

## Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date: January 2024**

**Subject: Child Healthy Weight Programme Update (21/2/2024)**

Lead officer: Mike McHugh, Consultant in Public Health

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children Life Long Learning and Families and Cllr Peter McCabe, Cabinet Member Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health

Contact officer: Rachel Tilford – Senior Public Health Principal

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### Recommendations

- A. Panel to note the latest National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) data and trends for Merton, London and England
  - B. Panel to consider how all Council services can contribute to the Systems Wide approaches to reducing obesity and to reducing inequalities relating to overweight and obesity
  - C. Panel to consider progress made on addressing child healthy weight since the last report to Scrutiny in November 2022 and opportunities for further action.
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on Merton's childhood overweight and obesity rates and trends including how these compare to London and England; highlight inequalities in overweight and obesity and report on progress delivering the Child Healthy Weight Action plan since the last report to Scrutiny in November 2022
- 1.2 Our collective efforts to reduce childhood obesity are essential because obesity increases the risk of developing a range of health conditions in childhood and later life including: diabetes, heart disease; stroke; high blood pressure; and some cancers.<sup>1</sup> Obese children are also much more likely to be obese adults,<sup>2</sup> Obesity can also have an impact on mental health and stigma associated with obesity can lead to disordered eating, avoidance of physical activity and avoidance of support.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3 Obesity prevalence is highest among the most deprived groups with children resident in the most deprived parts of the country being more than twice as likely to be living with obesity than those in the least deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.4 Whole systems approaches highlight the role that different Council functions can play in reducing the risk factors for overweight and obesity.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.5 There is no single solution to the high levels of child overweight and obesity, and it is vital to take a whole systems approach.<sup>6</sup> Whole systems approaches recognise the myriad of factors such as the physical environment, culture, behaviour, housing, poverty, food quality at home and at school, transport, fuel poverty, food knowledge, which have an impact on children's weight.

1.6 Merton’s Child Healthy Weight Action Plan recognises this complexity in its range of actions, acknowledging that targeted weight management programmes can only touch the tip of the iceberg.

## 2 Details

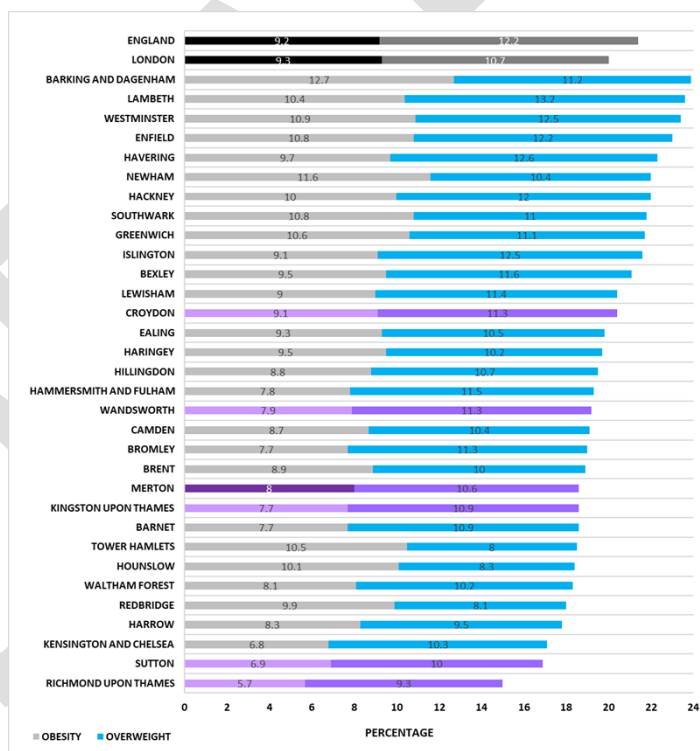
Latest data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)

2.1 The NCMP is a universal national programme delivered in schools by school nursing services. Child weight is measured at two time points, reception and year 6.

2.2 The most recent data from 2022/2023 <sup>7</sup> shows Merton’s overweight and obesity rates are lower than the London average, but this does not mean that the rates are acceptable either for Merton as a whole and particularly for some areas of Merton.

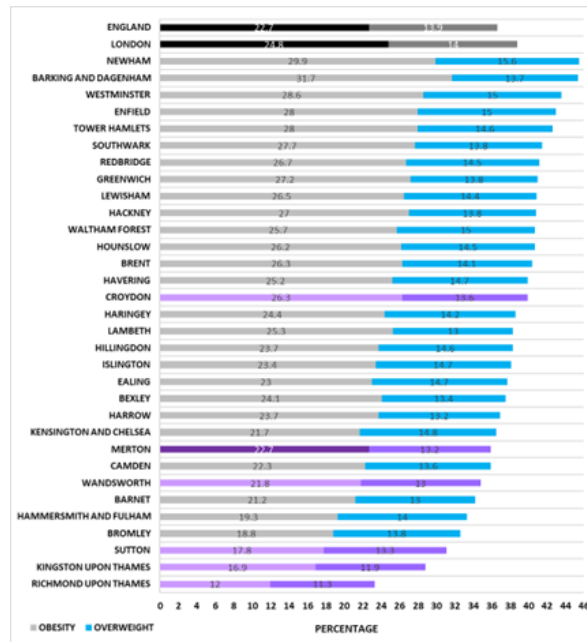
2.3 Figure 1 shows that in 2022/23 8% of Merton children in reception were obese, and a further 10.6% were overweight. The combined total of 18.6% is the 11th lowest rate of the 32 London boroughs, slightly lower than the London average of 20% and the England average of 21.4%. Merton’s obesity rate (8%) in reception children ranks 8<sup>th</sup> lowest of all London boroughs.

