

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Director of Public Health  
**PORTFOLIO:** Health and Wellbeing  
**SUBJECT:** Healthier Food and Drink Advertising Policy  
**WARD(S)** Borough Wide

## 1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report focuses on the opportunity to implement a healthy food and drink advertising policy to ensure unhealthy products are replaced by healthier alternatives on local authority advertising spaces. This report outlines what the policy will look like, background across the region to this policy and how the policy will help us prioritise our residents health and tackle health inequalities

## 2.0 **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the board agrees to the proposed policy and the benefits of its implementation**

**RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.**

## 3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Implementation of a Healthy advertising policy will support Halton Borough Council meet multiple priorities including:

- a) Reducing health inequalities in Halton and inequalities between Halton wards.
- b) Improved health outcomes and a subsequent reduction in the cost of treating obesity-related illness.

Reduction in childhood overweight and obesity rates.

3.2 Obesity directly costs the NHS £6.5 billion a year and is the second biggest preventable cause of cancer. A research study by Frontier Economics estimates the wider social cost of obesity is £58bn a year when taking into account its impact on additional health costs such as mental health and costs to society through a loss of productivity and demand for social care. With rates of obesity higher in more deprived areas such as Halton the cost will disproportionately place strain on our services. 78% of Adults in Halton are overweight or obese compared to 64% nationally.

- 3.3 Adverts often promote high fat, salt and sugar food and drink as part of a normal diet, with marketing frequently targeted at young people and associated with fun cartoon characters or toy collections, specifically aimed at children. By the time children reach reception age (4-5) in Halton 14% are obese compared to 9.2% nationally. This rises to 26% by the time they finish primary school again exceeding the national average of 22.7%.
- 3.4 Furthermore, obesity rates are much higher in areas with higher rates of deprivation with the discrepancy rising substantially since 2014. Individuals living in areas with the highest rate of deprivation are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital with obesity-related health problems than the average. 48.7% of Halton's population live in the top 20% most deprived areas in England, with 1 in 5 children living in relative low income households. These areas have greater exposure to adverts in general, for example, on bus shelters telephone boxes or billboards, as well as direct marketing placement decisions for this cheap, energy dense 'family-friendly' food. This all contributes to increasing the size of health inequalities in the Borough, with life expectancy in the most deprived ward in Halton 13.7 years worse for men and 9.3 years worse for women compared to the least deprived ward.
- 3.5 Carrying excess weight, particularly to the level of obesity, diminishes almost every other aspect of health from respiratory functions to memory. Obesity increases the risk of wider illnesses including diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers increasing costs for the system. More importantly than adding costs to the system, obesity decreases both the length and quality of life for the individual.
- 3.6 The causes of overweight and obesity are complex and often a consequence of multiple variables related to individual biology, eating behaviours and physical activity all set within a social, cultural and environmental landscape. Tackling these causes requires a whole-system approach. Adopting a healthier food and drink advertising policy should be just one part of a wider approach, however, it is one within the gift of the council.
- 3.7 Healthy advertising policies have now been implemented by 20 Boroughs in England with many more in the process of implementing their own. In Cheshire and Merseyside, Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool, Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester have already passed replicable policies, with all other Boroughs in the region working to follow suit. A consistent policy in force across the region opens up possibilities to work collectively to influence advertising on services that cross over boundaries, for example, regional bus services, and provide a clear foundation for private advertising space that wanted to follow similar policies.

3.8 An independent evaluation of Transport for London's policy conducted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found there has been an estimated 6.7% decrease in average weekly household purchases of energy from high fat, salt and sugar products, and the average weekly purchases of chocolate and sweet confectionery fell by 19.4%. This equates to a 1000 calorie decrease in energy from unhealthy food purchases in Londoners' weekly shopping.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The policy uses the Nutrient Profiling Model to differentiate food and non-alcoholic drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar and healthier alternatives. The model was created by the Food Standards Agency in 2004-2005 as a tool for Ofcom to tackle unhealthy food and drink advertising on children's TV programming, which at the time made up 80% of all advertising during these shows. As such, the introduction of the standard within our own commercial spaces to safeguard residents continues best practice in place nationally.

