



Health Select Committee
17 February 2010

**Report from the
Director of Children and Families**

For Information

Wards Affected : ALL

MEND – Brent’s Childhood Obesity Treatment Programme

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Childhood obesity is a complex public health issue that is a growing threat to children’s health, as well as a current and future drain on both National Health Service (NHS) and Local Government resources. It is estimated that obesity already costs the NHS directly about £1 billion per year and the UK economy a further £2.3 to £2.6 billion indirectly. If the current trend continues, the economic implications are projected to increase to £49.9 billion by 2050.
- 1.2** Tackling childhood obesity is a national government priority, the National obesity strategy *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A cross government strategy for England* set out the first steps towards meeting the challenge and aims “to be the first major country to reverse the tide of overweight and obesity in the population, our initial focus will be on children; by 2020 we aim to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels”. The Department of Health (DH) is responsible for the overall ambition on healthy weight and is jointly responsible with the Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF) for delivering the Public Service Agreement (PSA 12) on Child Health. In addition, within the Local Area Agreement (LAA) National Indicator set (NI’s) there are two indicators specifically on childhood obesity (NI 55/56). Brent is one of 126 local areas that have chosen a childhood obesity indicator as one of their designated targets for 2008-2011.

2.0 Childhood Obesity Prevalence Nationally and in Brent

- 2.1** Levels of childhood overweight and obesity are measured and recorded as part of the annual National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) which commenced in 2006 and aims to weigh and measure all children in both reception and year 6. The most recent data from the NCMP (2008/2009) is provided in Table 1 below. Key points to note are:
- Brent has higher levels of childhood obesity than both the London and national averages.
 - In Brent the total number of overweight and obese children in Reception year increased from 22.3% to 24.1%.
 - The data shows early signs that the rate of increase of obesity in year 6 pupils has stabilised. This indicates that local programmes may be having an impact on the levels of overweight and obesity in children. However, caution in interpretation is recommended and it is suggested that five years of consecutive data is required to accurately predict trends.
 - As with previous years’ data, the 2008/2009 NCMP report identified that levels of obesity are higher in urban areas, and that a strong affirmative relationship exists between deprivation and obesity prevalence in children – both of which are relevant to Brent’s demography.

2.2 Table 1: Levels of childhood overweight and obesity in Brent compared with the London and England averages (NCMP 2008/2009)

	overweight 07/08	overweight 08/09	obese 07/08	obese 08/09	Totals 07/08	Totals 08/09
Reception						
Brent	11.6%	12.8%	10.7%	11.3%	22.3%	24.1%
England average	13.0%	13.2%	9.6%	9.6%	22.6%	22.8%
Year 6						
Brent	14.6%	14.3%	22.5%	22.9%	37.1%	37.2%
England average	14.3%	14.3%	18.3%	18.3%	32.6%	32.6%

3.0 Brent's Childhood Obesity Programme

3.1 A joint NHS Brent and Brent Council funded programme to tackle childhood obesity commenced in September 2008. This programme aligns with national guidance about evidence based interventions, e.g. National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), and offers multi-component preventative and treatment interventions. The overarching objective of the programme is to 'slow the year-on-year rise in the prevalence of obesity in reception age children to 10.9% by 2010/11 (National Indicator 55), and reduce the prevalence of obesity in Year 6 children to 22.0% by 2010/11' (National Indicator 56) through a combination of universal (preventative) and targeted (treatment) initiatives'.

3.2 Table 2. Preventative (Universal) initiatives

Initiatives	Outcome and/or measure
Food in Schools Programme: Supporting schools to meet the mandatory school food standards and increasing the number of children choosing a healthy school meal over a packed lunch; Increasing the quality and amount of healthy cooking lessons offered in both Primary and Secondary schools in and out of the curriculum.	-Ensures all children and young people in Brent have access to healthy food and drinks both at school and during extended services -NI52 (school meal uptake)
Healthy Schools: By meeting the Healthy Schools criteria, schools will be providing an environment which promotes healthy choices, including healthy eating and increased participation in PE and physical activity. Support is given to schools to meet the healthy eating criteria, including writing of whole school food and nutrition policies, balanced diet and practical food preparation training for school staff, and monitoring of school menus and pupils' food choices. Schools are also required to meet the minimum requirement of 2 hours of PE within the curriculum, provide activities outside of the curriculum, and have a school travel plan which promotes walking and cycling to school in order to achieve the Healthy Schools status.	-Currently 73% of Brent schools are Healthy Schools with 99% engaged in the programme.
Building Capacity and Raising Awareness: through training for health professionals e.g. School Nurses and Health Visitors and school staff.	-Aiming to deliver INSETs in all schools by March 2011 -Have delivered one day obesity awareness training to over 45 Health Professionals
Parent Cooking Programme: Brent Council has commissioned healthy cooking programme for parents, which aims to improve parents' cooking skills through practical, tasty, healthy and budget conscious recipes, as well	-4 schools in the pilot programme, now being rolled out to a further 6 schools.