Figure 1 Percentage of reception aged children classified as obese and overweight 2022-23



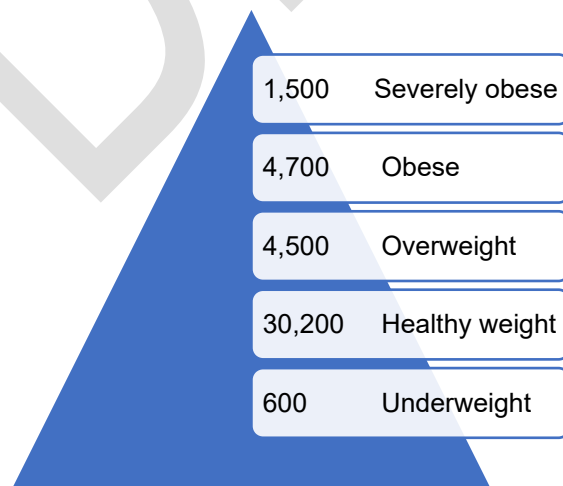
2.4 Figure 2 shows the corresponding data for Year 6. In 2022/2023 the percentage of Year 6 children who were obese was 22.7%, 14.7% higher than in reception, with a further 13.2% being overweight. The combined total of 35.9% is the 9th lowest rate of the 32 London boroughs, and lower than the London average of 38.8% and the England average of 36.6%. Whilst Merton’s obesity rate in year 6 children ranks 10<sup>th</sup> lowest of all London boroughs, it is worth noting that Merton’s reception and Year 6 obesity rates are the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest of the six South West London Boroughs, with only Croydon’s’ rates being higher.

Figure 2 Percentage of Year 6 aged children classified as obese and overweight 2022-23



- 2.5 Understanding what these percentages mean in terms of the numbers of children who are overweight and obese is important for informing our priorities. We have therefore used the 2022/2023 percentages to estimate the actual numbers of Merton children and young people between the ages of 4 and 18 who are living with overweight and obesity.
- 2.6 Figure 3 shows the estimated number of Merton children and young people aged between 4 and 18 in each weight category. These estimates are important because they help explain why targeted weight management services can only be the solution for a small number of children, young people and their families.
- 2.7 We have also estimated the number of children who may be underweight. These figures have remained fairly constant over time. <sup>8</sup>

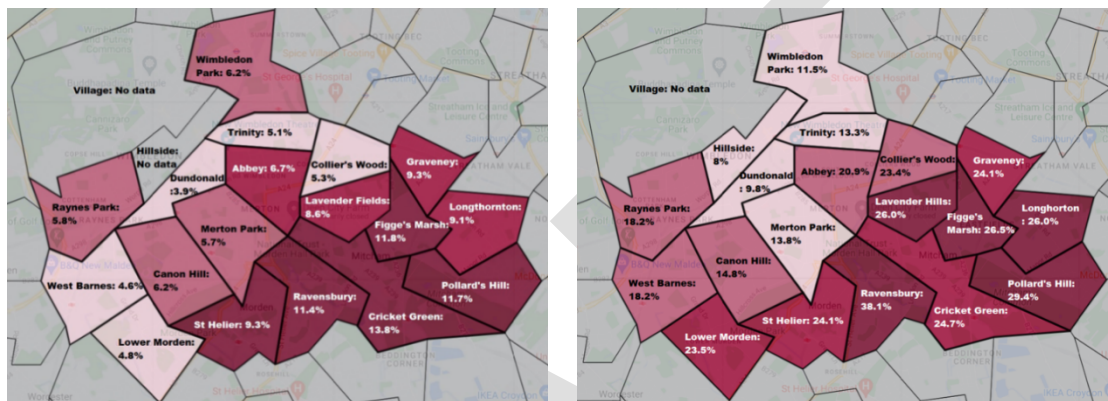
Figure 3 Estimated number of Merton children and young people aged 4 to 18 at each weight category



## Inequalities

2.1 In the update to Scrutiny in November 2022, we highlighted that obesity rates vary across Merton, with wards in the east of the Borough having the highest rates. This trend continues with the latest data. Figure 5 shows the obesity rates in year 6 for Merton’s wards for the 3 years 2020 to 2023. The maps are colour coded by quartile benchmarked to the Merton average. It is worth noting that while the wards in the east of the Borough have the highest rates, 13 of Merton’s 20 wards have obesity rates of over 18% in Year 6.

