Action on Healthier Weight in Stockton-on-Tees

Director of Public Health Report 2026

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Foreword

Many parents and carers will know the influence of 'pester power' – when their children spot the brightest packaging on the shop shelf, containing food that is often full of sugar, salt or fat. In reality though, we often face a similar situation as adults, where food that is low in nutrition and high in unhealthy ingredients, can be relatively affordable, very easily available and attractively promoted. Unfortunately, we know that healthy food at affordable prices is often less available in areas where people are already struggling with the cost of living and with poorer health. Together with things such as accessible places to be active and support with cooking skills, good food forms an important part of local people being able to live with a healthy weight. As a Council and with partners, it is our responsibility to help create places that give people the best chance of being healthy – and as far as possible, to 'design in' things that promote good health and wellbeing rather than just mitigate the impact of poor health. To do this meaningfully, we need to work alongside communities, particularly those who experience disproportionately worse health outcomes.

Living with a healthy weight is important to people in the borough. It affects their mental wellbeing and physical health and this report focuses on further work we can do working with partners and communities, to address the social, economic and environmental factors that drive levels of healthy weight or obesity. We know from research evidence, that focusing on these factors (rather than over-focusing on individual behaviours), is what will help to change outcomes at population level in our borough. I hope you find this report helpful. The recommendations follow on from those in last year's report, which focused on community-centred healthy places (an update on this is given in *Appendix 4* below).

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Executive Summary

This year's report focuses on the further action we can take as a Council and partners, working alongside communities, to give local people the best chance of living with a healthy weight.

- Healthy weight is important to local people and has a significant effect on both physical and mental health
- Over-focusing on individual behaviours will not drive a population-level shift in health outcomes
- To achieve this shift, a focus is needed on creating places that enable people to be healthy – including the social, economic and environmental factors that drive healthy weight and obesity
- It is particularly important to work alongside local communities, to shape an approach that makes the most of strengths in local communities and ensure that places and support are appropriate to the needs of different communities across our borough
- The local Health and Wellbeing Board has identified healthy weight as a priority and is coordinating the approach to this across partner organisations that make up the health and wellbeing system, including working with local communities
- There is a lot of good work underway, across partners and within the community, which we can build on
- There are also opportunities to take this further, through leadership, policy and practice, to help shape healthy places and support communities
- The report sets out recommendations on the following:
    - Strengthen strategic leadership
    - Implement the Healthy Weight Declaration
    - Increase focus on food environments and harmful industries
    - Strengthen community-centred approaches and peer support
    - Focus on prevention and early intervention

- The recommendations follow on from those from last year's report, which focused on community-centred healthy places

Introduction

This year's report looks at healthy weight and good food for communities across the borough.

Living with a healthy weight has been recognised as an important local issue by people in the borough and by statutory and partner organisations. Most people in Stockton-on-Tees would like to eat more healthily and to be more active, but the places we work, live and play can sometimes make this challenging. Different communities across the borough will experience these challenges in different ways, leading to unequal and unfair differences in health and wellbeing.

We know from research over many years, that a healthy weight is important for both mental and physical health and wellbeing - however there are numerous factors that influence whether local people are able to live with a healthy weight (*Appendix 1*). This report focuses on what we can do, working across the Council, with communities, and with our partners such as the NHS and local Voluntary and Community Sector, to make it easier to live with a healthy weight. Our local Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board brings key partner organisations together and has recognised this as a priority for local people. The Board is looking at what more we can do, working together, to improve the opportunity for local people to have a healthier weight, including adopting the Healthy Weight Declaration, with a particular focus on healthy eating and the food environment. This focus recognises the significant progress so far on local participation in physical activity and draws attention to the local challenges and resulting opportunities we have to improve the healthy food environment and address inequalities, (*Figure 1*) working with residents and partners.

Figure 1



(Based on evidence including WHO 2020, Global Burden of Disease 2020 & Cochrane reviews).

The following report sets out some recommended actions to allow people of all ages to live at healthier weights, recognising the importance of creating supportive environments from childhood onwards, enabling people to develop and maintain healthier weight throughout life and into older age. These actions build on some of the existing strengths in the borough and recognise both where we have made progress and where we know there is more to do.

What local people say

Feeling well and achieving a healthy weight are important issues for people in Stockton-on-Tees. Surveys of people in Stockton-on-Tees have found that 70% of people would like to eat more healthily, but that they find it challenging to do so.

Feedback gathered through several consultations in 2022 identified key themes relating to healthy weight for residents. Respondents felt that there is a strong push towards eating food high in salt, sugar and fat, with it being cheaper, more appealing, more available and more convenient when compared to healthier options.

"Some weeks I'm fine, others I'm stuck — I never know." – Stockton-on-Tees resident

Insights from Growing Well Growing Healthy participants (a local programme supporting children and families to achieve and maintain a healthy weight) also indicate that unhealthy eating is heavily shaped by the food environment. Children and families are more likely to eat healthily when healthy options are affordable, convenient, accessible, promoted and normalised, while barriers arise when unhealthy options are cheaper, easier, larger, more heavily marketed and more readily available. Lasting improvement therefore requires changes to the wider food system and the impact this has on local people's access to healthy food.

Feedback from Community Health and Wellbeing Champions in Stockton-on-Tees found that although local people are aware of actions they could take to improve their health, many people experience practical, physical and environmental barriers to putting this into practice. We know that different communities across the borough will experience these barriers in different ways, depending on their circumstances. Accessible, adaptable and non-judgemental options are essential, as well as creating the environment that gives people the best chance of a healthy life.

Example: 2022 Stockton-on-Tees Resident Short Survey

Of the 122 resident responses, only a quarter said they find it easy or very easy to maintain a weight they are happy with. 70% would like to eat more healthily, and a similar percentage would like to be more active.

