is not such clear progress.

Ms Simmons said: “You look at the commercial weight loss programmes and they can have some really good results – better than council schemes. But by their very nature they are working with really motivated people, they are paying for the service after all.

“For council services, it is not always like that. But that can be lost if we simply focus on recording weight loss.”

In recognition of this, Portsmouth has started recording levels of activation and engagement by using the Patient Activation Measure scale.

“It shows that some patients start off with very low levels of activation. By the end of 12 weeks they may not have lost weight or lost very little. That does not look like a success, but we can see that activations levels have actually increased.

“The problem is that a standard 12-week course is simply not enough for some people even with the one-to-one support we provide. Some clients are only just starting to get their head round five-a-day.”

## Next steps

The service started to look at new ways to support clients last year. A pilot scheme based around six-week Living Well Workshops was launched in November.

The workshops were run by the service’s wellbeing workers and contain fewer clients than would normally take part in a 12-week programme. They are based on addressing the wider barriers that individuals face in terms of engaging with weight loss support.

Ms Simmons said: “There is a bit of nutritional advice, but the emphasis is very much on peer support and encouraging people to discuss the stresses and difficulties they face. Social isolation, self-esteem and confidence can be big barriers. But by working together in these small groups of about eight people we want to help people overcome these.”

The idea is that once they have completed the workshop they could then do a 12-week weight management programme. The first workshop cohort ran before Christmas with another two planned for 2020 before a full evaluation of the pilot.

“We hope as a group they will support each other and continue to do so as they move on through the weight management programme. It could help improve activation and engagement,” added Ms Simmons.

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# REDBRIDGE COUNCIL: DEVELOPING A WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH

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Two years ago Redbridge launched a weight management service to complement its exercise-on-referral scheme. It has proved to be a huge success, but now the council is aiming to build on that work by developing a whole systems approach – dubbed “a partnership approach on steroids” – to tackle obesity.

## Local context

Redbridge is a London borough in the north east of the capital. It is home to around 300,000 people and is one of the most ethnically diverse councils in the country with two-thirds of residents describing themselves as from black or minority ethnic groups.

Redbridge is roughly in the middle of English local authorities in terms of overall deprivation – ranked 160 – although that does hide some pockets of quite extreme deprivation.

Life expectancy is higher than both the London and national average, while the proportion of adults who are overweight or obese is 56.4 per cent, below the national average.

## The solution

Redbridge has commissioned a successful exercise-on-referral programme for over five years. In 2018 it was decided to extend its support and run a tier two weight management scheme as obesity was the top reason for referral to the exercise programme.

Leisure provider Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure was commissioned to provide this service off the back of their work with the exercise-on-referral scheme.

Vision has trained some of its referral staff on level four diabetes and obesity management to enable them to deliver a weight management service to those with a BMI

of over 30 incorporating exercise, nutrition advice and motivational-interviewing.

The service is open to all residents aged 16 and over. They are invited to six sessions looking at healthy eating, food labels, portion control and in addition are offered 12 sessions of physical activity.

## The impact

The service is still very new, but Redbridge said the feedback received from participants has been “overwhelming”. One service user said: “I’ve lost weight and I really feel good about myself”, while another added: “This has changed my life, I can play with my grandchildren now.”

Over the last year 240 residents accepted the offer of weight management. A third of completers lost at least 5 per cent of their body weight and reduced their waist circumference. The average weight loss was 2.8kg.

Public Health Principal, Sultana Choudhury, said she was pleased with what has been achieved so far. “We have been working collaboratively with our leisure colleagues for many years and have developed a long-lasting relationship with them. This has helped bring health to the forefront of what they do and has enabled them to embrace the concept of physical activity as improving health and wellbeing and reducing obesity.

“We are proud of both our exercise and group weight management services – they are being run within very small budgets and delivering very good outcomes.”

## Lessons learned

Despite the success of the weight management service, the public health team recognises that it does not have the resources

to support all those who are struggling with overweight.

The current reach of the service means less than 1 per cent of people who are overweight or obese are helped. On top of that, the constraints on the budget has meant that little has been able to be done to engage more vulnerable groups, such as those with learning disabilities, mental health problems or people who are housebound.

Public Health Registrar Una Geary said: “It has become clear that health and local government cannot tackle obesity alone – we need a whole systems approach. Based on Public Health England’s guidance last year we began thinking about how we could do this in Redbridge.

