

Swindon's Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight Strategy



2023 - 2033



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword

Welcome to Swindon's Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight Strategy. This document represents a pivotal moment in our collective effort to create healthier and more resilient communities. This plan acknowledges the multifaceted nature of having overweight and obesity, recognising it as an issue woven into the fabric of our daily lives. It extends beyond individual choices, encompassing the wider systems that shape our environment, our access to resources, and ultimately, our health outcomes.

Obesity in Swindon affects one in four adults, one in five children in reception and two in five children in year 6, so requires urgent action. This challenge not only impacts an individual's wellbeing but also places a significant strain on our healthcare and social care system and broader community resources.

This strategy is a testament to our commitment to addressing this complex issue head-on. It outlines a comprehensive and collaborative approach, focusing on creating an environment that empowers residents to make informed choices and prioritise their health. By ensuring access to affordable and nutritious food and promoting physical activity opportunities, we can create lasting change.

The strategy will prioritise our most vulnerable communities, recognising that access to health promoting resources and opportunities is often inequitably distributed. By tailoring interventions and fostering inclusive environments, we can ensure that residents across Swindon have the tools and support they need to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

This whole systems approach is only as successful as our partners can make it – the Council, local businesses, educational settings, healthcare providers, community groups, and most importantly, individual residents need to support the implementation of this strategy. Our collective voice, expertise and dedication are essential in making this strategy work.

Our vision is to create an inclusive environment where a healthy choice is the easy choice. We invite you to explore the strategy, engage in its implementation, and join in making this vision a reality.



Professor Steve Maddern
Director of Public Health
Swindon Borough Council



Councillor Jim Grant
Cabinet Member for Adults and Health
Swindon Borough Council

Executive Summary

Swindon faces a growing public health challenge with rising overweight and obesity rates. Rising rates negatively impact individuals, families, and our local health and social care systems, putting additional strain on these resources. Previous approaches that have placed sole responsibility on the individual to achieve a healthy weight have proven insufficient in changing population trends. The insufficiency prompted the development of a more comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to address this complex issue.

Excess weight is a major public health issue: in Swindon it affects one in four adults, one in five reception-aged children and two in five year-6 aged children. Obesity can cause long-term illness and increased costs to health and social care, as well as increase the risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Excess weight for children can have negative or undesirable health impacts as they grow up, but also when they are adults and can result in serious psychological difficulties. Being overweight or obese can have an impact on all areas of people's lives, however, it disproportionately impacts individuals and families living in more deprived areas and is a major source of inequalities. There has been a significant increase in obesity in the most deprived communities in England in recent years, which is reflected locally where obesity prevalence in reception and year 6 is higher in the more deprived wards¹.

Research suggests that adopting a whole systems approach may help address the complex issue of obesity². It will involve fostering collaboration across diverse sectors, including local government, health and social care, businesses, community organisations, as well as individual residents.

Through this collaborative framework, the strategy aims to create supportive environments to address the underlying factors contributing to obesity. It will acknowledge the wider social determinants of health, such as income inequality, access to green space, the food environment, food costs and food preparation skills that create inequalities for individuals and communities when trying to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Creating an environment where healthy eating and physical activity are the easy choice at every stage of life and addressing the disparities that currently make this harder for residents are key to this strategy.

This can be achieved by:

- **Reshaping the food environment** where unhealthy food options are prominent
- **Engaging with the advertising industry** to encourage responsible marketing practices that promote healthier options
- **Promoting healthy food options** in workplaces, schools, and public spaces
- **Encouraging physical activity opportunities** by partnering with sports clubs and stakeholders responsible for improving green spaces and parks
- **Enhancing active travel options** through infrastructure improvements and awareness campaigns
- **Influencing and advocating for policies** that address factors like food retail, housing, education, and access to green spaces, which can lead to healthier choices and wellbeing.

To decrease the prevalence of overweight and obesity in Swindon, it is vital that local partners take an active role in supporting individuals and communities at greatest disadvantage to achieve a healthy weight.

¹Local health, public health data for small geographic areas - Data - OHID (phe.org.uk)

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tackling-obesities-future-choices>

What is our vision for the whole systems approach to healthy weight?

This strategy sets out the vision and strategic objectives needed to ensure that everyone in Swindon is able to achieve and maintain a healthy weight across the life-course. The vision for Swindon which was agreed at the Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight workshops is that:

Together we will create an inclusive environment that supports everyone in Swindon to have a healthy weight.