"Everyone else knows what they're doing – I'd feel stupid" – Stockton-on-Tees resident

Hundreds of Stockton-on-Tees residents have shared their views on physical activity in the Borough through surveys in 2022. This engagement found that people experience several barriers to keeping active, including financial insecurity; chronic health conditions and associated pain; mental health challenges and low confidence; lack of safety and inclusion in local spaces; and inaccessible or unaffordable transport.

> *"It's food or football – we choose food" (Stockton-on-Tees resident)*

Despite these challenges, our understanding of local needs also shows that there is huge potential to create the conditions for active and healthy lives in Stockton-on-Tees when communities and local system partners work together and focus on collaboration and community-led action.

The challenge

Public health impact

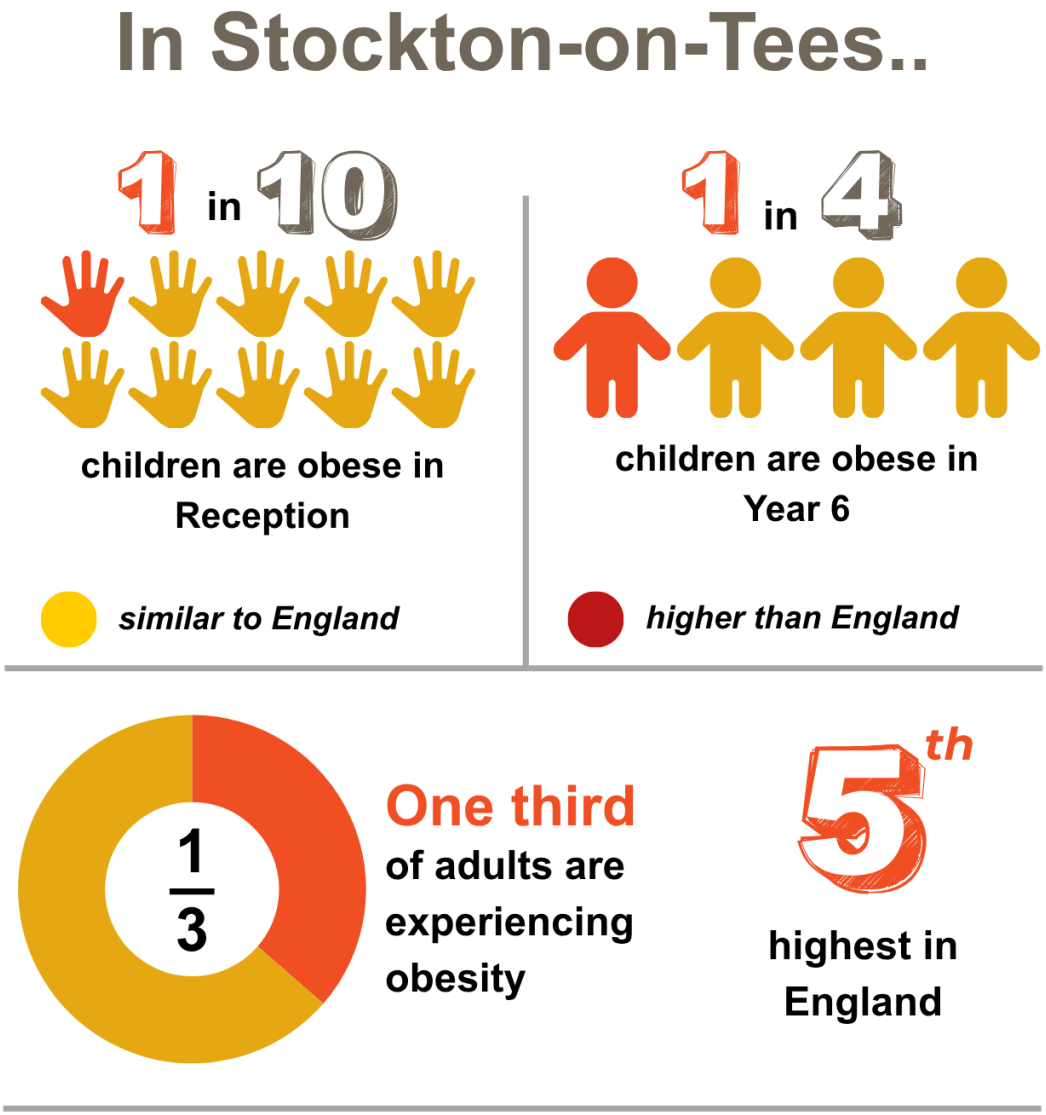
In Stockton-on-Tees, more people are overweight or experiencing obesity than in other parts of the country, with adult obesity rates among the highest in England. There are major inequalities across the borough in relation to healthy weight and good food. People who live in areas of high deprivation are less likely to have access to good food and are more likely to be overweight or obese. These inequalities are evident from a young age, with children starting school in some of our more deprived areas in Stockton-on-Tees already more than twice as likely to be experiencing obesity as children in some of our most affluent areas.

Supporting people to live at a healthier weight has many benefits for individuals and their communities. Living with obesity can mean experiencing stigma and living at a healthier weight can reduce the risk of people developing long-term conditions (like diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers) and improve mental health and wellbeing. These are important drivers of the inequality in life expectancy between the most and least deprived communities in Stockton-on-Tees. For example, Stockton-on-Tees experiences higher rates of deaths and emergency hospital admissions from heart disease compared to the national average and people living in more deprived areas of the borough are disproportionately affected.

The picture in Stockton on Tees

Interactive data on healthy weight and good food can be found in the Stockton-on-Tees joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA), which summarises the health and care needs of the local population (and further data in *Appendix 2*).