Initiatives	Outcome and/or measure
as provide basic nutrition and health information	
Brent Children's Centre Nutrition Project: The Healthy Little Eaters project currently being delivered by Brent Community Services, commissioned by Brent Council, is being delivered in Children's Centres throughout Brent. The project aims to improve nutrition in children aged 0-5 years through the delivery of parent sessions such as weaning, fussy eating, pregnancy and breastfeeding, cook and eat sessions and shopping tours. They also provide nutrition 'drop-in' sessions to provide nutrition advice for parents with specific nutrition queries.	Performance reviewed quarterly and on track. Are delivering weekly sessions to parents, children and staff in all Children's Centres.
Improving Breastfeeding Rates at 6-8 weeks: This programme aims to improve breastfeeding prevalence across Brent through range of targeted and universal initiatives. A main aim of the project is to achieve the UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation Standards at all Children's Centres and the Acute Trusts where Brent babies are born.	National Indicator 53 and Vital Sign target for NHS Brent

3.2.1 Additionally, the childhood obesity programme has contributed to the development of the Brent Sports Strategy (2010 – 2015) which aims to reduce ill-health through increased knowledge of the wider benefits of an active lifestyle, and increased participation in sport and physical activity. A reduction in childhood obesity rates has been chosen as one of the success measures.

3.2.2 Recently a Strategic Obesity Group has been formed with stakeholders from both the NHS and Local Authority. The initial focus of this group is on the development of a borough wide obesity strategy.

3.3 Treatment (targeted) initiative

3.3.1 The MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!) programme is the current treatment programme for children aged 7 – 11 in Brent and is jointly funded by Brent Council, NHS Brent and the Big Lottery Fund. The programme aims to support children and their families to make positive changes to their diet and fitness levels through practical nutrition and fun exercise sessions. Each programme runs for 10 weeks, with sessions held twice a week – a total of 20 sessions.

3.3.2 MEND - The National Picture

- MEND is currently being run in 365 locations in the UK including 70 Primary Care Trust's and 31 Local Authorities.
- MEND is also being delivered in 5 countries including the USA and Australia.
- In the UK 12,500 families have completed the MEND programme to date (26% BME)
- The programme is still only reaching 1% of all overweight children in the UK

3.3.3 MEND - The Local Picture

- Nine 20 session MEND programmes have been delivered including a pilot programme with 7 pupils in April 2008, with a total of 99 children and their families completing the programme to date. Numbers of children completing each programme in Brent are outlined in Table 3 below.
- A further nine programmes are to be delivered by April 2011 with a minimum of 12 children planned to complete each programme.
- A total of 216 children and their families are planned to complete the programme by 31st March 2011.

3.3.4 Table 3: Number of children and their families completing the MEND programme.

	Year 1 (Apr 08 – Mar 09)	Year 2 (Apr 09– Mar 10)	Totals
No. of programmes planned	4	7	11
No. of programmes completed to date (2 further programmes commenced in Jan 2010)	4	5 (2)	9 (11)
No. of children planned to complete	48	84	132
No. of children completing to date (approx 24 additional children will complete by 31 March 2010)	37	62 (24)	99 (123)

3.3.5 Demographics of Brent MEND participants

- **Ethnicity:** Brent is a culturally diverse borough. Predominant ethnicities attending MEND in Brent include Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan), African and African Caribbean, White British and White other (which includes Greek, Pilipino, Spanish, Portuguese, Bulgarian and white North African).
- **Single Parent Status:** the majority of participants (two thirds) were from a household of 2 parents and one third from single-parent households.
- **Home Ownership:** 51% reported to own their own home and 49% reported not to own their own home.

3.3.6 Outcomes in children completing MEND in Brent

- Both qualitative and quantitative feedback from the children and parents completing the programme has been very positive. This feedback has been gained through both physical examinations and questionnaires/focus group sessions.
- Positive results have been seen immediately post programme in children's:
 - Body Mass Index (mean change was -0.4)
 - waist circumference (mean change -2 cm)
 - fitness rates (-2.4 recovery bpm)
 - dietary habits (28% improvement in nutrition behaviour score)
- Additionally, programme feedback from parents has been extremely encouraging with many asking that the programmes be continued after the ten weeks. We have seen strong friendships emerge between children attending and their parents as well as improvements in psychological outcomes and activity levels across the programmes.