Principles

- Adopt a Whole Systems Approach to Healthy weight approach in Swindon
- Promote a 'health in all policies approach'
- Tackle unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes related to where people come from, live or any barriers they face

Priorities

Knowledge and insights gained by bringing together key local stakeholders, alongside a review of published evidence, defined and shaped our five strategic priorities:



Improving the food environment and making healthy food choices easier



Improving the physical activity environment and promoting physical activity



Improving identification and management of obesity to support people to achieve a healthy weight



Increasing positive community influences



Enabling educational settings and services to contribute to children and young people achieving a healthy weight

We have taken a bold step away from an approach to obesity that puts the onus on individual residents and instead we are using a whole systems approach, working as a system to take radical action to address the identified drivers of obesity in Swindon.

The overarching principle underlining all five priorities is to embed the whole systems approach to healthy weight in Swindon and to work collaboratively to promote healthy weight and reduce inequalities. This means a broad range of local stakeholders working together to develop an integrated approach to addressing obesity in the local area. We will work across local authority departments, and with wider local services, including the NHS, third sector, business, and local communities.

Introduction

Obesity costs the NHS £6 billion annually, a figure which is expected to rise to over £9.7 billion each year by 2050¹. The overall cost of obesity to wider society is estimated at £27 billion². In 2019/20, obesity was a factor in 1,400 hospital admission in Swindon, where rates of admission increased with levels of deprivation. These disparities are reflected in the local population data, where higher prevalence of obesity is seen in areas of greater deprivation, as well as black and minoritized communities.

Tackling obesity and promoting a healthy weight is a priority nationally, at the local health system level across Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire and locally in Swindon. The new Swindon Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023-2033) is a key policy driver and the successful delivery of the Swindon's Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight strategy will support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Obesity is a key factor and indicator of health inequalities, and Swindon's Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight will contribute to the Council's mission of reducing inequality.

Other key strategies that prioritise healthy weight are:

- The NHS Long Term Plan 2019⁴
- Department for Health and Social Care – Tackling Obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives 2020⁵
- Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care System (BSW Together) Integrated Care Strategy 2023-2028⁶
- Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care System (BSW Together) Implementation Plan 2023⁷
- The BSW Inequalities Strategy 2021-2024

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-obesity-treatments-and-technology-to-save-the-nhs-billions>

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment-2>

³<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-plan/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-obesity-government-strategy>

⁵<https://bswtogether.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Integrated-Care-Strategy-Summary-v3.pdf>

⁶<https://bsw.icb.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2023/07/BSW-Implementation-Plan-v3-2.pdf>

Local Picture

The World Health Organisation defines overweight and obesity as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health¹. An individual adult with a body mass index (BMI) over 25 is considered overweight, and over 30 is obese. An adult with a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered a healthy weight range. This is calculated by dividing an adult's weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared². A child's body mass index (BMI) is classed as overweight or obese where it is on or above the 85th centile or 95th centile, respectively, based on the British 1990 (UK90) growth reference data.

In Swindon, the latest data from 2021/22 shows that 24% of children in reception (ages 4-5), 37% of children in year 6 (ages 10-11) and 69% of adults (ages 18+) are overweight or obese. Swindon's prevalence of overweight and obesity in reception, year 6 and adults is higher than both the regional and England values and for year 6 and adults, Swindon has the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity in the South West region (Figure 1)..

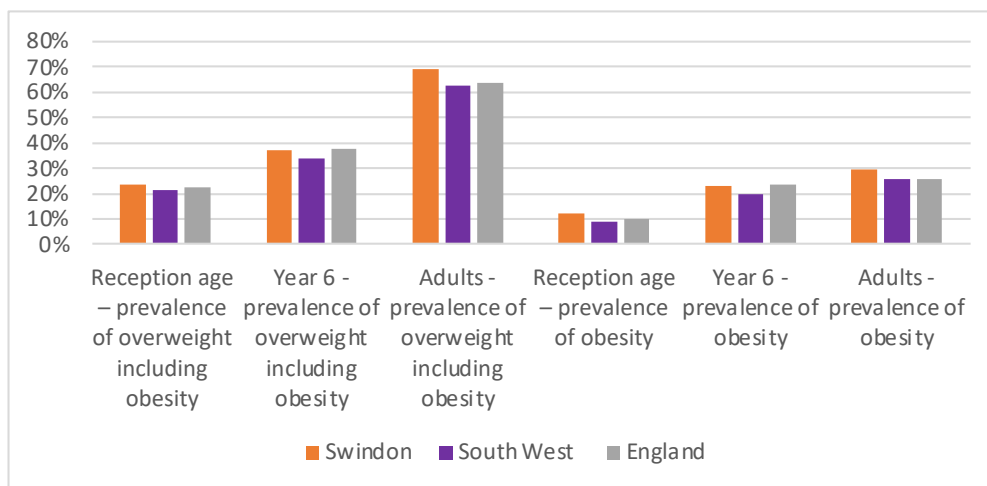


Figure 1 - Prevalence of overweight including obesity in reception, year 6 and adults (18+) for Swindon, South West Region and England 2021/22.