Figure 5 Maps of obesity rates across Merton wards in reception and Year 6 - 3 years combined 2020/2023



2.2 Of significant concern both locally and nationally is the difference between the overweight and obesity rates in reception and year 6. Figure 5 shows the difference between reception and year 6 for Merton wards (2020-2021 2022-2023) from 5.3% in Wimbledon Park to 21.4% in Ravensbury.

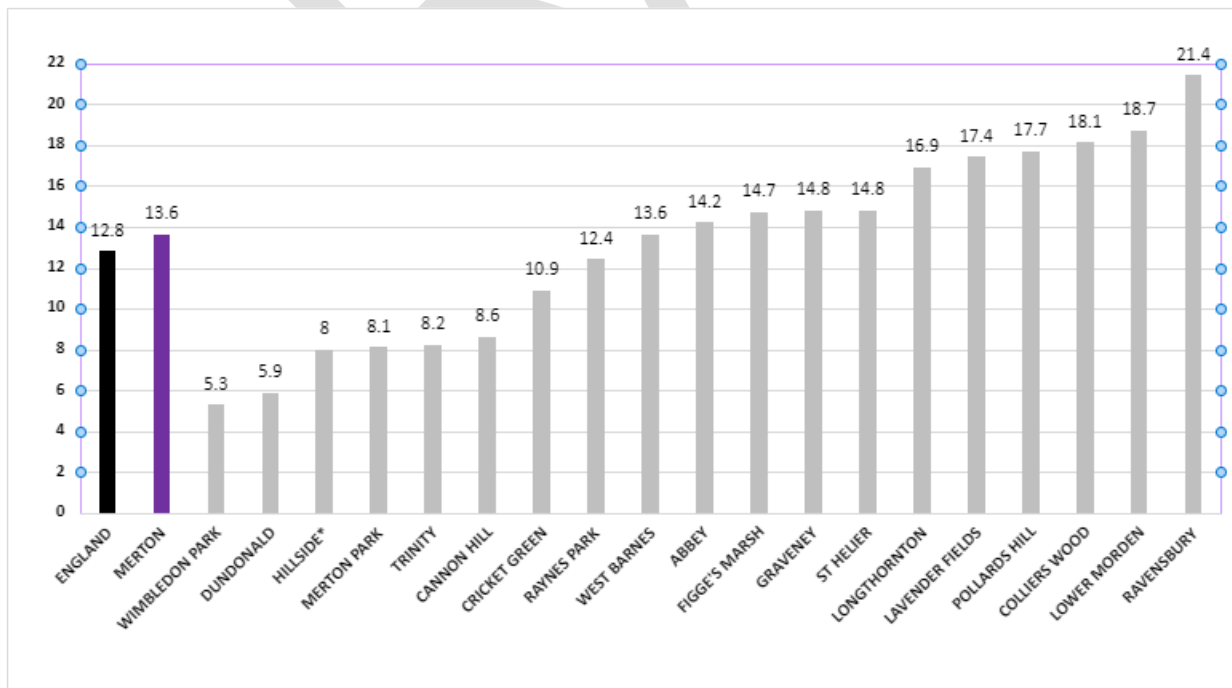
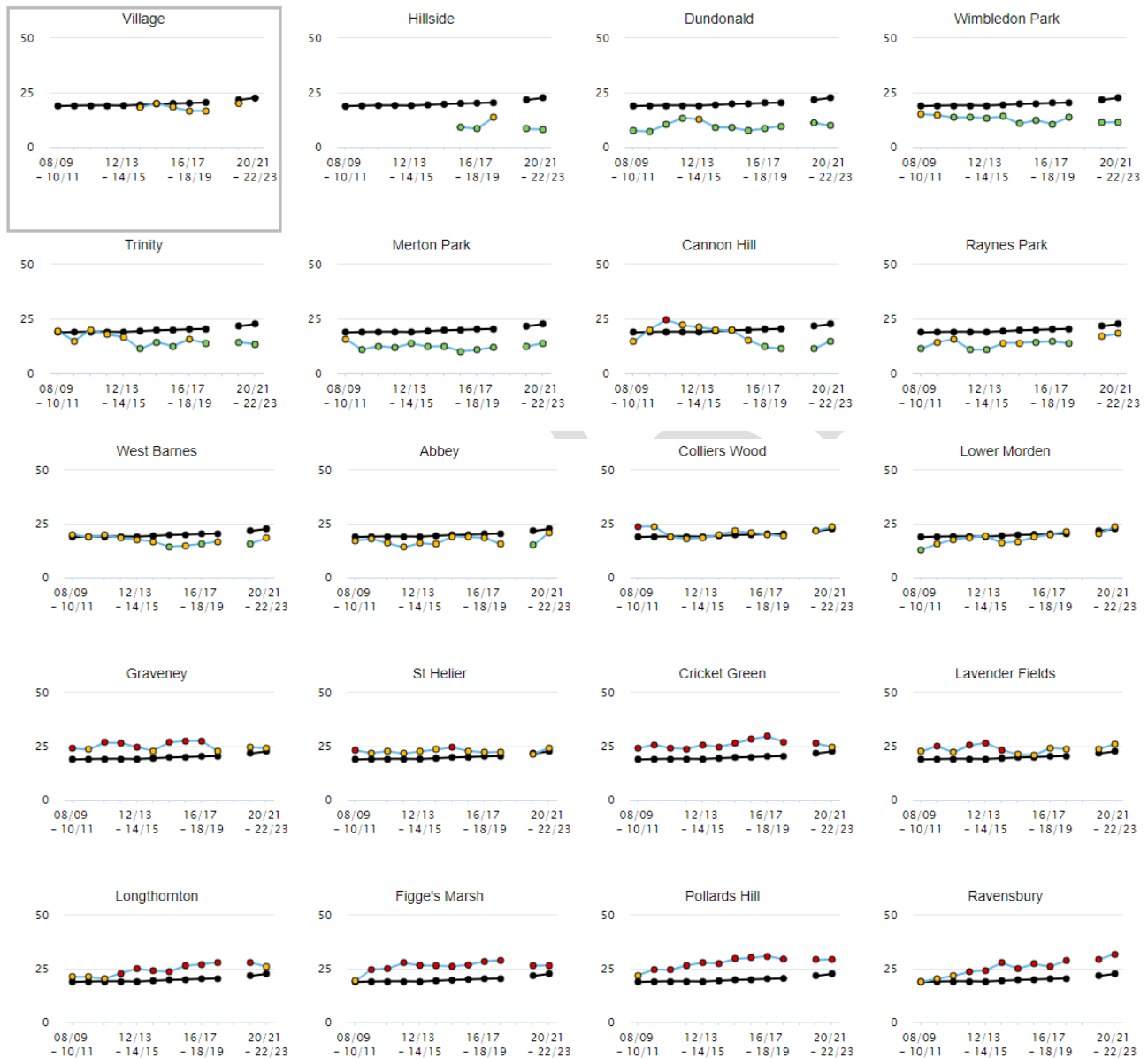