Figure 2. The image below shows that in Stockton-on-Tees: 1 out of 10 children in reception are experiencing obesity (10.4%); 1 out of 4 children in Year 6 are experiencing obesity (25.7%); 1 in 3 adults are experiencing obesity (36.4%); and the Borough has the 5th highest obesity prevalence in England

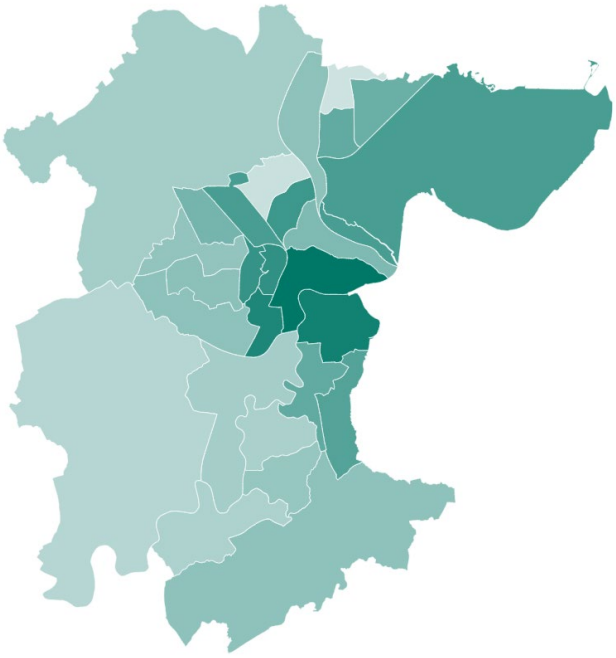


There are stark inequalities in obesity prevalence in different parts of the Borough and between different communities. Certain groups are less likely to be a healthy weight, including:

- People living in areas of high deprivation
- People in lower socio-economic groups
- People living with disabilities
- Children of Asian or black ethnicity, and adults of black ethnicity
- People experiencing mental health conditions

The map below shows that the prevalence of obesity in for children in reception ranges from 15.4% in Stockton Town Centre (the Borough's most deprived ward) to 6.3% in the more affluent Billingham North ward.

Figure 3. Map of Stockton-on-Tees, which shows areas with higher prevalence of obesity for children in reception in dark green and areas with lower prevalence of obesity for children in reception in light green.



What works?

There is strong evidence to suggest that prevention (supporting a healthy weight and improving access to healthy food), particularly in the early years, is critical in reducing obesity prevalence throughout life. The first five years of life are a critical period, with early experiences and family support shaping children's health, development, wellbeing and future life chances. Pregnancy, infancy and the early years provide a key opportunity to support families in establishing the foundations for healthy growth, development and school readiness, including healthy eating, physical activity and positive routines. For example, breastfeeding is associated with a lower risk of overweight and obesity in later childhood and, alongside its wider health benefits, is an important component of a whole-system approach to obesity prevention and reducing health inequalities.

Weight should not be viewed in isolation; it is connected to, and affected by, many different aspects of people's lives. In addition to deprivation, weight is strongly associated with other determinants of health, including poverty, food insecurity, and the built and natural environment (*Appendix 1*). This means it is important to focus on the wider factors that drive healthy weight or obesity across the population, rather than a very narrow focus on individual behaviours. In fact, often individuals have very limited real choice over many of the factors driving weight, such as access to healthy and affordable food.

Helping people to eat healthier food and maintain active lifestyles therefore requires coordinated and collaborative action, tailored to the needs of our various local communities. This is sometimes described as a "whole systems approach". National guidance on the Whole Systems Approach to Obesity says that this way of working "enables local stakeholders, including communities, to come together, share an understanding of the reality of the challenge, consider how the local system is

operating and where there are the greatest opportunities for change. Stakeholders agree actions and decide as a network how to work together in an integrated way to bring about sustainable, long-term systems change."

This way of working is in keeping with the Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out a coordinated, Borough-wide approach to building strong foundations for health and wellbeing and is overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Council is well-placed to lead a whole systems approach to addressing obesity through influence over planning, transport, housing, education, and leisure services. This is underpinned by strong partnerships, including with the Mayoral Strategic Authority, the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and the skills and resources of local communities. In line with the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, this report is focused on prevention and early intervention in order to help people achieve a healthier weight. While there is a role for services (such as the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme) and medicines to treat people who are living with obesity, the recommendations in this report are focused on making changes at population level and creating places where it's easier for people to start and stay at healthier weights. This 'universal' approach provides an important foundation for proportionate, targeted activity for the groups most in need.

National action

Local leadership to improve the food environment and help people to achieve healthier weight is essential and is the focus of this report. We acknowledge, however, that there is also scope to address obesity through regulatory and fiscal interventions at the national level. The Government has published a 10 Year Health Plan for England, which describes several commitments in this area, including to:

- restrict junk food advertising targeted at children
- ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to under 16 year olds
- update school food standards legislation
- uplift the rate at which the Soft Drinks Industry Levy is paid
- update the Nutrient Profile Model to categorise which foods are more or less healthy
- introduce mandatory healthy food sales reporting for all large companies in the food sector
- expand access to weight loss services and treatments

The Government also published a Food Strategy for England, which sets out plans to "create a healthier, more affordable, sustainable, resilient food system".

Progress so far

Work is already underway to tackle the underlying causes of obesity and poor diet in Stockton-on-Tees.

Good Food Local

In June 2026, Sustain published its first report on the approaches Councils in the North East are taking to food partnerships, household food insecurity, food related ill-health and the wider food system. This builds on a decade of work mapping and reporting on Council-level commitments in London, providing an opportunity to apply this approach in our region. The Good Food Local mapping in the North East found that Stockton-on-Tees has achieved sustained progress across three years of using this tool and benefited from regional collaboration and learning. One notable area of progress

has been in the Sustainable Food Economy theme, where Stockton-on-Tees has progressed from *Foundation* to *Leadership* level over three years. This achievement has been driven in part by the work of the Council's Town Centres Team, which has worked closely with market providers to encourage a wider range of healthy and diverse food options, while also reducing barriers and making it easier for local businesses to establish market stalls. This has helped to support a more vibrant, accessible, and sustainable local food economy. Overall, Stockton-on-Tees is showing 'Leadership' or demonstrating 'Good Progress' in several categories of the Good Food Local tool, including food governance and strategy; food poverty alliances; and school meals (*Appendix 3*).