“In late 2019 we ran two workshops with a range of stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors that focussed on taking a complex system perspective in understanding and taking action on obesity.”

The aim of the first workshop was to increase participants’ understanding of what a whole systems perspective on obesity means and to gather their perspectives on the local causes of obesity.

An expert in the field of systems science in relation to obesity, Professor Paul Gately, came to speak and then ran a group activity in which participants created maps of the local system of obesity causes. Using system-mapping software a local obesity system map was created which depicted 108 local causes and more than 200 relationships between them.

The causes were grouped into five broad themes – physical activity, individual psychology and mental health, an obesogenic environment, individual and family dietary habits, and food and cooking knowledge and skills. The second workshop focussed on action planning, using the system map to identify where partners could intervene in the system to achieve the most impact.

## Next steps

A variety of ideas were put forward during the second workshop. These included measures such as working with the local food economy to encourage the purchase and consumption of healthier options and in particular reduce the availability and promotion of products that are high in saturated fats, sugar and salt.

Another step that was recommended was working towards a more consistent and standardised approach to teaching children about how to live a healthy lifestyle in schools through training healthy lifestyle champions who could then cascade their learning through their schools.

These and other ideas put forward at the workshop are now being used to inform the development of a new obesity strategy and action plan. Drafts are being drawn up by the public health team and will be fed back to the network that took part in the workshops.

“Taking a whole systems approach is a bit like partnership working on steroids,” added Ms Geary. “The workshops proved a great way to get all these different partners from the public, private and third sectors involved in tackling obesity – they were really enthusiastic and we now have a strong cross-sector network to push forward with the work we are doing.

“It will help us reach out to both children and adults who are overweight and obese and enhance the work we are doing with our weight management services.”

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# SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL: CREATING AN APP TO HELP THE MASSES

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Sandwell has worked with a technology company to develop an app to give residents access to a virtual health weight management programme. The app is being championed by partners across the borough, while opportunities for physical activity are promoted.

## Local context

Sandwell is a metropolitan borough in the Black Country made up of six towns – Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. It is home to around 330,000 people.

The borough is the 12th most deprived local authority area in the country and has one of the highest rates of adults with excess weight – some 71 per cent are obese or overweight.

Sandwell has been running two weight management programmes – Mytime Active and Wellness that Works. Both have been successful in seeing an average weight loss of 5kg and 4.1kg respectively.

Between them they were working with more than 3,000 people a year, but that is just a fraction of the overweight and obese people in the area.

A desire to expand the support being provided, coupled with the Stronger Sandwell drive, which targets investment at local projects and is based on building on local strengths, led to the council exploring new ways of working.

## The solution

Sandwell's public health team decided it wanted to develop something that could support everyone in Sandwell.

It led to the design of a new innovative free weight management programme known as Weigh2GO under the guidance of Weight Management Project Manager Maxine Dixon.

It uses a combination of the latest “smart scale” technology and an online app combined with good old-fashioned community partnership work to create a virtual weight management programme.

The public health team worked with a technology company called Aspetika Ltd. The existing ‘Activ8rlives’ app was used as the basis for the project. It allows users to track and monitor their weight.

A range of extra elements were then built into it for Sandwell residents, including interactive learning materials like videos and quizzes as well as access to virtual groups with local people where they can engage, motivate others and share good news stories.

The app gives users advice about diet and sets targets. Participants can then monitor their progress on the smart scales that were made available in convenient locations. It is available to anyone with a BMI of over 23, allowing those with a healthy weight to maintain it and those who are overweight or obese to work towards losing it.

The approach was first tried with council's own workforce and proved successful. After that a full pilot was run in 2018-19 across 20 different locations, including libraries, leisure centres, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust and voluntary sector organisations. All were given their own smart scales and staff briefed on how to run the project.

The push has been coupled with promotion of the community physical activity opportunities that have been developed as part of the Stronger Sandwell policy under the Move More Sandwell banner.

They include the Sports England-funded Move a Mile project, which encourages inactive people to take part in a 10-week programme to start being able to run, jog or walk a mile without stopping. The participants who complete the programme are sign-

posted on to the local Couch-to-5K schemes.

There is also a programme aimed at the over 60s which sees classes run in church halls, leisure centres and community centres and Cycle More, which involves a partnership with local cycling groups and sees volunteer cycle leaders organised group rides around the area.