4.2 The NP model was subject to rigorous scientific scrutiny, extensive consultation and review. It is supported by the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and a wide range of nutrition experts. The NP model has been used continuously by Ofcom since April 2007, with technical support for the NP model transferred from the Food Standards Agency to the Department of Health.

4.3 The NP model uses a scoring system based on the nutritional content of 100g of a product. For drinks with nutritional information given in millilitres, the product will be converted to 100g using the appropriate specific gravity (density) of the product. Products are given points based on their energy, sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. This number is subtracted from for fruit, vegetables, nut content, protein and fibre. Foods scoring 4 or more points and drinks scoring 1 or more points are classed as 'less healthy' and would therefore be restricted from advertising.

4.4 As some brands are strongly associated with unhealthy products, for example fast food, all adverts for a food and drink brand must include prominent promotion of a compliant product.

4.5 All adverts where food and drink that are high in fat, salt and sugar are featured are restricted even if they are not the central focus of the adverts or business. For example, an advert for a travel agency that features ice cream would need to amend and remove the ice cream to be compliant.

4.6 The food and advertising industry is familiar with the NPM model

having been in place for 17 years as a nationally recognised standard. It was initially developed as a way to regulate advertising on television during children's TV shows, with 80% of adverts at this time high in fat, salt and sugar. The model was again used in 2022 as the government brought in restrictions on supermarkets selling goods in this category at till displays. Furthermore, the government has announced it will stick to the previous governments plan to extend the restriction on junk food advertising to all paid for TV advertising before 9pm. This will come into force from October 2025 with the NPM again used as the standard to which products will be judged. Research from the Obesity Health Alliance found that 8 out of 10 adults support the government restricting unhealthy food advertising to children on TV (79%) and online (81%).

4.7 The policy is written in such a way that it can be replicated by other local authorities. As noted within Cheshire and Merseyside Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool, Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester have already passed replicable policies. A standardised approach safeguards residents as they travel across neighbouring local authorities, creates a simple unified approach for advertisers to follow in the region, while opening up the possibility for future collective initiatives.

4.8 The four main areas of council advertising space consist of Active Halton, the DCBL stadium, main council website and roundabout advertising. In 2017 the councils communication team, working alongside Public Health, created the current advertising protocol used across the councils advertising estate (Appendix 1). This is a list of items we wouldn't consider for advertising which includes unhealthy food alongside items such as E-cigarettes and gambling. Therefore, introducing a healthy advertising policy wouldn't create major changes to income generation whilst providing a more robust set of guidelines for settings to follow in line with national standards.

## 5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

### 5.1 **One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027**

The One Halton Health and Wellbeing strategy is targeted at all stages of the life course as well as a focus on how this is influenced by the wider determinants of health. A healthy advertising policy, and the subsequent effects of a reduction in unhealthy food purchases and consumption, will improve health outcomes across the life course. Furthermore, with overweight and obesity a driver of health inequalities and vice versa, this policy will contribute to tackling the causes and effects of inequality in some of Halton's most deprived communities.

## 6.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The advertising company is responsible for verifying its products meet the rules including the Nutrient Profiling Model, therefore, no additional administration is required by council officers.

6.2 A healthy food and drink policy was implemented across the entire Transport for London network. No revenue losses were reported as a result of advertisers facing restrictions with advertisers willing to work constructively to produce advertising that adheres to the policy, with many already having to follow the NP model guidelines elsewhere in their advertising campaigns. Furthermore, TFL saw a rise in new advertisers who were more willing to advertise their healthier products with guidelines ensuring these wouldn't be alongside unhealthy alternatives. The implementation of this policy would be subject to review if it impacted significantly on revenue from advertising, although this has not been seen in other areas, and is not anticipated.

## 7.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### 7.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

A healthy food and drink advertising policy will ensure unhealthy products are not advertised to residents in Halton. The promotion of unhealthy products not only encourages brand switching within a product category but increases consumption of particular categories of food including fast food and sugary soft drinks.

