

What Proportion of Local Authorities in England have Plans to Tackle Childhood Obesity?

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Background



- The UK government's ambition is to halve childhood obesity in England by 2030, necessitating action by local authorities (LAs).
- LAs are encouraged to take a whole systems approach, but there is no mandate for them to tackle obesity.
- Against a backdrop of diminishing budgets and competing agendas, local political commitment to tackling childhood obesity may be limited.

Research questions

- What proportion of councils in England have accessible policies/plans to tackle obesity and childhood obesity?
- How is political commitment to tackling childhood obesity demonstrated by local councillors?

Methods

- An initial internet search followed by a search of councils' webpages was undertaken for LA plans/policies, using terms "healthy weight", "obesity" and "childhood obesity".
- Telephone interviews are being undertaken with LA public health obesity leads to understand their views on local councillors' political commitment¹ to tackle childhood obesity.
- Interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.
- The five forms of political commitment were used to inform the interview guide and will be used to inform the analysis.¹
- The interrelated (non-linear) forms of political commitment needed to address all types of malnutrition were identified by Baker et al.¹



Results

- 51 (34%) of the 152 councils had up-to-date and publicly accessible plans to tackle obesity.
- Interviews to date (n = 5) with LA obesity leads suggest that local councillors express support for tackling childhood obesity, but this may not translate to institutional and resource commitments beyond the public health function.

Conclusions and next steps

Only one third of councils with a public health function had up-to-date and visible plans to tackle childhood obesity, which are required to translate priorities into action.

It is unclear if local councillors give the political commitment required to achieve national childhood obesity targets. Further interviews are planned and data will be thematically analysed, focussing on the forms of political commitment demonstrated to tackle childhood obesity.

Future research will consider how mechanisms of public accountability in LAs can be used to influence political commitment to tackle childhood obesity.