## The impact

The virtual weight management programme is able to provide real time feedback on the progress participants make. During the trial last year nearly 700 people were engaged, with two thirds losing between 1 per cent and 10 per cent of their weight.

Those who have taken part are full of praise. Library Manager Jean Fenn said her customers have been really enthusiastic. “This is a great weight management tool because it is so easy-to-use. It is a great addition to our health and well-being offer.”

Meanwhile, Jenny Wright, the Health and Wellbeing Manager at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust, said: “This programme has been a huge success with NHS employees and subsequently NHS staff have encouraged patient groups to participate.”

Its success has also been recognised in the UK Public Health Practitioner Awards, winning the improving public health practice category.

## Lessons learned

During the pilot, a number of changes were made to the app. Initially it could only be linked to one scale, but that has now been amended so it is usable with any of the community smart scales to make it easier for people to take part. Extra functionality has also been added, including a range of new recipe ideas.

The public health team has also invested time in making sure the staff and volunteers at locations where smart scales are introduced

are fully aware of the programme and how it works so they can promote it to customers and those who use their facilities.

Sandwell Consultant in Public Health Paul Fisher said: “You can’t just go in and drop the scales off. Maxine and her team have spent a lot of time explaining the idea behind the project and supporting people to promote it to the public.

“We also encourage the staff themselves to take part. If they become enthusiastic about it, they transmit that to the public. Providing feedback on the numbers using their location and the progress they make also encourages participation. They can see the benefit of their work with the programme.”

### Next steps

Sandwell launched the next phase of the Weigh2GO programme in January 2020 with the aim of rolling out to a much wider range of organisations.

Thirty new organisations have signed up, but it is expected many more will join up in the coming months. There is particular enthusiasm in expanding out to the primary and secondary schools across the borough.

Public health development officers working across the six towns in Sandwell have also been trained to support the roll out. Meanwhile, the weight management service by Mytime Active is being decommissioned in April 2020.

Ms Dixon believes the new approach has “great potential” to reach out to the 99 per cent who do not access conventional weight management programmes. “It has the ability to reach thousands of people at low cost, giving people flexibility and choice to manage their weight how they want to,” she added.

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# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL: INTEGRATING TIER TWO AND TIER THREE WEIGHT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

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Sheffield City Council has re-shaped its weight management service, integrating elements of a tier three programme with its tier two offer. The move has saved money and is helping motivate both overweight adults and those with severe levels of obesity.

## Local context

Around 575,000 people live in Sheffield. Rates of excess weight – at 65 per cent in adults – is just above the national average.

The council has been commissioning separate tier two and tier three weight management services for adults in recent years. The tier two programme was provided over 12 weeks, while the tier three was initially for 24 weeks before being shortened.

But faced with growing pressures on the budget, Sheffield decided having two separate services was unsustainable.

## The solution

Providing tier three service is not mandatory and is often provided by the NHS, so the easy option would have been to scrap that. But the council recognised it provided an important service to people with a BMI of over 40 – or over 35 if they had additional health needs – in that it helped prepare them for or avoid the need to have bariatric surgery.

So instead the council decided to commission a new tier two service with an enhanced “bolt-on” offer for those who would have been eligible for tier three previously. Live Lighter Sheffield was launched in April 2019 and Zest chosen as the provider with staff TUPE’d across from the previous provider.

As before, the service works via self-referral or referral from health and care practitioners,

such as GPs. Everyone is sent into a central hub for triage.

Those who meet the criteria for the enhanced offer and who are seeking bariatric surgery are then provided with a separate one-to-one meeting before starting the 12-week course, which combines nutritional advice with opportunities for physical activity.

During that one-to-one meeting, the adviser goes through their diet and lifestyle habits to ensure they are fully aware of what changes they need to make. They are also invited to a separate two-hour session outside the normal classes that covers the pros and cons of bariatric surgery.

To add to that there is extensive follow-up for up to 12 months for those that still wish to be referred for bariatric surgery – many clients decide to try to lose weight without surgery after they learn more about the impact of surgery. This includes phone calls to check in and invites to come in for one-to-ones if that is deemed necessary.

A weekly drop-in health check clinic is also run from the Zest centre in the city so both those on the enhanced service and normal service can call in to get weighed and talk to advisers to help sustain progress during and after the programme.

There has, however, been a change to the minimum qualification criteria for access to the mainstream tier two programme.