No significant changes with respect to the proportion of children, in reception and year 6, and adults classified as overweight or obese have been reported in recent years in Swindon (Figure 2, Figure 3)

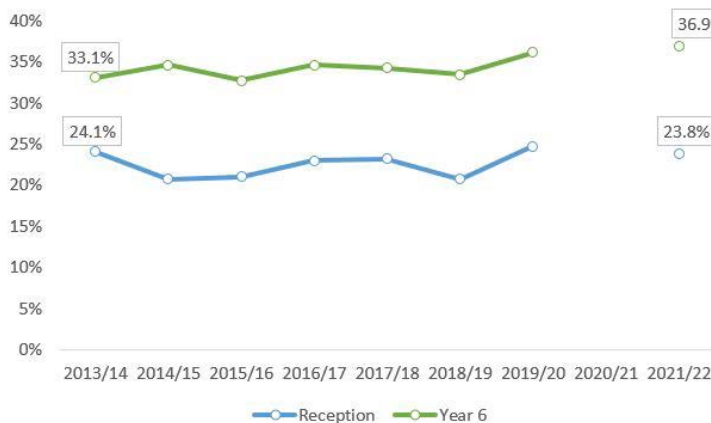


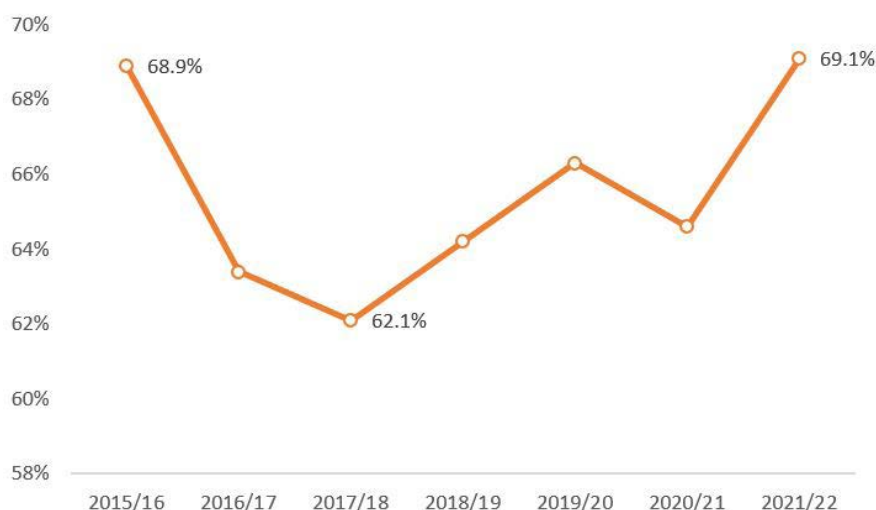
Figure 2 – Prevalence of overweight including obesity in reception and year 6 children in Swindon 2013/14 – 2021/22

Source: PHOF
Data for 2020/21 not available due to data quality

⁽¹⁾https://www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab_1

⁽²⁾ [https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/lifestyle/what-is-the-body-mass-index-bmi/#:~:text=The%20body%20mass%20index%20\(BMI\)%20is%20a%20measure%20that%20uses,of%2025%20means%2025kg%2Fm2](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/lifestyle/what-is-the-body-mass-index-bmi/#:~:text=The%20body%20mass%20index%20(BMI)%20is%20a%20measure%20that%20uses,of%2025%20means%2025kg%2Fm2)

Figure 3 – Prevalence of overweight including obesity in adults in Swindon 2015/16 – 2021/22



There is a clear link between obesity and deprivation in Swindon, with the prevalence of overweight and obesity in reception and year 6 aged children being higher in more deprived wards (Figures 4 and 5, Table 1).