Figure 4 Difference in obesity prevalence (%) between reception and year 6 by ward

2.3 Figure 6 shows the ward level trends over time compared to the London average. There is always a need for caution when looking at data involving small numbers, but a general observation is that there are few wards experiencing a consistent positive change over time.

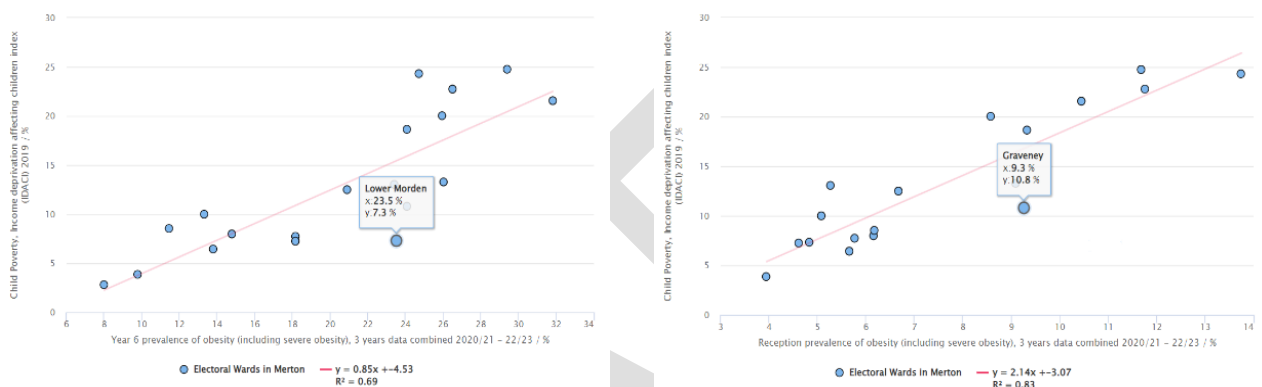
Figure 6. Ward level obesity rates over time

Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3 years data combined Proportion - %



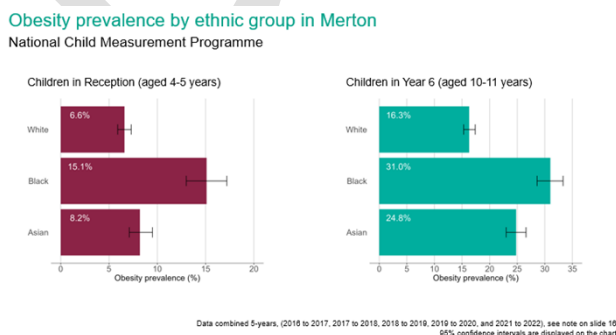
2.4 The relationship between deprivation and obesity at ward level in Merton is illustrated by Figure 7 & 8 which shows the IDACI (child poverty) levels for the three years 2020-2023 in relation to the Year 6 and Reception obesity rates.<sup>9</sup> The wards with higher deprivation generally have higher obesity rates, however in both reception and year 6 there are wards which have higher obesity rates than expected considering the child deprivation rate, indicating another factor is at play. In reception Lower Morden is out outlier (higher obesity rate than expected in light of the IDACI score) and in Year 6 Graveney is the biggest outlier.