Due to the reduced resource for weight management and the need to reduce health inequalities it was decided that tier two support would be targeted.

Only those with an additional need, such as a long-term condition, physical complication that affects mobility or living in a highly deprived area, now qualify for face-to-face support.

But an online offer has been developed to give people access to weight loss support for those that lose out under this change. The online resource is available to anyone in Sheffield and the hope is that with sufficient promotion it can have a greater reach than face-to-face interventions.

## The impact

The cost of providing weight management support has been halved with the Live Lighter programme costing £140,000 a year. The saving has come from the fact that there are slightly fewer groups than before – 18 a week now.

But that has had a minimal impact on the numbers being supported because the groups are consistently full with around 20 clients each – previous the tier three classes could have under 10.

It means the Live Lighter programme is on track to achieve its target of getting 640 completers a year. There has, however, been a drop in the numbers of completers achieving a 5 per cent weight loss compared to the previous tier two service. In some ways that was to be expected given the tier three clients tend to be more complex cases, but the service is working hard to improve that.

Zest Health Service Manager, Laura Whitfield, who is in charge of the programme, said the signs were encouraging. “We were worried that the move to the combined group might put off some of those people with a higher BMIs or at least make them feel uncomfortable. But if anything it has had the opposite affect.

“Before, some of those on the tier three course sometimes saw it as a tick-box exercise to getting surgery. But now it seems they have actually become more engaged and better motivated by being in a mixed group.”

## Lessons learned

The change in provider has not come without challenges. The service has always used a variety of venues for classes from leisure centres and medical clinics to community halls.

But the increase in the size of some of the groups meant that larger venues have had to be sourced for some of the classes.

The move away from two separate services and adapting to the new model also led to a temporary slowdown in the numbers going through the course. This, in turn, has led to the growth of a waiting list, which did not exist before.

Ms Whitfield said the service has tried to manage this carefully. “We are working our way through it – and have been active in engaging with clients quickly before they start. We send out texts to acknowledge the referral and try to get them in for that initial triage quickly even if there is not a space on a course yet.”

## Next steps

Sheffield Public Health Director, Greg Fell, said despite the challenges the changes have bedded in well. “Budgets are tight and we simply could not keep funding a tier two and tier three service.

“Lots of councils do not even have tier three, but we thought we could still keep elements of that service in our new model. There’s still work to do, but we are pleased with how it has gone so far.”

Mr Fell said this was just one element of the wider work on obesity that was going on. The city has separate food and physical activity strategies – both of which are helping to drive forward changes.

Under the food strategy, a new sugar campaign is about to be launched called Sheffield in Sweet Enough, which will highlight the amount of sugar in popular foods such as cereals. There is also a programme of work

aiming to support schools and early years settings to improve their food environment and culture

Then, later this year, the physical activity strategy will be re-launched to coincide with the Olympics in the summer. There will also be another More More Month – an annual campaign that encourages residents to log their activity as part of a city-wide drive to get people active.

Mr Fell said: “We set ourselves the target of becoming the most active city in the country by 2020 some years ago. We have not quite got there, but we are well placed and want to build on that to keep people fit and healthy.”

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# SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL: ENGAGING HARD TO REACH GROUPS

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Southend-on-Sea's integrated health and wellbeing service has started running interventions, including weight management support, at the local job centre, sheltered housing sites and alongside substance misuse services. The 'light-touch' six-week programmes are aimed at engaging people the service would not normally reach.

## Local context

The coastal borough of Southend-on-Sea is to the north of the Thames estuary in the county of Essex. It is home to about 180,000 people.

The proportion of adults who are overweight or obese is 68 per cent – above the national average. Excess weight is estimated to cost local health services in the region of £5 million a year.

There are significant levels of deprivation in Southend. But what marks the area out most is the extreme inequalities that are seen. It contains nine neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10 per cent and 13 in the least deprived. It means the gap in life expectancy seen among residents is 11 years for men and 10 for women.

## The solution

Southend-on-Sea has run a weight management programme for a number of years. The contract for the service was given to Everyone Health last year. The 12-week programme offers both nutritional advice and opportunities for physical activity at five different sites.

Access is provided to people with a BMI of over 30 or over 27.5 if they have additional health issues and are from South Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean backgrounds.

People who either live, work or have their GP in the borough are entitled to help. Free places on local Slimming World and Weight Watchers programmes can also be arranged if clients prefer as well as places on the local Trim and Train service.