For example, in reception aged children, prevalence in Walcot and Park North is 30.9%, compared to 16.7% in Chiseldon and Lawn. In year 6 aged children, prevalence in Central Ward is 43.9%, compared to 25.7% in Old Town.¹

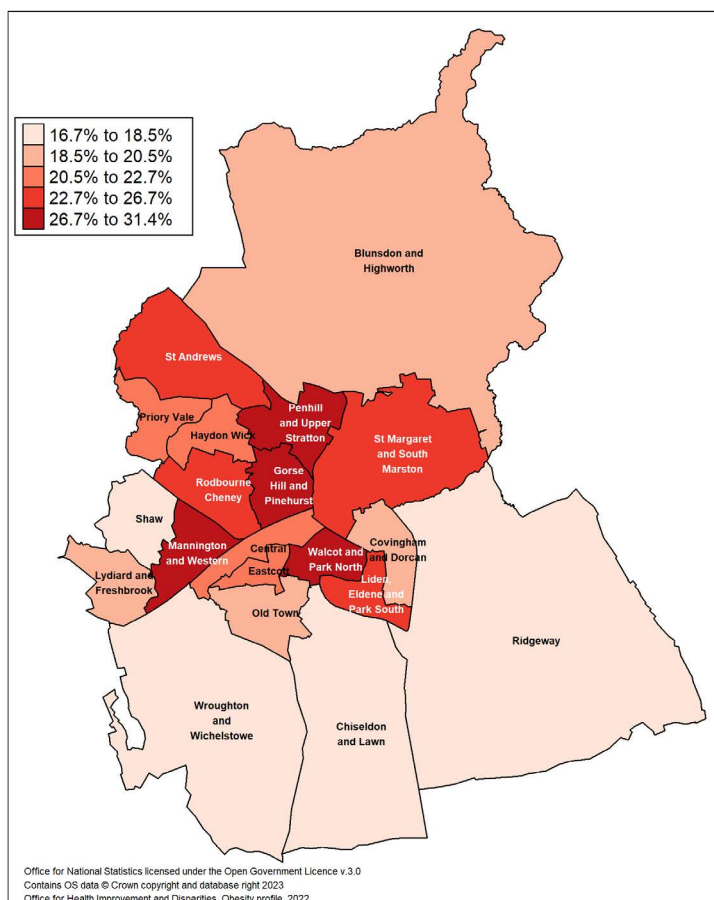


Figure 4: Prevalence of overweight by ward for reception children in Swindon 2019/20 – 2021/22 (Source: OHID Local Data)

¹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/local-health/data#page/3/gid/1938133183/pat/401/par/E06000030/ati/8/are/E05010755/iid/93108/age/201/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/3/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

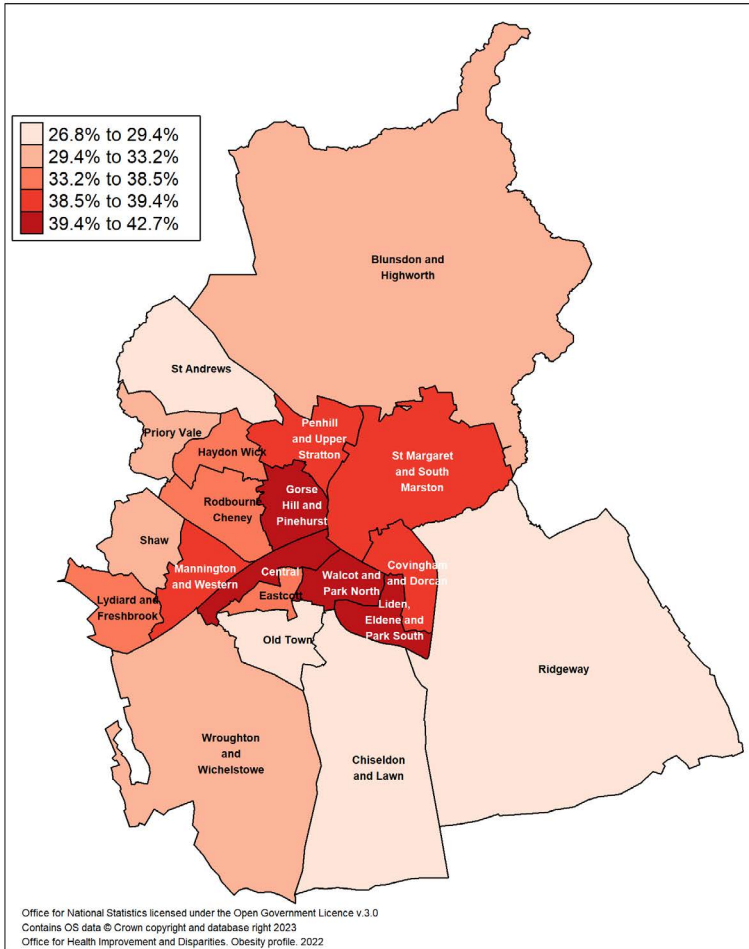


Figure 5: Prevalence of overweight by ward for year 6 children in Swindon 2019/20 - 2021/22
 (Source: OHID Local Data)