3.3.7 Successes of the MEND Programme

- Brent has been relatively successful in recruiting families to take part in the MEND programmes especially compared to some London boroughs, some of whom have had as few as 3 children finishing or have had to cancel programmes due to low numbers. The four most successful methods of recruitment include a running full page advert in The Brent Magazine, leaflets distributed through schools, school nurse referrals and dietetic referrals.
- The Brent MEND programme has proven to be a London leader as MEND Central are in regular contact with Brent to discuss new ideas, bring overseas visitors to observe our programmes and are implementing a number of adaptations recommended in Brent's MEND programme evaluation (April 2008 – August 2009)centrally.
- Brent has developed and chairs a regional London MEND Group which meets on a termly basis to share good practice and ways to improve local programme delivery.
- Committing to a 10 week programme is a challenge for families but through regular and individual contact from the team, in-between programme sessions, we have experienced a low drop out rate for our programmes (1-3 families per programme). Additionally, our average attendance rates throughout the 9 programmes have been positive at 80%.
- Strong programme management and partnership working has ensured that a successful childhood obesity programme has been efficiently and successfully implemented.

3.3.8 Challenges of the MEND programme

- As with the national programme and due to its intensive nature, the Brent MEND programme has the capacity to reach only a small percentage of the overweight and obese children in the borough. With an estimated 6,000 overweight or obese children in the primary sector alone, the MEND programme is currently only reaching a very small percentage of those requiring support.
- Lack of awareness about childhood obesity and limited skills by practitioners to identify overweight and obesity in children to refer onto the programme.
- The sensitive nature of raising the issue of overweight and obesity with parents and lack of parental awareness of overweight and obesity in their own children.
- Ongoing motivation and commitment from children and parents in attending a 10 week, 20-session programme – strategies are in place to maximise attendance and minimise drop-outs, such as rewards and incentive vouchers.
- Lack of joined up working and borough-wide initiatives to tackle this agenda in Brent.

3.3.9 MEND programme costs

The on-costs (staffing, venues, group rewards, and miscellaneous costs) associated with running the MEND programme in Brent has been calculated as approximately £654 per child completing the MEND programme. This excludes the actual MEND purchase costs.

3.3.10 Supporting families after MEND: The MEND Graduate Programme

The MEND 'Graduate' programme in Brent is continually being developed with the aim of supporting families to continue the increased level of exercise achieved and promoted during MEND.

- The main Graduate activity offered is *SportsCoach*, a 12 week programme for children aged four to sixteen. The programme is run in Brent on a Saturday morning from 9am – 12pm offering the children 3 hours of physical activity provided by professional coaches. 40 MEND graduates have been subsidised to attend this programme to date.
- Other activities include MEND Graduates participating in the weekly MEND exercise sessions and signposting to activities run at Brent's community leisure centres for both children and adults.
- The team has recently taken on an allotment site and MEND Graduate families will be offered the opportunity to take part in managing the site as an ongoing Graduate activity.
- MEND Central has recently launched MEND World, a website which aims to keep the children motivated to stay healthy and active.
- A local MEND Graduate newsletter is also sent out regularly to the families.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 Robust policies and initiatives which promote healthier choices and make the healthy choice easier are required in Brent. An example would be a borough wide policy on the availability of fast food to school aged pupils at lunch time, as well as to and from school. Strong support from partners is essential to implement such a policy and there is currently an absence of a cohesive, complementary and consistent approach to tackling this issue across all council departments and partner agencies. Improved care pathways for identifying and managing overweight and obesity are also required
- 4.2 Given that the Council's funding to support the programme is grant funded, the sustainability of the current arrangements will need to be addressed if we are to achieve the 2011 LAA target. Ideally an evidence based programme addressing all levels of needs is required; a strong integrated universal approach delivered in unison by all partners, as well as a targeted intervention to support those children and their families who are already overweight and obese using the MEND delivery model.
- 4.3 With more than 1 in 10 children entering primary school in Brent already obese, more focus needs to be placed on tackling obesity in the early years, including improved maternal

nutrition, increasing breastfeeding prevalence rates, and targeted support for identified overweight children. These are key priorities that NHS Brent is addressing in partnership with Brent Council Children and Families department.

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