One of the areas where further local work is needed, is on **healthier food environments**. The recommendations from Sustain and learning from other areas, have informed the focus and recommendations of this report.

Healthy Weight Declaration

Work is currently underway to implement the Healthy Weight Declaration in Stockton-on-Tees. Developed by Food Active, the Declaration is a strategic commitment that supports organisations to tackle unhealthy weight through a whole-systems approach. Although implementation is still in its early stages, significant progress has already been made, including establishing a Food Equity and Healthier Weight Steering Group, to drive the work forward. A cross-cutting Food Strategy is being planned, bringing together partners and priorities across the wider food system to improve health outcomes for residents.

Children and young people

Childhood obesity is both a symptom and driver of wider inequalities. In Stockton-on-Tees, the Best Start in Life Plan 2026 to 2031 sets out our ambition to ensure every child has the best start from pregnancy to age five. Recognising the importance of early intervention in reducing inequalities and improving outcomes, healthy weight and good food are embedded in one of the priorities: 'Foundations for a Healthy Childhood'. This focuses on supporting breastfeeding, healthy weaning, access to Healthy Start and free school meals, as well as active play and reduced sedentary behaviour to help children eat well, stay active and develop healthy habits from the earliest years.

The Healthy Start Scheme supports eligible families with the cost of healthy food and vitamins during pregnancy and the early years. Increasing uptake is a Best Start in Life priority, with partners across the system working together to identify eligible families and maximise access to this support.

The Healthy Child Programme (the '0-19 Service') is a key mechanism for obesity prevention in the early years. Through universal and targeted support from pregnancy to age five, health visitors help families establish healthy behaviours, monitor children's growth and development, and access additional support where needed. A newly introduced review at age 3.5-4 years provides a further opportunity to promote school readiness and identify emerging needs.

Breastfeeding supports healthy growth and development and is associated with a lower risk of obesity in later life. Local support is provided through maternity services, the 0-19 Service and Family Hubs. The Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme has been established in over 70 organisations and businesses in Stockton-on-Tees, helping to create a community where breastfeeding is visible, accepted and supported.

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) helps identify children who may benefit from additional support to reach a healthy weight, with those identified as overweight or obese offered targeted intervention through the Growing Well Growing Healthy Service (GWGH). NCMP data also

informs a neighbourhood approach, enabling resources and interventions to be targeted where need is greatest and helping to reduce health inequalities. GWGH is a healthy weight programme which provides targeted support for children and families. The programme combines individual and family support as well as key priorities to promote healthy eating and support behaviour change. Building on, and maximising, links with local communities, a recent review has prompted a redesign of the service towards a more preventative and targeted geographic offer, with greater integration into the wider healthier weight and good food system.

Good oral health and healthy weight are closely linked, with both influenced by diet, particularly the consumption of sugary foods and drinks. Establishing healthy eating and oral health habits in the early years can help prevent both obesity and dental decay, reducing inequalities and supporting children's health, wellbeing and school readiness. In Stockton-on-Tees, we've made incredible progress with oral health through supervised toothbrushing programmes and targeted oral health initiatives helping to give children the best start in life and support lifelong healthy behaviours.

Health impact assessment

Stockton-on-Tees has also introduced Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) for planning applications and developed a toolkit to support development of HIAs. These HIAs should assess the potential effects of proposed plans, policies and programmes and their development will provide timely recommendations during the decision-making process to create healthy environments, minimise poor health outcomes, and reduce health inequalities.

Public Health Small Grants Scheme

The Public Health Small Grants Scheme is one initiative that is helping local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to support their communities and improve health and wellbeing. The Scheme sits as part of a range of grant-funded activities enabled through the Council, that support health and wellbeing and help address inequalities. Over the past three years, the Scheme has supported 37 VCSE organisations including activities designed to increase physical activity, promote healthy eating, and reduce social isolation by helping residents build meaningful social connections. These interventions address key factors associated with achieving and maintaining a healthier weight.

A notable feature of the programme has been the ability of some grant recipients such as Stockton Food Power Network to establish their own small grant schemes, building resilience, sustainability and community ownership. This has enabled them to support other smaller community organisations, supporting projects that improve access to healthier food options within local communities. Through this approach, the programme has extended its reach to groups that may previously have faced barriers to accessing funding through more competitive application processes. The programme has demonstrated the value of empowering trusted local organisations to respond to community needs and deliver targeted wellbeing initiatives.

Active Stockton

"Active Stockton – Communities on the Move" is the name of the Sport England Place Partnership in Stockton-on-Tees, part of Sport England's Place Expansion programme. With £1.3million awarded for the next phase of work, Active Stockton is encouraging greater collaboration and partnership working in Stockton-on-Tees, to increase opportunities to be active and address barriers that prevent people

from moving. This shared effort across local partners aims to create long-term change by working differently – starting with communities, building trust, and joining up across organisations.

Funding will be focused on five priorities over the next two years:

- Growing the network of connected partner organisations to create a strong system
- Creating a more inclusive, active culture
- Creating safe spaces and doorstep opportunities to help people be active
- Targeted support for children and young people to increase their activity
- Supporting people living with pain and health conditions to be more active

While not focused on healthier eating and the food environment, specifically, this work contributes to the longer-term aim of Stockton-on-Tees becoming an inclusive, safe and collaborative place where communities feel they belong, have a voice, and naturally lead active, healthy lives. By complementing it with efforts to make healthier food choices accessible to everyone – in line with recommendations below – we will start to see better outcomes for residents.

Tees Active

Tees Active supports residents across Stockton-on-Tees by providing accessible, affordable and inclusive opportunities to become more active. Working in partnership with the Council and healthcare professionals, Tees Active delivers programmes that help people overcome barriers to participation and develop healthier, more sustainable habits.