Ward	Deprivation (IMD, 2019)
Ridgeway	Least Deprived
Priory Vale	
St Andrews	
Haydon Wick	
Shaw	
Chiseldon and Lawn	
Old Town	
Blunsdon and Highworth	
Wroughton and Wichelstowe	
Covingham and Dorcan	
St Margaret and South Marston	
Eastcott	
Lydiard and Freshbrook	
Mannington and Western	
Central	
Rodbourn Cheney	Most Deprived
Liden, Eldene and Park South	
Gorse Hill and Pinehurst	
Penhill and Upper Stratton	
Walcot and Park North	

Table 1 Deprivation in Swindon by ward
 (Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019))

What is a Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight?

Obesity is a complex problem with multiple causes. Excess weight is affected by many factors, such as the built environment, access to good quality affordable food, education, life skills, and physical and mental health conditions/issues. There is no one single solution and tackling such an ingrained problem requires a long-term, system-wide approach.

In Swindon we have adopted the Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight¹, a programme developed by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (formerly Public Health England) based on academic studies and a national pilot. The whole systems approach recognises that local authorities are in a uniquely influential position to collaborate with communities, NHS organisations, the voluntary and community sector and local partners to tackle obesity.

There are different definitions of what a whole systems approach is. The whole systems approach to obesity has developed its own definition, informed by academic thinking and learning from local authorities, which is that “A local whole systems approach responds to complexity through an ongoing, dynamic and flexible way of working. It 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”².

In practice this means taking a collaborative approach – bringing stakeholders together from a broad range of sectors to jointly develop and take ownership of a programme of work that may reduce overweight and obesity prevalence. It means developing a cross-sector range of actions, identifying areas of activity where the Council can take action (for example the workplace, the local food environment and built and green environment) and working with partners to develop a range of short, medium and long term actions to deliver these actions.

The local Government Association paper ‘Whole systems approach to obesity: A guide to support local approaches to achieving a healthier weight’ outlines the benefits of a Whole Systems Approach:³

- The effect of collective actions is greater than the sum of the individual actions
- Reflects the local leadership role of local authorities
- Aligns health with all policies
- Maximises all assets in the local area, including community assets
- Supports a community centred approach to tackling health inequalities.

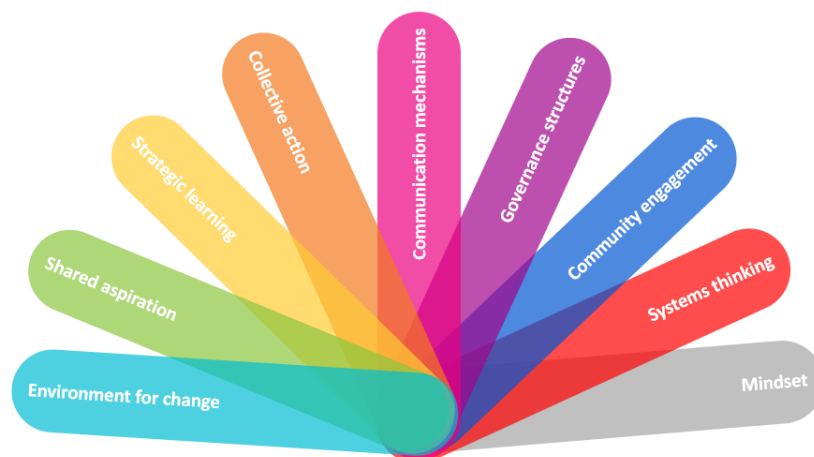
Adopting a systems approach means developing new behaviours to support collaborative working. Figure 5 depicts the key behaviours associated with successful systems thinking.

¹ Whole systems approach to obesity - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-whole-systems-approach-to-obesity/health-matters-whole-systems-approach-to-obesity>

³ Making obesity everybody’s business: A whole systems approach to obesity | Local Government Association

Figure 5 – Key behaviours that support systems thinking¹



A whole systems approach also requires a system network for the ongoing delivery of the work. The role of the system network is to reflect on responsibilities, review and monitor progress, adapt the action plan and maintain momentum.