During the first eight months of Everyone Health running the service nearly 400 patients were supported. But despite the ongoing success, there is a recognition that more needs to be done to engage a wider range of people and so when Everyone Health was appointed it was tasked with reaching out to clients from particularly hard-to-reach groups and areas.

Key performance indicators were written into contract including the need to engage at local events and collaborate with local partners with a particular focus on groups such as job seekers, those in sheltered housing and clients of substance misuse service.

Council Leisure Contracts and Development Manager, Kevin Read, said: "We know if we are going to engage these groups we have to do more to take services to them to make it more accessible or we will be reaching the same people time and time again in the most affluent and mobile groups. The most vulnerable will be left behind."

## The impact

Working together with the Mr Read, Everyone Health has set up a new light-touch offer as well as running the 12-week standard programme.

The new programme – Be Active, Be Healthy – runs for six weeks and is focussed on health and wellbeing rather than pure weight management. One week is set aside for promoting physical activity with the other five focussed on nutrition and other lifestyle topics.

The first programme started at the end of 2019 with the substance misuse service. Eight clients have been engaged at the service's centre. Two more 'light-touch' schemes are starting at sheltered housing sites and another one at the local job centre office.

The groups are smaller than the standard programmes to allow more time for relationship-building and interaction.

Everyone Health Service Manager, Amy Young, said: "We are also tailoring them to the clients. So we have incorporated some mindfulness elements into the job centre one and stop smoking support in to the substance misuse one."

A version of the light-touch programme has also been set up for the general population with four courses being planned from April. There will be no BMI threshold for accessing it. "We see it as a way of helping prevent anyone who is concerned about their health to get access to support," added Ms Young.

## Lessons learned

Everyone Health will be evaluating the light-touch courses as they roll out. But Ms Young said from the work done so far a number of lessons had already been learnt.

"There are challenges dealing with these hard-to-reach groups. For example, we have found, from the work with the substance misuse service, that the same clients are not always there every week. We want to keep learning as we go.

"It is important to get staff from the service you are working with on board. We are getting them to come to the sessions – they have the trusted relationship with the clients and that is very important when you are dealing with vulnerable groups like this."

## Next steps

Southend is one of four areas that is taking part in a Health Foundation project that is looking to carry out qualitative research in deprived areas. Milton ward in the centre of Southend has been chosen with others are likely to be involved too.

Mr Read said the aim is to engage with and gather intelligence on communities that services do not normally reach. "The traditional way is to go out on to the high street with a clipboard or ask for online feedback. But we know this is not reaching some groups so this is a way of doing more to find out what they think what they are doing.

"We have some really significant health inequalities so the idea is to go out where people congregate – bowls clubs, community centres and even knocking on doors to find out what they think and what they need. That will then help us design services that meet their needs."

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# WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL: GIVING DISTRICTS AND BOROUGHES THE FREEDOM TO INNOVATE

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A partnership between the county council and its seven districts and boroughs has seen locally tailored weight management programmes develop across West Sussex. The approach has encouraged innovation and flexibility.

## Local context

West Sussex is a largely rural county on the south coast. It is home to 860,000 people. Around 62 per cent of adults are overweight or obese – in line with the national average.

More than half the population live in the four main towns of Bognor Regis, Crawley, Horsham and Worthing with the rest dispersed across a series of small towns, villages and hamlets.

The rural nature of the county contributes to the challenge of engaging with and reaching out to people who are overweight and obese.

## The solution

The county council has entered a partnership arrangement with its district and borough councils to provide healthy lifestyle support, including weight management, as part of the West Sussex Wellbeing Programme.

The programme is delivered via six separate local services – two councils run a joint service. This approach has enabled innovative and flexible services to develop that are responsive to local needs.

The districts and boroughs are delegated funding under partnership agreements that have been in place for over a decade. While they are asked to adhere to NICE guidance and quality standards on adult weight management, beyond that they are free to design the services to best meet their local population's needs.

All areas run 12-week programmes with dedicated sessions on nutrition. Some offer exercise alongside these sessions, while others use the community physical activity opportunities available nearby. Follow-up also varies with some running optional drop-in weighing clinics for graduates.

West Sussex Wellbeing Hubs Public Health Lead, Tamsin Cornwall, said: “We trust the district and borough teams. We have a strong working relationship with them. They are the ones that know their residents the best and how to reach them. This has meant that there are differences in how the services are run – but that is a strength.