Figures 7 and 8 Relation between obesity rates and deprivation in reception and Year 6 – 3 years combined 2020-2023



2.5 Obesity rates vary significantly between ethnic groups. Figure 10 shows the combined rates over 5 years for white, black and Asian children in reception and year 6. Black children in Merton are almost twice as likely to be obese than white children. However, we need to use some caution when looking at the obesity rates for black and Asian children, because there is evidence which suggests that BMI underestimates Asian children’s obesity and overestimates black children’s obesity.<sup>10</sup> Solutions are being sought for this at a national level. In addition, what this figure does not convey is the role played by deprivation and therefore we also need to recognise the higher deprivation levels experienced by Asian and black children<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 10 Obesity Prevalence by ethnic group in Merton





### 3 Impact of the cost-of-living crisis

- 3.1 The rising costs of fuel, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability and putting many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced wellbeing.
- 3.2 Food poverty is a driver of poor physical and mental health, including chronic diet-related conditions such as obesity and cardio-vascular disease. Families experiencing food poverty often have to rely on cheap, poor quality food and less fruit and vegetables, which means that child hunger and obesity often co-exist<sup>12</sup>.
- 3.3 For children, food insecurity can limit development and affect the ability to concentrate and engage in school, impacting their educational attainment and long-term life chances<sup>13</sup>. Nationally, emerging evidence on the impact of cost-of-living increases shows that families are cutting back particularly on fruit and vegetables replacing these with “filling” foods that offer better value per calories and pre-processed food that avoid using gas stoves to prepare.<sup>14</sup>

### 4 What are we doing in Merton to improve child healthy weight?

- 4.1 As highlighted in the introduction the causes of obesity are complex and the actions to tackle it and increase the numbers of children who maintain a healthy weight should reflect this. By employing a system wide approach, we increase the likelihood of making a difference. We also need to be very mindful of minimising the stigma associated with weight management approaches <sup>15</sup>
- 4.2 Merton’s Child Healthy Weight Action Plan recognises the need to take a system perspective with universal and targeted actions grouped under three themes.

**Theme 1: Making Child Healthy Weight Everyone’s Business – universal actions**

**Theme 2: Supporting Children, Young People and their Families**

**Theme 3: Healthy Place**

Table 1: Progress against the three themes in the Child Healthy Weight Action plan

Theme	Action area	January 2024 update
<b>Making child healthy weight everyone’s business</b>	Healthy Schools London and Healthy Early Years London	<u>Healthy Schools</u> 52 schools in Merton have registered for the Healthy Schools London programme 22 - Bronze award, 12 – Silver award 3 – Gold award <u>Healthy Early Years London</u> 54 - First Steps 11 - Bronze (21 working towards) (4 of the 11 require renewal) 3 – Silver 3 (1 working towards) 1 - Gold
	Daily Mile Merton Sports Award	31 schools in Merton undertake a daily/active mile programme as part of their school's physical activity programme (in addition to PE curriculum) and 35 schools meet the CMO Active 30:30 target.
	Staff training about healthy weight	117 staff from a broad range of sectors including Health, Education, Social Care, Holiday Activities and Food Provision and the VCS took part in training about having conversations about weight.

Theme	Action area	January 2024 update
		Participants confidence in raising the issue of weight rose from 5/10 before the training, to 8.8/10 afterwards
	London Sport Active Lives Survey	There has been a significant increase in the numbers of schools and pupils who have completed Sport London's Active Lives Survey in the autumn term of 2023. Merton School Sports Partnership have been instrumental in driving up this increase. The data will enable us/schools to target physical activity programmes and support more effectively.
<b>Supporting children, young people and their families</b>	Healthy Start Vouchers	During 2023 a range of actions were undertaken to increase uptake of Healthy Start, this included awareness raising sessions with staff from across the Borough – health visitors, early years staff, VCS colleagues, primary care. Presentations were also made to the Family Hubs Start for Life group and Food Response Network. Healthy Start uptake rate increased from 54% to 69% between January and December 2023.
	Food Poverty Action Plan	A successful bid was made in July 2023 to the GLA Food Roots 2 funding to recruit a Strategic Lead for Food, Food Poverty and Cost of Living. This is a one-year post. A key objective of the role is to further increase uptake of Healthy Start.
	Family Weight Management	School Nurses deliver the 'Family Start' programme, a weight management support service for children and their families to achieve healthy lifestyle and reduce their weight (particularly those identified through the National Child Measurement Programme). More children will be eligible for referral for further support from the CYP Social Prescribing service from January 2024.
	Infant Feeding	The Health Visiting service provides a range of support to parents with feeding their babies. A new addition during 2023 has been the recruitment of peer supporters. The service is working to submit its application for the UNICEF Baby Friendly Gold award. The Children's Centres also registered in 2023 to start their UNICEF accreditation journey <sup>16</sup>
	Holiday Activities and Food Programme	The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme provides healthy food and activity for children in receipt of free school meals and those identified by schools as in need.  In 2023 1,868 children participated in HAF programmes over the summer holidays.
	Free School Meals (FSM)	Since April 2023 all primary school children have been eligible for FSMs part of the London Mayor's programme. This has now been extended for a further year.
	Physical Activity	Beat the Streets 2023– 8000 0- to 18-year-olds and 47 primary schools took part in the Beat the Streets Campaign
	Supporting 13-18 years olds with their weight – CYP Social Prescribing	The Children and Young People's Social Prescribing pilot has supported 153 children since it started in October 2022. The eligibility criteria for the programme are weight and emotional wellbeing issues. The pilot started in the East Merton PCN and expanded to Morden PCN in August 2023. Having successfully bid for additional funds from the SWLondon Inequalities Fund the service is being extended to the North PCN from April 2024



