

Briefing Paper for Bury Health and Wellbeing Board

Childhood Obesity in Bury: A Whole System Approach

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Decision: Information Only

Purpose

This briefing provides an overview of childhood obesity in Bury, highlights the significant inequalities that underpin current trends, and outlines the positive action being taken through the Bury Obesity Alliance and wider partnership arrangements to address unhealthy weight through a whole system approach.

Executive Summary

Childhood obesity remains one of the most significant public health challenges facing Bury. Whilst obesity prevalence has remained relatively stable in recent years, early National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP) is showing that excess weight continues to increase across both Reception and Year 6 pupils, with the greatest burden falling on children living in more deprived communities. Local data shows that some wards have rates of overweight and obesity approaching 48% amongst Year 6 children.

Importantly, childhood obesity is not simply an issue of individual behaviour or personal choice. The evidence increasingly demonstrates that unhealthy weight is shaped by wider social, environmental and commercial factors including poverty, food affordability, access to healthy foods, marketing exposure, planning decisions, transport systems and opportunities for physical activity.

In response, Bury has established a multi-agency Obesity Alliance and adopted a whole systems approach that seeks to influence the environments in which children and families live, learn, travel and play. Significant progress has already been made across schools, early years settings, planning policy, active travel, community engagement and neighbourhood partnerships.

The challenge remains substantial, but Bury is building strong foundations for long-term, sustainable change.

The Current Picture in Bury

Early snippets of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) data highlights a continuing concern regarding childhood excess weight:

- Reception excess weight has increased from 22.1% to 23.9%.
- Year 6 excess weight has increased from 38.8% to 39.6%.
- Healthy weight prevalence continues to decline across both age groups.
- Some neighbourhoods experience significantly higher rates than the Bury average.

These findings suggest weight gain accumulates throughout childhood and reinforces the importance of intervention across the life course, from early years through to adolescence.

Childhood Obesity is an Inequalities Issue

Childhood obesity is one of the clearest examples of health inequality.

National evidence consistently demonstrates that children living in the most deprived communities experience obesity rates more than double those seen in the least deprived communities. Similar patterns are evident locally, with higher levels of excess weight concentrated in areas already experiencing wider social and economic disadvantage.

Several factors contribute to these inequalities:

Wider Determinants of Health

- Household income and food affordability.
- Access to green space and safe places to be active.
- Housing quality and neighbourhood environments.
- Educational attainment and health literacy.
- Access to affordable leisure opportunities.
- Availability of active travel infrastructure.
- Transport connectivity and mobility.

Commercial Determinants of Health

Commercial influences play a significant role in shaping behaviours and opportunities for children and families:

- High density of fast-food outlets in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Advertising and promotion of unhealthy food and drink products.
- Pricing strategies that make calorie-dense products more affordable than healthier alternatives.
- Digital and social media marketing targeting children and young people.
- Product placement and retail environments that encourage unhealthy purchasing decisions.

For many families, unhealthy environments can make healthy choices significantly harder to achieve.

Bury's Whole System Response

Recognising the complexity of childhood obesity, Bury has moved beyond individual behaviour change programmes and adopted a whole system approach involving partners across health, education, planning, transport, communities and local government.

The Bury Obesity Alliance

The Alliance brings together partners to coordinate activity, share intelligence and focus collective action on prevention and reducing inequalities.

A life-course approach has been established with risk cohorts identified across:

- 0 to 5 years
- 6 to 11 years

This enables interventions to be targeted at key points where they can have the greatest long-term impact.

Progress Achieved So Far

The partnership has already delivered several important system changes:

Schools and Physical Activity

- Teach Active introduced across 43 Bury primary schools.
- More than one-third of schools now registered with LET'S Get Bury Moving Schools.
- Development of the LET'S Get Bury Early Years Accreditation scheme.
- Creation of a Physical Development Pathway linked to Early Years outcomes and Good Level of Development measures.

Healthy Environments

- Formal adoption of Hot Food Takeaway restrictions through planning policy.
- Exploration of Healthy Advertising approaches across council assets.
- Increased focus on active neighbourhoods and active travel opportunities.

Community and Place-Based Action

- Public Service Leadership Teams engaged with childhood obesity as a standing agenda item.
- Development of Junior Parkrun opportunities in Whitefield and Bury West.
- Increasing emphasis on neighbourhood-based prevention and community engagement.

Health System Contribution

- NCMP intelligence shared with Primary Care Networks.
- Active Practice accreditation supporting primary care to promote physical activity and prevention.
- Review of NCMP pathways, communications and intervention opportunities.

What We Are Doing Next

The Obesity Alliance continues to strengthen the local evidence base and target action where inequalities are greatest.

Key areas of ongoing work include:

- Enhanced analysis linking NCMP data with school meals, free school meal eligibility, attainment and physical activity indicators.
- Continued development of place-based approaches in neighbourhoods with the highest burden of excess weight.
- Further exploration of healthy advertising policies.
- Strengthening active travel and active neighbourhood initiatives.
- Working with schools and education partners to create healthier school environments.
- Embedding obesity prevention within broader work on poverty, health inequalities and prevention.

Why This Matters for the Health and Wellbeing Board

The evidence suggests that the most effective actions are not isolated programmes but coordinated, long-term changes to local systems and environments.

The Health and Wellbeing Board has a critical leadership role in:

- Championing a whole system approach.
- Recognising childhood obesity as an inequalities issue.
- Supporting healthy food environment policies.
- Promoting active neighbourhoods and active travel.
- Influencing planning, regeneration and economic development decisions.
- Aligning partners around prevention and reducing health inequalities.

Key Board Message

Bury is taking positive and evidence-based action.

Through the Bury Obesity Alliance, partners are increasingly working together to create environments that support healthier choices for children and families. While rates of excess weight remain a concern, substantial progress has been made in establishing the foundations for long-term change through schools, planning policy, active travel, neighbourhood partnerships, primary care and community action.

Childhood obesity should be viewed as a system challenge driven by inequalities, wider determinants and commercial influences. By continuing to work collectively across organisations and communities, Bury can help ensure every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy, active and able to thrive.

Please find below for further information:



Childhood Obesity
Trends in Bury 2025.p

- 24-25 National Childhood Obesity Bury Data Pack:
- [Bury Childhood Obesity Policy Simulator](#)
- Bury Obesity Alliance landing page: [Bury Obesity Alliance | Bury Directory | Bury Directory](#)

