



Department  
of Health

## Obesity Review Group

### Meeting note

2:00pm – 4:00pm Wednesday 22 January 2014

Board Room, Richmond House, Department of Health

#### Attendees

Jane Ellison MP	Prof David Haslam
Dr Jessica Allen	Prof Susan Jebb
Louise Ansari	Jane Landon (for Paul Lincoln)
Cllr Steve Bedser	Prof Ian Macdonald
Catherine Collins	Andrew Opie
Sue Davies	Dr John Radford
Prof Nick Finer	Prof Harry Rutter (invited)
Carolyn Garland	Dr Alison Tedstone
Zoe Griffiths	Prof Jonathan Valabhji
Kate Halliwell (for Melanie Leech)	Prof Jane Wardle

#### Apologies

Prof Paul Aveyard	Paul Lincoln
John Byrne	Prof Marie Murphy
Prof Chris Drinkwater	Sanjay Pathak
Prof Kevin Fenton	Dr Abdul Razzaq
Prof Andrew Hill	Martin Smith
Philip Insall	Prof Jane Wardle
Melanie Leech	

#### Officials in attendance

Liz Woodeson (Chair)	Richard Sangster
Richard Cienciala	

## Discussion

- The Chair (Liz Woodeson) welcomed attendees to the meeting and said that Jane Ellison MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health, would join the meeting at 3pm.
- Members were informed that Jane Landon was attending in place of Paul Lincoln and Kate Halliwell was attending in place of Melanie Leech.
- The Chair asked Richard Cienciala to provide a brief policy update on key developments since the last meeting.
- Richard Cienciala said that an obesity policy update had been circulated to the group in advance of the meeting, and this highlighted recent developments:
  - The new public health system had been in place for almost a year with the change having gone smoothly. The Department was working with Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England and progress was being made on a wide agenda.
  - There had been active cross-government work including significant investment in school sport and active travel, and implementation of the School Food Plan.
  - Progress was being made with key partners in industry through the Responsibility Deal, including calorie reduction and significant sign-up to the new Front of Pack labelling scheme. Discussions had taken place with business on the promotion of food and the in-store environment.
  - PHE was continuing to invest in initiatives to tackle obesity, such as Change4Life, with encouraging progress.
  - We had input to the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity which is currently being drafted. There is recognition that child obesity is a shared problem which no one country had yet managed to solve.
  - The task now was to build on these initiatives and secure continued progress across all areas.
- Richard recognised the positive reaction to the recent announcement by supermarket chain Lidl that sweets and chocolates have been removed from its check-outs.
- The Chair introduced Dr Alison Tedstone, Director of Nutrition and Health Policy, PHE, who updated the Group on PHE's plan to

support local authorities in tackling obesity and its five pillars of action. Areas covered included PHE's role in:

- Evidence, monitoring and dissemination, through mechanisms such as the National Child Measurement Programme and National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Data had been published in December which broke child obesity statistics down to local authority level.
  - Providing advice and support for local authorities to help with planning and to aid evaluation of their own data.
  - Listening exercises including surveys and a series of local events.
  - Improving the service for example through commissioning the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop an e-learning package for GPs and other primary care professionals to assist in tackling obesity.
  - Communications and social marketing through Change4Life, with about ¼ million people already signed up to the January "Smart Swap" campaign.
- Discussion with the Group included how PHE made decisions on health promotion campaigns given the complexity of securing evidence of effectiveness.
  - The Group also discussed whether it would be helpful if obesity was classed as a disease. Though it was agreed this may raise the profile, similarly to that of diabetes, concerns were expressed about the impact of labelling a high proportion of the population with disease. It was pointed out that the Foresight report referred to the condition as obesity. It is not a single condition and it affects people in different ways.
  - The Chair introduced Councillor Steve Bedser, Cabinet Member Health and Wellbeing, Local Government Association, who gave a presentation about how Birmingham City Council is tackling obesity. Areas covered included:
    - Budget implications of the increasing number of people who are obese.
    - 1 in 4 children in Birmingham are clinically obese by the age of 10.
    - The consequences of obesity.
    - The future pressure on the local authority of a higher number of people of working age having a life limiting disability.
    - The need to treat obesity as a pandemic.

- That consideration should be given to a more hard-hitting public health campaign on obesity.
- The Chair thanked Councillor Bedser for his presentation, which she said demonstrates that local authorities are fully capable of taking on the transfer of these public health responsibilities.
- The Chair introduced Professor Jonathan Valabhji, National Clinical Director for Obesity and Diabetes, NHS England who updated the group on NHS England's work. Areas covered included:
  - Feedback received by NHSE and PHE on the variation in the provision of obesity services across the country, including surgical interventions.
  - Relationship between and responsibility for tier 3 and tier 4 services.
  - A working group had been established by NHSE and PHE to rapidly examine these issues. A report will be published shortly and a link to the report will be circulated to the group.
- The Chair thanked Professor Valabhji and introduced Professor Harry Rutter, Public Health England, who gave a presentation about annual obesity data published in December from the National Child Measurement Programme School year 2012/13 and Health Survey for England 2012. Highlights from the data included:
  - Obesity rates show a levelling off. However, it was stressed we must not be complacent.
  - The proportion of children who were obese or overweight had shown a slight decline (Reception year: 22.2% down from 22.6% in 2011/12 and in Year 6 33.3% down from 33.9% in 2011/12.
  - There are higher rates of obesity in areas of deprivation and the equality gap appears to be widening.
  - There are more people who are morbidly obese.
  - BME groups have higher levels of obesity.
- The Chair thanked Professor Rutter and introduced Jane Ellison, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health.
- The Minister said that obesity was not something that could be solved overnight, though prevalence rates may be levelling off we cannot be complacent. She said we needed better engagement with the public, especially the harder to reach groups such as those in

areas of deprivation. The Minister said we needed to continue our efforts by engaging with the public.

- The Minister asked the group what more might be done to tackle the issue of obesity. The group discussed a number of issues on this including:
  - Most overweight people are motivated to lose weight, however it is difficult to maintain that motivation.
  - Seeing people who have successfully lost weight is a good motivator.
  - There is confusion in the media about what obesity is, which leads to problems about how to address it.
  - Midwives are well placed to signpost pregnant women with weight problems to appropriate services.
  - Rules on advertising weight management providers in the commercial sector.
  - Need for high-level political leadership.
  - Scope of local action such as planning rules in local authorities and changing local environments.
- The Minister said she had written to Lidl to congratulate them for removing sweets and chocolates from checkouts and she had also written to other retailers about Lidl's announcement asking them to take similar action.
- The Minister outlined key work underway. She said obesity is a cross-government issue and it is important that it isn't just embedded in the Department of Health. She expressed her enthusiasm for the school food agenda and the work with DfE including cooking going into the National Curriculum, the school food standards and free school meals for infants. The Minister said she is Chair of the cross-government Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Committee Physical Activity Sub-Group. She said that effective local action was key to making a change with effective leadership from local authorities and PHE, there needed to be sharing of information between areas of similar demographics and the spreading of good practice.
- The Chair thanked all members for their contributions, said the group plays an important role and looked forward to future dialogue.