“Individual districts and boroughs have acted as a test-bed for innovation. Most of the councils deliver the service themselves, they employ the advisers and that means they are willing to try different things. Where something works, we can share it, and where it doesn't we can learn from it.”

## The impact

A prime example of the innovation seen in recent years is the men's weight management programme developed by the Mid Sussex service. It is run alongside the general tier two 12-week offer which is open to all adults, but predominantly used by women.

Mid Sussex Wellbeing Adviser, Oliver Thomas, who has led this programme, said: “Traditionally it has been hard to engage men with over two-thirds of participants being female. We needed a different approach.

“We changed the course content and how the service was promoted. Advertisement was designed to include humour and positive imaging as suggested by research.”

It was branded under a new name, Motivation Exercise and Nutrition (MEN) with the focus promotionally much more on physical activity rather than weight loss.

The weekly discussions tend to be less formal too with more time for group discussions and questions and answers, said Mr Oliver. Meanwhile, the fitness class at the end of each session often incorporates a competitive element. It seems to be working. Average weight loss is just under 3kg so far.

One of the many men that have benefited is Steven (not his real name). He was in his 40s and weighed nearly 100kg when he started the programme.

It got him back into running while teaching him how to use food labelling and the links between food and mood, which has helped him control his diet. He said: "I was a slow starter, but with the encouragement I got I moved forward quickly."

The success of the MEN programme has led to two other areas running projects aimed specifically at men. This is just one example of how good practice is shared. In recent years the Crawley service introduced a system of rolling starts to programmes – an approach that has since been taken in other areas.

Ms Cornwall said it has had a number of benefits. "It means when people drop out, others can come in and take their place. Courses are not run with empty spaces and it has reduced waiting lists."

Overall, the services are achieving excellent outcomes, above the expected NICE standards. The average weight loss across all six services last year was 3.7kg.

Some 644 clients completed the programme – a completion rate of 75 per cent, while 41 per cent achieve a weight loss of 5 per cent and 72 per cent achieve more than 3 per cent weight loss.

## Lessons learned

Giving the local services freedom to innovate and tailor services does not mean there is no oversight. Ms Cornwall said that performance is monitored against the NICE standards and close working relationships with the wellbeing hub managers are well established.

She said: "We meet quarterly to review performance, discuss challenges and share best practice. But there are plenty of discussions outside of that too.

"If we are not getting the level of performance we would want we work together to look at why. For example, it maybe the way an instructor is engaging with clients or the location is not the best one.

"We will try different things, while recognising that if we want to reach the right people it may not always be simple and straight-forward. The great benefit of our approach is that we have the opportunity to work through any problems and issues."

This has included working with the tier three services, which are commissioned by the NHS. Ms Cornwall said: "We have worked hard to improve handovers between the services. We have helped our wellbeing teams build and maintain those relationships."

## Next steps

Ms Cornwall said here is also pan-county strategic work under development. "This year we are aiming to develop the current offer aimed at local businesses. The teams go into workplaces and provide healthy lifestyle support.

"We are exploring greater consistency in what that package includes. We think this provides a valuable addition to our work in the community.

“It could help us engage more men, for example, along with shift workers who we know can find it difficult to attend regular classes. If we are going to engage hard-to-reach groups, we have to take services out to people in locations that suit them.”

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# WIGAN COUNCIL: TAILORING SUPPORT TO DIFFERENT COUNCILS

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Wigan Council has been running weight management support ever since public health was brought into local government. Over the years it has expanded the offer and improved services – and now provides a comprehensive and tailored range of support, including a dedicated programme for men.

## Local context

Wigan is a metropolitan borough that is part of Greater Manchester. It is home to more than 320,000 people. Rates of obesity and excess weight are higher than the national average at 69 per cent.

Much of the work done by the council is defined by the Wigan Deal. Launched in 2014, The Deal is designed to get local residents playing their part in society and community life from recycling to getting healthy. In return, the council has promised to keep council tax low, cut red tap and provide high quality services.

Weight management services – delivered under the banner of Lose Weight, Feel Great – provide a key part of that promise as a way of supporting people to achieve their goals and aspirations, and lose weight.

## The solution

One of the longest running programmes is the community weight management service. It offers 12-week programmes to those with a BMI of over 25 via free access to local Slimming World courses, which are supplemented by physical activity classes at a wide range of community venues right across the borough, including the council's leisure centres.