A number of key documents have been published supporting a Whole systems approach to healthy weight:

- National Institute for Health Research: How can local authorities reduce obesity? - NIHR Evidence
- Public Health England and the Association of Directors of Public Health: What good healthy weight for all ages looks like
- Local government association: Making obesity everybody's business: A whole systems approach to obesity

Following the decision to adopt a whole systems approach to healthy weight in Swindon, a network of key stakeholders was formed and two system workshops were held. The first workshop brought stakeholders together to identify the key drivers of obesity in Swindon, with a particular focus on children, young people and families. The insights gained were used to develop a systems map for Swindon. This

systems map featured seven key themes that later informed the strategic priorities. The themes were as follows:

- Food culture
- Information and influences of food choices
- Eating as a coping mechanism
- Food poverty
- Life skills and family support
- Built environment
- Levels of physical activity

A copy of the obesity map for Swindon can be found on Swindon's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment website².

Following the success of the first workshop, a second workshop was held, during which an overarching vision for Swindon was agreed and an action plan was developed. Both the vision and the action plan were informed by the seven identified themes.

Our engagement with stakeholders throughout the process resulted in the development of an ongoing and dynamic 'systems network' consisting of a group of stakeholders with an interest in tackling the wider causes of obesity, such as transport planners, schools, social navigators and a range of voluntary and community sector organisations.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d396e7140f0b604de59fde9/Whole_systems_approach_to_obesity_guide.pdf
²<https://www.swindonjsna.co.uk/profiles-tools/smoking-maps/>

Priorities

1. Improving the food environment and making healthy food choices easier

This priority addresses the environments where people buy, prepare, and consume food which shape the choices people make and what they eat. As a local authority we have the power to influence food environments, and reduce health inequalities. This includes the spaces such as grocery stores, supermarkets, convenience stores or takeaways where people make decisions about food, the food and drink available and how accessible, affordable and nutritious it is.

Strategic objectives:

- A healthier food environment in Swindon.
- Improved opportunities to consume healthy food.

2. Improving the physical activity environment and promoting physical activity

This priority recognises the importance of physical activity in promoting healthy weight and the impact of the built and natural environment on levels of activity, for example, by providing opportunities for active travel and to enjoy open spaces such as parks, woodland and allotments. The built environment includes neighbourhood design, housing and transport. This priority links closely to our Get Swindon Active strategy 2022 – 2025¹.

Strategic objectives

- Prioritise active travel in transport and planning policies.
- Improve the physical environment in Swindon to promote physical activity.
- Provide opportunities and encouragement for Swindon residents to move more.

¹<https://www.swindonjsna.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Get-Swindon-Active-strategy-2022-25.pdf>

3. Improving identification and management of obesity to support people to achieve a healthy weight

This priority recognises the importance of weight management programmes for people living with overweight or obesity. These programmes aim to increase healthier food intake and help them to be more physically active by changing their behaviours. People most in need will be appropriately identified and supported to achieve a healthy weight through culturally appropriate services, which could potentially help reduce inequalities.

Strategic objectives

- Deliver local weight management services that are equitable.
- Improve identification and management of obesity including awareness and signposting resulting in increased referrals into the right service for the individual.
- Adopt a compassionate, non-judgmental approach to weight management and healthy lifestyles.

4. Increasing positive community influences

This priority recognises the importance of community influences such as the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in empowering and supporting people particularly children, young people and their families to make lifestyle changes.

Strategic objectives

- The development of community driven health initiatives particularly focusing on those experiencing food insecurity.
- Work collaboratively alongside a wide range of departments and sectors, including communications, housing, NHS, VCSE and businesses, to increase positive community influences.

5. Enabling educational settings and services to contribute to children and young people achieving a healthy weight

This priority recognises that schools and other educational settings are environments that can encourage healthy behaviours and help children establish habits of healthy eating and being physically active. This can be achieved through working with schools to improve the uptake and quality of school meals and encouraging more movement throughout the school day.

Strategic objectives:

- Sustainably reduce overweight and obesity in children in Year 6 and Reception.
- Prevent obesity in pre-school aged children.
- Increase levels of physical activity in Primary and Secondary school aged children.
- Increased numbers of children accessing a healthy diet.



Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight Action Plan

This strategy will be implemented through the Swindon Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight action plan which will set out short, medium and long term outcomes and success measures for each action.

The Whole Systems Approach to Healthy Weight Steering group will oversee the implementation of the action plan. Regular updates will be provided to every Swindon Health and Wellbeing Board as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy update.