One example is the Adult Weight Management Programme, a structured 12-week intervention available through referral from a GP or healthcare professional. Participants receive access to Tees Active gyms, swimming pools and fitness classes, helping them gradually increase their activity levels in a supportive environment. The programme focuses not only on weight loss but on creating long-term behavioural change, building confidence and encouraging healthier lifestyle habits that can be maintained beyond the programme.

In addition, the Active Health Programme provides tailored support for individuals living with existing health conditions. Through specialist guidance and adapted physical activity opportunities, participants are supported to safely increase their activity levels, improve management of their health conditions and reduce the risks associated with inactivity and excess weight.

Through these programmes, Tees Active contributes to supporting healthier communities, reducing health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing outcomes across Stockton-on-Tees.

Recommendations

Stockton benefits from several existing strengths, as described above. These provide opportunities to strengthen prevention and reduce inequalities in healthy weight. However, more needs to be done to transform Stockton-on-Tees into a healthy place that supports people to eat well and achieve a healthy weight. This requires:

- Strong political and system leadership.
- Multi-agency partnerships and governance.
- A long-term strategic approach.
- Investment in workforce development.
- Early years intervention.

- Combining individual and family support with wider environmental and policy action.
- A clear focus on reducing inequalities

The following actions are recommended, fitting with the commitments and principles in the local Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

1. Strengthen strategic leadership

The Health and Wellbeing Board's ambition is to help create healthy communities and design health into our places, turning a focus on mitigating poor health to a drive for health creation. In Stockton-on-Tees, strengthening strategic leadership will involve a whole-system healthy weight approach led by the Health and Wellbeing Board and the newly established Food Equity and Healthier Weight Steering Group. This recognises that healthy weight considerations must be embedded across council policy and decision-making, with the involvement of partners and communities.

This will ensure that work to improve the food environment is aligned with other local priorities, including the anti-poverty agenda and ambitions surrounding inclusive growth. As such, work on healthy weight should **prioritise reducing inequalities**, targeting action towards communities experiencing the greatest burden of obesity and the greatest barriers to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

2. Implement the Healthy Weight Declaration

The Healthy Weight Declaration will provide a framework for strengthening and coordinating existing activity across Stockton-on-Tees, ensuring that healthier weight and food equity considerations are embedded across Council policies, services and partnerships. Building on the strong foundations already in place, delivery will focus on both short- and longer-term priorities aligned to the Declaration's 16 commitments.

In the short term, priority actions will include the development of a consolidated Healthier Weight Action Plan, continued support for partnership networks, improving access to health literacy training, and strengthening links between planning, public health and wider council services.

Over the longer term, work will focus on creating healthier food environments through planning and procurement, supporting a sustainable local food economy, improving access to drinking water, integrating healthier weight considerations into climate and resilience planning, and embedding health-promoting approaches across council services and public spaces.

Delivery and monitoring of the Declaration will be overseen by the newly established Food Equity and Healthier Weight Steering Group, which will provide strategic leadership, drive cross-departmental collaboration, and monitor progress against agreed commitments and actions. The Steering Group will also ensure that implementation reflects a whole-systems approach, recognising the interconnected factors that influence healthy weight, including food access, food insecurity, planning, transport, physical activity and the wider determinants of health.

Implementation of the Declaration will also build upon the learning, partnerships and momentum developed through Stockton-on-Tees' participation in the Good Food Local North East pilot. Through this work, the Council has strengthened relationships with partners across the food system, enhanced its understanding of local food system challenges and opportunities, and identified areas for future improvement. The Healthy Weight Declaration will provide an opportunity to build on these achievements, aligning healthy weight ambitions with wider work to create a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system for all residents.

3. Increase focus on food environments and industries harmful to health

We know that getting people to a healthier weight is not just about giving them the information but about making tangible changes to the environments in which they live. We must focus on both reducing the availability of less healthy food and on increasing the availability of healthier food options. This sits alongside and supports a focus on the economy and inclusive growth, as part of our efforts to enable people to be healthy work and contribute to society, community and the economy.

Councils can work to strengthen protections from unhealthy food advertising, learning from the success of advertising laws in reducing tobacco harms. We all need access to affordable, nutritious food and yet those options can be hard to find amongst aggressively marketed unhealthy food on our shop shelves and in our towns. We want people to be able to make decisions that are right for them, free from commercial influence. Implementation of the Healthy Weight Declaration – as described above – will include development of a Food Strategy and action on food advertising, planning, reducing food insecurity, and improving access to affordable, healthy food across the borough.

In Stockton-on-Tees we will work closely across planning and public health teams in development of the emerging Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan. Local planning policies can help create places th at enable people to make choices that are right for their health. There are several opportunities through which the Local Plan can influence the food environment, including addressing the prevalence and location of hot food takeaways, good home design, neighbourhood design and promoting opportunities for food growing and physical activity.

4. Strengthen community-centred approaches and peer support

Work with communities also has a central role to play, as communities themselves are best placed to identify and mobilise assets and opportunities that are accessible and acceptable to members of their communities. Last year's Director of Public Health Annual Report proposed using a community-centred public health approach to develop healthy places and healthy communities, in a way that proactively promotes and builds in good health and wellbeing. Several actions were proposed, fitting with the commitments and principles in the Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We know from speaking to residents that VCSEs are trusted community anchors, embedded in their communities and seen as ‘go-to’ organisations.

Building on the success and impact of the Public Health Small Grants scheme described earlier in this report, the funding scheme will continue in 2026/27 to sustain and further strengthen positive outcomes for residents.

The current development of the local Neighbourhood Health Plan presents a significant opportunity to embed healthy weight, physical activity and food-related prevention within a broader whole-system approach to reducing health inequalities. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, Community Connectors, social prescribing and community assets could provide important mechanisms for engaging residents, improving access to support and addressing obesity-related risk factors as part of wider cardiovascular disease prevention, population health management and neighbourhood-based approaches to improving wellbeing.