Theme	Action area	January 2024 update
	Supporting very obese children	A new Complications of Excess Weight clinic at St. George's hospital has started seeing children in January 2024. The clinical lead presented to the January meeting of the Child Healthy Weight Steering group.
<b>Healthy place - shaping the places we live, learn, work and play and influencing choices on the food we eat</b>	Climate Strategy and Action Plan	Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan contributes to tackling child healthy weight, committing to active travel and increasing and protecting existing vegetation like trees, including the school streets programme (adopted by 30 schools <sup>17</sup> ), which has the benefit of both reducing air pollution and promoting physical activity.
	The London Mayor's planning guidance	Boroughs are required to implement the 2021 London Plan's restriction on new take-aways within 400 metres of primary and secondary schools. <sup>18</sup> No submission for new takeaways within 400 metres of schools were made in 2023.
	Reducing unhealthy advertising	Merton is one of 4 London Boroughs to have successfully introduced a Healthier Advertising Policy.
	School Superzones	The Healthy Places Officer has successfully bid for 3 GLA superzone grants which are tackling different aspects of Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing active travel to school</li> <li>• Creating safer access to greenspace across the road from primary schools</li> <li>• Increasing safety in car park neighbouring a school</li> </ul>

	Healthy Catering Commitment	The Tri-borough healthy catering commitment officer has made progress in 2023 to sign up businesses to the Healthy Catering Commitment
	Cooking well on a budget	Ready Steady Cook classes focused on cooking well on a budget are currently running in Mitcham at Pollards Hill and St. Mark's Church Wimbledon; funded by Civic Pride. Launched in September 2023, numbers have been gradually increasing.
	Borough of Sport	Good progress is being made with the Borough of Sport ambition, which aims to get more people aged 4-16 more Active. We have recently introduced permanent u16's free swims at times in all 3 leisure centres. We are also working on other 'exemplar' projects such as Park Play which will provide free weekly intergenerational play opportunities at several parks in the borough starting in Spring 2024. More information as to where to find activities within your local area can be found here <a href="#">Merton - Get Active</a>

## 5 Future plans and opportunities

- 5.1 The national guides to implementing systems wide approaches to reducing obesity cover the types of work we should be doing as a council and wider partnership to promote environments, behaviours, approaches which help CYP stay a healthy weight.<sup>19</sup> One example is implementing a 'Health in All Policy' approach which provides 'a useful framework for tackling complex health issues and embedding health in the work of all partners'<sup>20</sup>

Current actions to address inequalities in child healthy weight will continue and, we will seek out opportunities to strengthen our approach in 2024. We will also continue to include the Young Inspectors in these discussions. Priorities for 2024 include:

- Increase the uptake of Healthy Start through the work of the new Strategic Lead for Food, Food partnerships and Food poverty (GLA funded 1 year post)
- Implement the refreshed Merton Food Poverty Action Plan
- Further develop and implement the Child Healthy weight communications' plan as part of the Public Health team's and other colleagues communications plans
- Work with the new Strategic lead for Food, Food partnerships and food poverty to develop more sustainable approaches to supporting those experiencing food insecurity such as cash first and wraparound models
- Bring together the requirements within the SW London Infant feeding strategy, UNICEF Going for Gold and Family Hubs Infant Feeding strategy to create an integrated Borough plan for infant feeding, including becoming a breastfeeding friendly borough
- Analyse the results from the Active Lives survey to understand trends and attitudes towards physical activity amongst CYP
- Use the extension of the SWL inequalities funding for the CYP Social Prescribing pilot until December 2024 to implement recommendations from the independent evaluation report of the CYP social prescribing programme
- Develop the case for a Merton Tier 3 service / work with South West London ICB on the development of a CYP Tier 3 weight management service
- Undertake detailed analysis into the different in obesity rates between reception and Year 6, including a review of the evidence base for what works in primary school. This will be used to inform bids when opportunities arise
- Review breakfast club provision in the Borough, including an assessment of the offer against the School Food Standards<sup>21</sup> This will be used to inform bids /business cases.
- Review and widen the membership of the Child Healthy Weight Steering Group