### 7.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

A healthy food and drink reduces the risk to the individual in terms of reduced healthy life expectancy and overall life expectancy from carrying excess weight. This in turn reduces the risk of being unable to work due to ill health costing the local economy by reducing the available workforce.

### 7.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

Child obesity in Halton shows a significant rise in overweight and obesity between the ages of 5-11. Childhood obesity is associated with increased morbidity and premature death with those obese as children more likely to be obese as adults compared to those who grow up a healthy weight. Ensuring we tackle obesity at a young age will help us improve life chances for children in Halton and reduce future costs to the system of tackling obesity related illness.

### 7.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

The greatest rates of adult obesity are seen in the most deprived parts of the country. An NHS health survey for England showed that

39% of women in the most deprived areas are obese, compared to 22% in the least deprived. Therefore, the effects of junk food consumption disproportionately affect those in Halton living in the most deprived areas

#### **7.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

Unhealthy food has a particularly high amount of carbon emissions associated with its supply chain. Methane emissions from cattle farming, a key requirement for most fast food chains, produce a large amount of greenhouse gases. Producing 3.5 ounces of protein leads to 110 pounds of greenhouse gases being released.

#### **7.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

Locally, individual packaging and the convenience of 'drive through' and 'food on the go' options for foods high in fat, salt and sugar increases the amount of and opportunities for littering. Although no brand is banned from advertising this policy could lead to a modest reduction in these types of purchases.

#### **7.7 Resilient and Reliable Organisation**

Twenty Boroughs have already passed a similar policy across the country with five of these in the Liverpool City region with all other Boroughs in the region working towards a similar outcome. Furthermore, the recent commitment from national government to expand the advertising ban on unhealthy foods on television shows the continued direction of travel towards restricting these products being advertised. Passing a local healthy advertising policy ensures we remain in line with our regional partners and have a foundation to build on if changes are made nationally in the coming years.

#### **8.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

8.1 With the rates of overweight and obesity rising there is great risk from the future costs to the system this poses. Costs of treating obesity related illness to the NHS are increasing year on year and with higher than average rates of overweight and obesity in Halton these costs will disproportionately affect services locally.

#### **9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.1 Health inequalities are a significant factor across Halton. Those suffering from poorer health are more likely to live in the more deprived areas of the borough and more likely to be living in poverty. For males and females there is a 13 year gap between life expectancy at birth for those in most deprived ward in Halton, compared to the least deprived ward (Halton Lea vs Daresbury, Moore & Sandymoor).

10.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Food and drink with low nutritional value and a big climate impact pose a double threat. These products sacrifice the environment, while also not meeting dietary requirements and encouraging over-consumption. Globally, food contributes roughly 30% of overall greenhouse gas emissions. Beef, palm oil, sugars and cocoa are leading causes of deforestation and extinction and very prominent in high fat, salt and sugar products.

11.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

11.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1- Current Halton Advertising Protocol**

The protocol below is currently in use covering the main areas of council advertising space comprising Active Halton, DCBL stadium, banners on the council website and roundabout advertising. It was developed in 2017 between Public Health, Communications Team and Legal.

Advertising Protocol:

We will consider advertising on a case-by-case basis. However, we will not accept advertising from any organisation wishing to promote:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- E-cigarettes
- Medicines; illegal substances; or legal highs
- Gambling
- Weaponry
- Unhealthy foods
- Violence
- Messages of a sexual nature
- Pay-day lending services
- Messages that conflict with our position as an equal and diverse organisation
- Political parties (in accordance with Part 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 ('A local authority shall not publish any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party'))

We will also not accept advertising from any organisation that is in financial or legal dispute with the council, and we will also show caution when accepting advertising or sponsorship where:

- an organisation is in the process of a planning application;
- an organisation who is in the process of a tender application;
- an organisation is in conflict with local residents over a planned development in the borough; and
- association with an organisation may conflict with the work of the council and our partners

### **Appendix 2 – Draft policy**