Stockton Food Poverty Network (SFPN) engages members, many from organisations who are embedded in communities and understand their needs. Every two months, updates on actions from members and community pantry visit numbers are recorded. This data, combined with foodbank usage data, helps us understand changes in demand for local food support. The SFPN Project Coordinator produces an interactive Google map of food poverty projects in the area, which is circulated widely through VCSE, Council and health services. Additionally, the Council has also established a working group to develop its next anti-poverty strategy, with significant input from

people with lived experience. This group is looking at the wider determinants of food poverty and will produce an action plan to address this.

Community Health and Wellbeing Champions are a wide network of individuals who live and/or work in Stockton-on-Tees. The aim of this network is to establish meaningful two-way communication with residents and communities, focusing on the eleven most deprived wards to improve health and wellbeing. Key public health messaging is promoted to residents and Public Health receive valuable feedback and insights through the network. This helps to identify local barriers, misinformation and gaps in need as well as examples of good practice and community assets delivering crucial interventions in the Borough.

5. Focus on prevention and early intervention

One of the priorities in the Stockton-on-Tees Council Plan is the 'best start in life', which recognises that early experiences and family support shaping children's health, development, wellbeing and future life chances. Improving outcomes for children and young people is implicit in each of the recommendations above but identifying some specific activities for this group is also important.

There is substantial variation in childhood obesity and wider determinants of health across the six towns in Stockton-on-Tees. Stockton contains the highest concentration of neighbourhoods experiencing multiple indicators of disadvantage, followed by Thornaby and Billingham. A review of the Growing Well Growing Healthy service has identified opportunities to adopt a neighbourhood approach to delivery, targeting enhanced support towards areas with the highest levels of childhood obesity and wider determinants of poor health, including deprivation. A universal offer will continue to be available across Stockton-on-Tees, with additional targeted interventions focused on neighbourhoods experiencing the greatest need. An estimated 11,628 children aged 0-15 live within the highest-priority areas. Focusing on priority neighbourhoods within these towns is likely to achieve the greatest impact on reducing childhood obesity and improving child health outcomes.

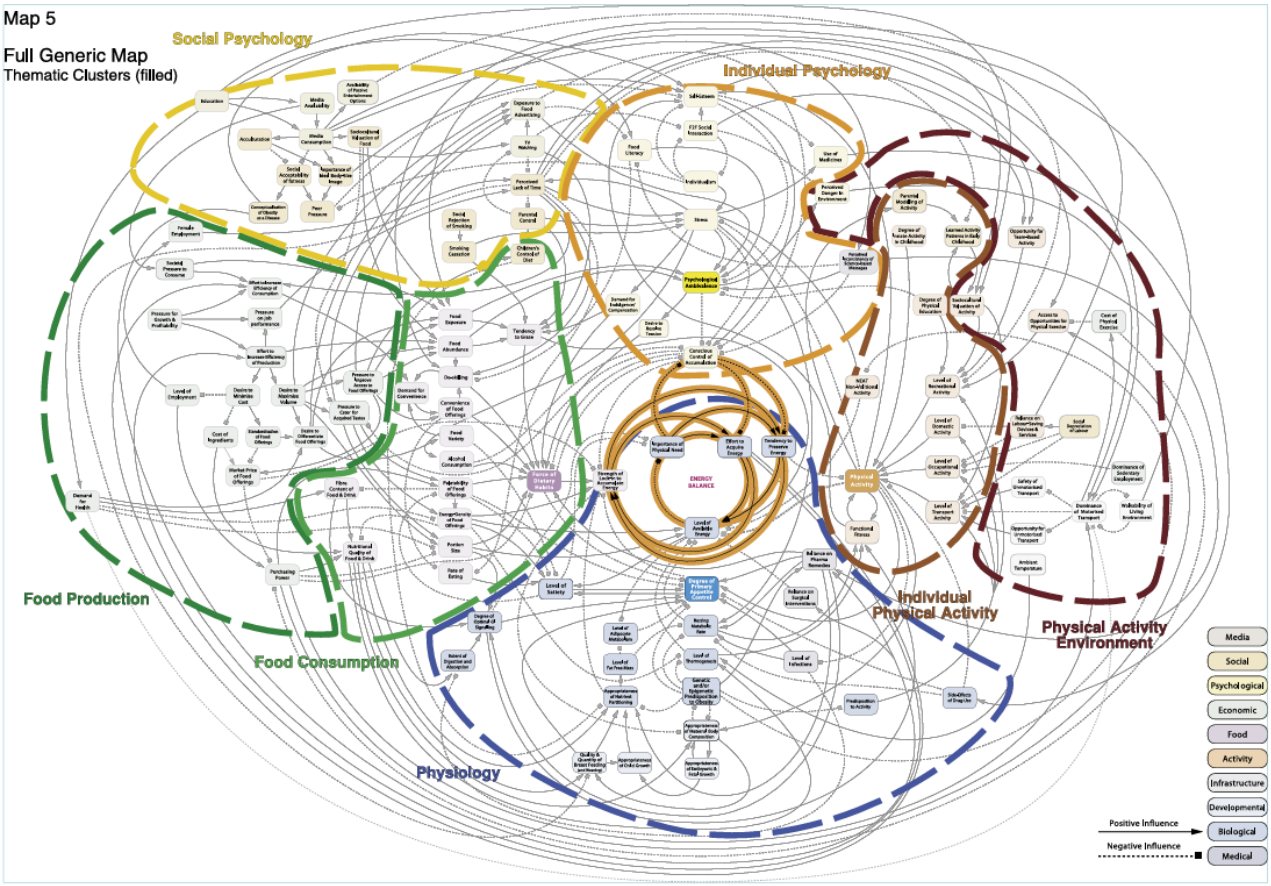
This approach aligns with the NHS 10 Year Health Plan and Neighbourhood Health Framework, which promote a shift from treatment to prevention, from hospital to community-based support, and from a one-size-fits-all approach to one informed by local population need and inequality. By using local data to target resources and support where they can have the greatest impact, the GWGH service will help reduce health inequalities, prevent obesity earlier and improve outcomes for children and families.