## 5.2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.2.1 N/A

5.3 Consultation undertaken or proposed.

5.3.1 Stakeholder engagement via the child healthy weight steering group.

5.4 Timetable

5.4.1 Timetable for work is as per the Child Healthy Weight Action Plan deadlines.

## 5.5 Financial, resource and property implications

5.5.1 The Child Healthy Weight Action Plan is being implemented within existing resources of all partners.

5.5.2 Tackling childhood obesity is a complex challenge that is shared by public health, the wider council, and external partners. Each partner contributes its time, expertise and influence to varying degrees e.g., Public Health through its existing resources commissions health visiting and school nursing, both of which work to influence the determinants of healthy weight through engaging with children, parents and schools and supporting those who are obese.

5.6 Legal and statutory implications

5.6.1 N/A

5.7 Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

5.7.1 Inequalities are detailed in the main report above.

5.8 Crime and Disorder implications

5.8.1 N/A

5.9 Risk management and health and safety implications

5.9.1 N/A

5.10 Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

5.10.1 N/A

5.11 Background papers

- [The Impact of Covid19 on young people in Merton - Final.pdf](#)
- [every child a healthy weight.pdf \(london.gov.uk\)](#)

## References

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<sup>1</sup> [Healthy weight – RCPCH – State of Child Health](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Childhood obesity: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(22\)00138-9/fulltext#seccesectitle0010](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(22)00138-9/fulltext#seccesectitle0010)

<sup>4</sup> [Obesity Profile - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [How can local authorities reduce obesity? - NIHR Evidence](#)

- <sup>6</sup> [Whole systems approach to obesity: A guide to support local approaches \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- <sup>7</sup> [Obesity Profile - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)
- <sup>8</sup> [Obesity Profile - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)
- <sup>9</sup> [Local health, public health data for small geographic areas - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)
- <sup>10</sup> Hudda MT, Nightingale CM, Donin AS, Fewtrell MS, Haroun D, Lum S, et al. Body mass index adjustments to increase the validity of body fatness assessment in UK black African and south Asian children. *Int J Obes.* 2017;41(7):1048–55.
- <sup>10</sup> St. Pierre C, Ver Ploeg M, Dietz WH, Pryor S, Jakazi CS, Layman E, Noymer D, Coughtry-Davenport T, Sacheck JM. Food insecurity and childhood obesity: A systematic review. *Pediatrics.* 2022 Jul 1;150(1):e2021055571.
- <sup>11</sup> [Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)
- <sup>12</sup> St. Pierre C, Ver Ploeg M, Dietz WH, Pryor S, Jakazi CS, Layman E, Noymer D, Coughtry-Davenport T, Sacheck JM. Food insecurity and childhood obesity: A systematic review. *Pediatrics.* 2022 Jul 1;150(1):e2021055571.
- <sup>13</sup> Marmot M. Health equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on. *Bmj.* 2020 Feb 25;368.
- <sup>14</sup> [https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/TFF\\_Cost%20of%20living%20briefing.pdf](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/TFF_Cost%20of%20living%20briefing.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> [Pervasiveness, impact and implications of weight stigma \(thelancet.com\)](https://thelancet.com)
- <sup>16</sup> [The Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative](#)
- <sup>17</sup> [School streets \(school safety zones\) | Merton Council](#)
- <sup>18</sup> [the\\_london\\_plan\\_2021.pdf](#)
- <sup>19</sup> [Promoting healthy weight in children, young people and families: A resource to support local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- <sup>20</sup> [Promoting healthy weight in children, young people and families: A resource to support local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- <sup>21</sup> [School food standards practical guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

## Appendices

Figure 13 Reception and Year 6 data for overweight and obesity compared to England average (data from OHID fingertips)

Indicator	Period	Merton			Region England			London		
		Recent Trend	Count	Value	Value	Value	Worst	Range	Best	
Reception prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	7.9%	10.0%	9.7%	13.5%			
Reception prevalence of overweight (including obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	18.1%	21.1%	22.1%	25.8%			
Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	21.5%	24.8%	22.5%	31.4%			
Year 6 prevalence of overweight (including obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	35.2%	39.2%	36.6%	46.3%			

Figure 14 Reception and Year 6 data for overweight and obesity compared to England average (data from OHID fingertips)

Indicator	Period	Merton			Region England			England		
		Recent Trend	Count	Value	Value	Value	Worst	Range	Best	
Reception prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	7.9%	10.0%	9.7%	13.6%			
Reception prevalence of overweight (including obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	18.1%	21.1%	22.1%	28.7%			
Year 6 prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	21.5%	24.8%	22.5%	31.4%			
Year 6 prevalence of overweight (including obesity), 3 years data combined	2020/21 - 22/23	-	-	35.2%	39.2%	36.6%	46.3%			