They have proved popular over the years – although the majority of participants have been women. This prompted the council's public health team to explore new ways to get men engaged and eventually led to

the launch of a dedicated men's weight management programme.

It works on the same basis as the community weight management service, but has seen the council partner with the local professional rugby and football clubs to create an offer that is attractive to men.

Classes are run at the clubs' stadiums as well as community venues with participants given the chance to play football and rugby alongside a range of other physical activity opportunities.

For those who prefer one-to-one support there is the Healthy Routes team, Wigan's integrated health improvement service. People are assigned to an adviser with training in behavioural change, who develops a tailored programme to support people to achieve their goals.

People can be connected to a wide range of activities and while it can involve support for any healthy lifestyle changes, many get weight management help.

Unusually Wigan also commissions the tier three specialist weight management service. Its core service is aimed at people with a BMI of over 40 or over 35 for those with complex health problems. It has close links with the tier four bariatric surgery team and provides support for up to 24 months.

## The impact

In 2018-19 nearly 2,400 started the community weight programme with 74 per cent completing it. The average weight loss was 3.4kg, while over half of the completers lost 5 per cent of their body weight.

The men's weight programme saw nearly 700 starters during the same period with 56 per cent completing it. The average weight loss was 3.8kg with 36 per cent of completers

losing 5 per cent of their body weight.

One of those who has benefited is Scott Ascroft. He was overweight and felt isolated and lonely when he joined up. During the programme he lost 19kg and said he gained great motivation from the thought of doing his exercise at Wigan's football stadium. He now works as a coach at the club's community trust.

"It's made a huge difference to my weight and health. I have made lots of friends and its motivated me to give something back," he said.

Wigan Public Health Director, Professor Kate Arden, is delighted with what is being achieved. "Lose Weight, Feel Great is going from strength-to-strength and I am proud of all the staff who are so passionate and committed to enabling people to reach their goals, and make some truly inspiring life changes."

## Lessons learned

Age Well Service Manager, Emma McNamara, said the council has put a lot of hard work into responding to feedback and looking at new ways to engage residents.

"The launch of the men's weight programme illustrates that. Around 90 per cent of those taking part in the community weight programme were women. No matter what we did, many men did not feel it was for them.

"But by setting up a programme just for men and getting the football and rugby teams involved we have created something that really works. We have tried to innovate and keep the programme fresh."

An example of this is the introduction of the Man v Fat as part of the men's weight programme offer. It involves a combination of competitive football and dietary advice and is aimed at men with a BMI of over 27.5.

Wigan has also expanded the offer for participants on the community weight management scheme, introducing activities such as gym-and-swim, walking football and zumba.

"We want to give people as much choice as we can. Circuits is not for everyone. We have also started to take a little more of a relaxed attitude to our BMI thresholds – if someone expresses an interest in an activity we try our best to accommodate them. You don't want to put people off by being too strict with the criteria. You want people to be motivated. That is the culture of the Wigan Deal really."

## Next steps

A key part of Wigan's ability to innovate is the partnership work with its providers. Three different organisations are involved in the weight management work – Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles leads the community and men's programmes with partners including Slimming World, Wigan Athletic Community Trust, Wigan Warriors and Man v Fat. Healthy Routes is provided by City Health Care Partnership and Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Trust run the tier three service.

All the providers meet along with the public health team at a quarterly forum. There is also another one for all the health improvement providers.

Ms McNamara said: "It's a great opportunity for training and sharing ideas and best practice. One of the things we're working on is systematising the routes into the services. People who are having operations, such as knee surgery or undergoing fertility treatment, may benefit from losing weight so we are looking at how those referral routes can be improved.

"We're also doing a lot digitally. There's an e-learning module for nutrition being developed and a My Wellness App. Collaboration between providers allows us to keep improving.

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# WILTSHIRE COUNCIL: PROVIDING A WIDE CHOICE OF OPTIONS

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Wiltshire's weight management offer has evolved over the years to give people a wide choice of different options. There is one-to-one support from health trainers, a group-based programme, an online course and even one targeted at pregnant women.

## Local context

Wiltshire is a county in south west England that is home to 470,000 people. It is relevantly affluent - ranked the 234th most deprived local authority area in England. It has a better healthy life expectancy than many other parts of England and at just over 57 per cent rates of excess weight in adults are below the national average, although there are variations with some communities seeing higher rates.