The Healthy Schools and Healthy Settings Programmes provide a universal framework for schools and early years settings to promote healthy eating, physical activity and oral health through a whole-setting place-based approach. The programme supports schools to create environments that make healthy choices easier and helps address the wider factors that influence healthy weight. Future plans include enhancing the offer through health and wellbeing survey data, enabling schools to better identify needs, target support and inform local action. We will also build on existing partnership working with schools to ensure opportunities relating to improved nutrition and physical activity are available at all education settings, from early years through to further education.

Appendix 1. Factors influencing obesity & overweight

The intention of the diagram below is to show the complexity of the interlinked factors influencing obesity, rather than each detail. While published in 2007, the picture remains relevant today.

Full obesity system map with thematic links (from *Foresight. Tacking Obesities: Future Choices – Project Report. 2nd Ed. Government office for Science, 2007*)



Appendix 2. Further data on overweight and obesity

The Department of Health and Social Care publishes data on obesity, physical activity and nutrition on 'Fingertips'.

Table 1. Prevalence for children in reception, age 4 to 5 years (2024-25)

	Stockton	North East	England
Healthy weight	76.1%	72.5%	75.4%
Overweight	12.8%	14.3%	13.0%
Obesity (including severe obesity)	10.6%	12.4%	10.5%

Table 2. Prevalence for children in year 6, age 10 to 11 years (2024-25)

	Stockton	North East	England
Healthy weight	59.3%	59.7%	62.2%
Overweight	14.6%	14.2%	13.9%
Obesity (including severe obesity)	25.0%	25.0%	22.2%
Children moving from healthy weight in reception to overweight or obese in year 6	21.7%	23.2%	21.5%

Table 3. Prevalence of overweight (including obesity) in adults (2024-25)

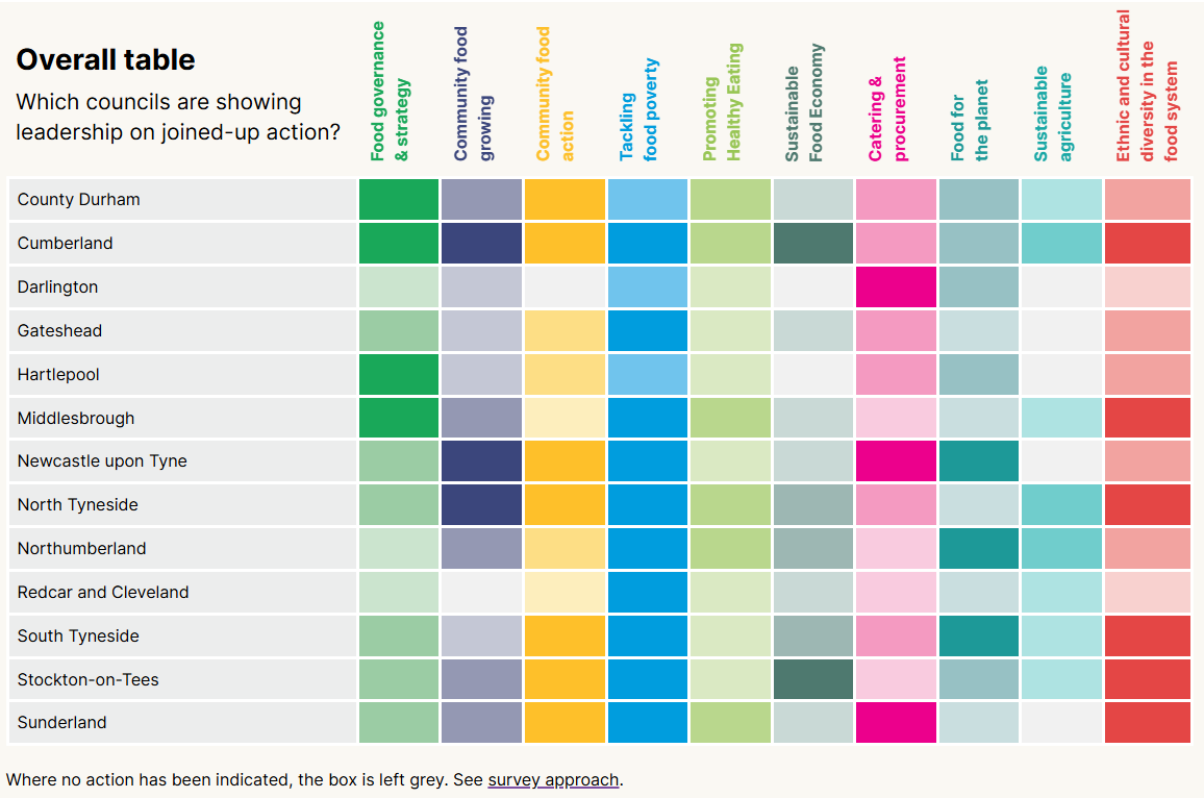
Area	Value
England	64.6%
North East region	70.3%
Sunderland	77.0%
South Tyneside	74.4%
Stockton-on-Tees	73.5%
Northumberland	73.3%
Hartlepool	72.8%
Gateshead	70.5%
Middlesbrough	69.7%
County Durham	69.3%
Redcar and Cleveland	67.4%
Darlington	67.0%
Newcastle upon Tyne	64.8%
North Tyneside	61.1%

Appendix 3. Further information on Good Food Local

The Good Food Local North East report from 2026 tracks council action on food systems change. It finds that the North East continues to face significant food and health inequalities.

Table 4. Summary of councils' progress in different aspects of food system change.

Note: the stronger the colour, the greater the strength of action in this area. Where no action has been indicated, the box is left grey.