Figure 15 Percentage of reception children classified as obese 2022-2023

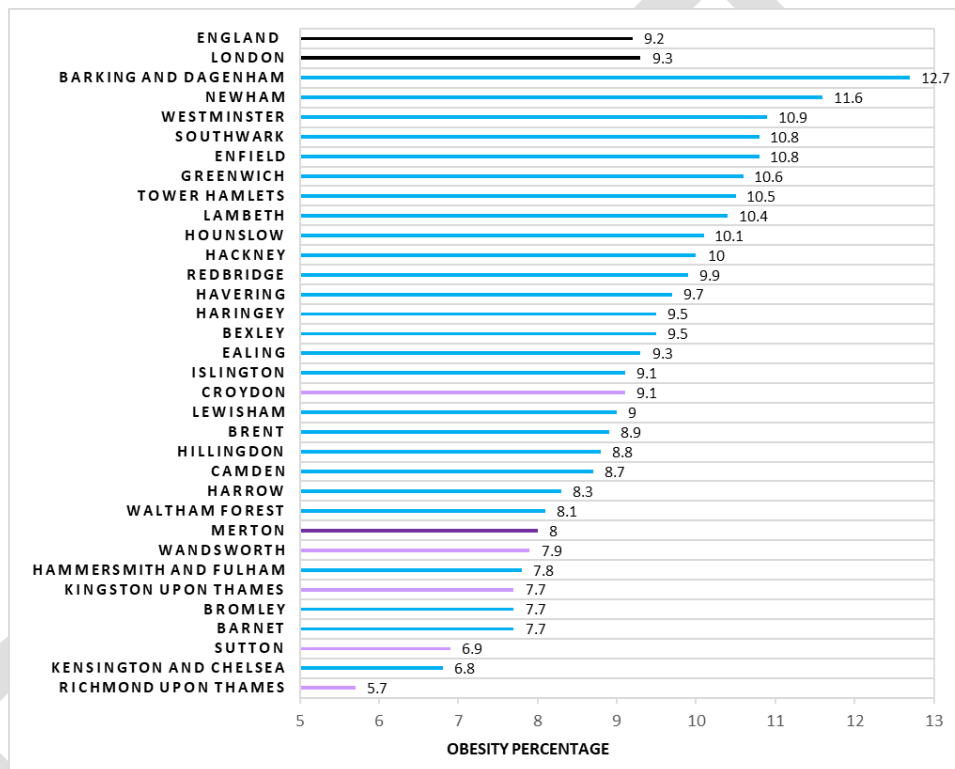
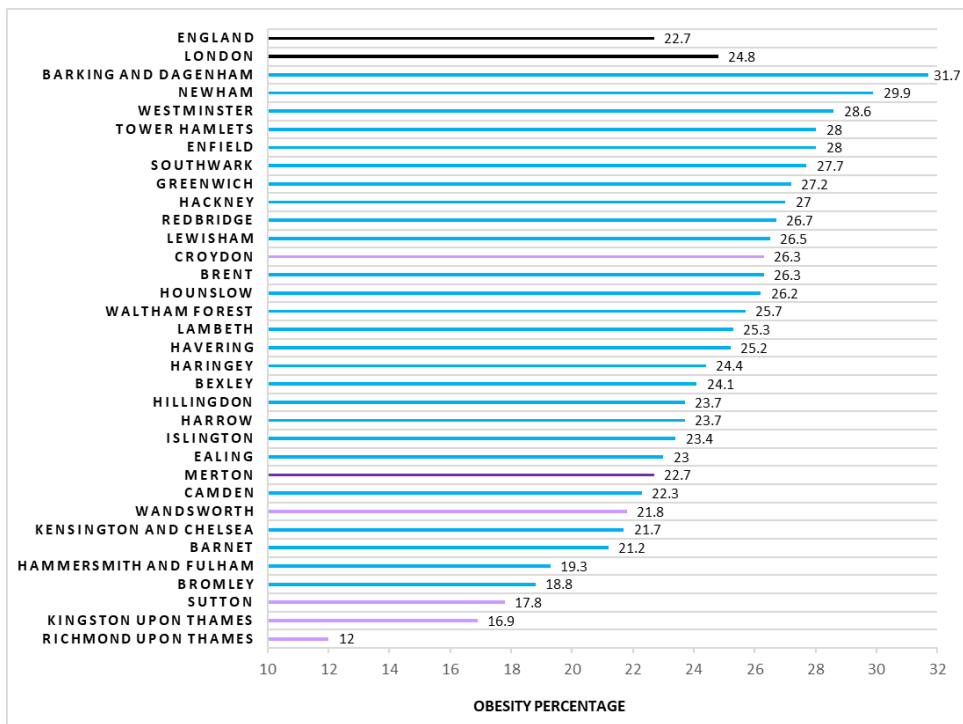


Figure 16 Percentage of year 6 children classified as obese 2022-2023



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