But the joint Wiltshire CCG and council obesity strategy still warned that there were a concerning number of adults and children who were obese – and if action was not taken the consequences would be “devastating”.

The strategy noted that achieving a healthy weight for all in Wiltshire could result in up to 230,000 residents living between three and nine years longer and an annual saving to the taxpayer of more than £118 million.

## The solution

Wiltshire Council has sought to develop a wide range of weight management programmes to cater for the local adult population.

It has been running a health trainer service for the past five years. The service works one-to-one with clients to support them with behaviour changes in relation to lifestyle.

The trainers give people the skills and confidence needed to change their own behaviours and improve their health and wellbeing. The programme works with adults aged over 18 across six sessions.

Support can include help with healthy eating, increasing physical activity, reducing alcohol intake, stopping smoking and emotional wellbeing.

The aim is to help build confidence and motivation and help the individuals achieve their goals. There are 18 health trainers – one designated to each community in the county.

Senior Health Trainer, Katie Smith, said: “I work with the client to support and encourage them to take small steps, which we call mini goals, to reach their end target. By empowering the client to make these changes they are able to improve their own health and wellbeing.

“I have the privilege of working with clients from all different walks of life and with many different reasons for wanting to make a change. Each one is as important as the next and by doing my job I am able to help reduce health inequalities in Wiltshire.”

There is also a group weight management scheme, known as ShapeUp4Life. It is a free 12-week programme that supports adults and young people to lose weight and keep it off in the long-term. It is aimed at those with a BMI of over 30.

It is run in groups of 12 to 15 people during the day and in evenings in community settings. Each 1.5-hours weekly session consists of a 45-minute nutrition workshop covering topics such as snacking, portion sizes, fats and sugar followed by 45 minutes of light exercise, such as circuits, boxercise, resistance bands and seated exercises.

There is also a 12-week online course for adults who cannot access the group and a separate group for those who do not want to take part in physical activity. Again it is open for self-referral as well as pathways for GPs and other professionals to refer in.

Meanwhile, Maternal Healthy Me is a service, which is aimed at healthy weight gain during pregnancy. A specialist team of midwives

have been trained by the public health team to offer advice on healthy eating, physical activity as well as behaviour change support throughout the programme.

## The impact

The numbers getting support from the health trainers has been growing every year. Last year nearly 500 people were given support with the average weight loss standing at 2.4kg.

The success seen with Fred is typical of the impact the health trainers have. Fred was referred to the service when he was trying to lose weight for a hip operation. He was part way through his weight loss journey when he turned to the health trainers for help to get him under 120kg – he was 124kg.

The health trainers worked with him on his diet and activity levels. By session six he was down to 115kg and was able to have his operation. His weight loss has also helped get his diabetes under control.

The other schemes have also seen good results. More than 330 also completed the ShapeUp4Life course last year – a completion rate of 40 per cent with 5 per cent weight loss recorded on average. The maternity programme helped nearly 180 women – a third achieved 'healthy weight gain' during pregnancy.

## Lessons learned

The way the services are set up mean referrals can come in directly from a wide variety of frontline professionals from GPs to social care staff. People can also self-refer.

But Public Health Principal, Katie Davies, said while providing easy access was important, it had led to some issues in making sure people access the right programme for them.

“Making a referral to our weight management services relies upon health professionals having a sound knowledge of what is involved in the programme to inform patients about this. With a range of weight management

services available this can be a challenge for professionals referring to our services.

“It important to assess whether someone is ready to change and what support they have accessed before. In many situations, health professionals don't always have enough time to have these conversations, or have enough knowledge about the range of weight management services we have available to refer people to the most suitable one. It got us thinking.”

## Next steps

This learning has informed the next steps the service is taking. Later this year a hub will be set up so all referrals come in to one place to allow them to be assessed and channelled to the most appropriate service.

Ms Davies said: “We recognise the challenge of delivering these services and the commitment that is required from individuals if they really want to change their behaviour.

“With behaviour change, it is a cycle, and it is certainly not easy to change a lifelong behaviour. Having a hub approach will allow us to work round some of these issues and ensure clients are getting the best support available for them.”

Other changes are also taking place. From April 2020 the health trainers have responsibility for providing the group weight management service.

Ms Davies said delivering weight management services requires constant evolution and improvement. “You can never stand still. Our programmes have had good results, but you always have to consider new ways of approaching support and engaging with different groups of people.

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