Across the 3-year programme so far, Stockton-on-Tees has made particularly strong progress in the areas of:

- Community food action
- Food poverty alliances
- Cash first responses to food insecurity
- Food access for older and disabled people
- Holiday activities and food
- Sustainable food economy
- Ethnic and cultural diversity

Appendix 4. Progress against 2025 DPH Report actions

The table below shows progress against the actions identified in the 2025 Director of Public Health Report, focusing on community-centred healthy places:

2025 DPH Report Action	**Progress – examples**
1. Move towards a 'health creation' approach, identifying proactive approaches to building or designing in good health and wellbeing wherever possible, in policy, practice and commissioning	- Embedding health and wellbeing in the development of the new Local Plan - Health impact assessment tool live for new development applications - Work under Thriving Communities to embed community assets-based working across teams e.g. through a toolkit - Work underway to further develop and embed Making Every Contact Count across services - Service change to respond to the differing needs of communities across the borough, within resource constraint e.g. children and families healthy weight support (through 0-19 service) - Good Food Local North East benchmarking and assessment, identifying strengths and areas for development, with good food as a protective factor for good health - Joint work across the Council, Combined Authority and ICB on initiatives to promote good, stable work and enable people back into work from absence due to ill health (in-line with the *Get Britain Working* White Paper)
2. Use the community-centred public health approach to inform thinking and next steps on working with communities, neighbourhoods and places, including ensuring common principles are shared across partners to help take this forward with communities	- Work with communities being brought further into our local approach to neighbourhood health and the local neighbourhood health plan, as this develops – including mapping community connectors / social prescribers to support integrated neighbourhood teams - Community case-finding approach starting to be developed to support neighbourhood health, including maximising links across inclusive growth and neighbourhood health - Discussion at Team Stockton regarding neighbourhood health, with neighbourhood profiles being developed involving partners and with community insights as a key theme
3. Review our position against the recommendations in the Local Government Association's (LGA's) guide Empowering healthy places: Unveiling the powers and practices of local councils in fostering healthy neighbourhoods. To support, consider completing the Public Health England diagnostic checklist together with partners to determine how well we are	- Work against the LGA guide recommendations is progressing, which will be continued e.g. - Neighbourhood profiles being developed, including quantitative and qualitative / community intelligence - Public health influence and investment shaping work across a range of Council areas looking at socio-economic determinants of health - Opportunity to further communicate and embed Health & Wellbeing Strategy priorities across the Council

collectively enabling communities to take part in place-based approaches to reducing health inequalities	- Health & Wellbeing Board development undertaken with refreshed focus and programme of deep dives on key themes - Opportunity to embed health impact assessment approach more widely across Council services - Significant joint working across planning and public health teams - Public health building approach to further embed Making Every Contact Count across the Council and partners - Health and wellbeing being embedded in some key policies and strategies – to continue - PHE diagnostic checklist not yet completed – opportunity to revisit this suggestion
4. Run LGA facilitated Health in All Policies sessions for Council officers, Members and potentially wider system partners, to inform adopting this approach	- LGA offer being revisited, to align with the new national public health peer review process – potential to implement this is being looked at - Making Every Contact Count approach is being refreshed and rolled out further by public health, across the Council e.g. working with social care colleagues, as well as promoting further with partners and communities - work progressing to embed health, wellbeing and addressing inequalities in policies, including community safety strategy, Local Plan and Best Start Strategy
5. Build in improving health and addressing inequality as a core primary objective of the new Local Plan	- Work underway to embed improving health and wellbeing as a core principle and objective throughout the Local Plan e.g. green space, transport, environment and sustainability, communities and inequalities and access to healthcare provision - Health and wellbeing intelligence and community insight is shaping the Local Plan - Learning from other areas shaping proposals on policies that could support the new Local Plan once developed
6. Identify key actions and issues arising from health impact assessment tool for developers and evaluate its implementation to inform future practice	- HIA tool now implemented, with initial learning fed in to Local Plan discussions and informing joint discussions and further work between public health and planning teams - Evaluation to be done when tool has been in place for 12 months
7. Health and Wellbeing Board to undertake a deep dive specifically on the food environment, in the context of the factors that shape places, to understand how levers can be maximised	- Board deep dive completed on healthy weight, including food environment, with support from Sustain colleagues, with actions agreed - Further Board deep dive being run in October 2026 focused on development of a Food Equity Strategy, as a key pillar of the Healthy Weight Declaration and following this being identified as a key area of development through the Good Food Local North East benchmarking
8. Build on existing insights work with communities such as Sport England and the learning from this approach	- Active Stockton (Sport England) work continues to progress, including building on community relationships and insights – community connectors identified to shape and help implement the work - Community insights from Active Stockton work being fed into wider collation of community insights through the Council's Thriving Communities Board

9. Feed community insights into an organisation and system-wide bank of information, to be used for a range of purposes. Proactively identify key pieces of work to use the insights such as Trailblazer, Pride in Place and Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme	- SBC Community Engagement / Fairer Stockton team is developing a system for collating community insights across the Council
10. Respond to issues communities raise through simple, quick actions and potentially small pots of seed-funding, supporting and empowering community groups to take action	- Range of work underway through Council's Thriving Communities Board – continuing this will be important in developing trust and conversation with communities to shape the approach to addressing key issues - Active Stockton approach developed rooted in community insights - Grant-funded activity supporting community-based work e.g. Public Health Small Grants Scheme
11. The Council as a convenor (where appropriate) and enabler, to build or support development of a community partnership or forum, led by the community, with the purpose of connecting community connectors as a network, supporting community capacity building	- Council supporting Pride in Place Board, which is community-lead - Further potential to develop community-lead models through other work such as Active Stockton - Neighbourhood health approach includes work to understand and connect in to community capacity
12. Develop a network of community connectors further by enabling conversations at places where people meet, led by those within the community	- Some work underway to develop and support networks of community connectors e.g. Active Stockton, community health and wellbeing champions - Further work needed to look at how these can be built on organically (community lead) and sustained