

Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Board	
Title	The Big Fat Chat – Public Engagement Report
Date	08/06/2017
Board Sponsor	Richard Harling
Author	David Sugden
Report type	For Debate

## Summary

1. In line with the Health and Wellbeing Board's (HWB) desire to better engage with the public on important health and well-being issues, a public debate on obesity was undertaken during February 2017. This included a social media campaign and a public event.
2. The purpose was to inform and develop strategic leadership around the obesity agenda. The public engagement was framed in the context of promoting individual responsibility for health and exploring how the public sector can support this shift toward increased individual responsibility.  
The aims were:
  - To raise awareness of the key messages around obesity with regard to the related health impacts and promoting individual responsibility for maintaining a healthy weight.
  - To engage with and understand public perceptions of obesity and what can be done to tackle it
  - To further inform the wider strategic agenda and coordination of activity to tackle obesity
3. This report outlines the outcomes achieved and key learning. An important outcome of the debate was to provide a local benchmark of public attitudes and ideas. The intention is that this will inform a planned stakeholder event (27<sup>th</sup> June 2017) and evolution of a Staffordshire partnership 'compact' to address obesity. The debate also provided some useful learning for future debates on other health and well-being issues.

## Recommendations

4. The HWB considers this report, the outcomes from the public debate and the lessons learnt to inform planning of future public engagement activity.
5. The HWB supports the development of a partnership 'compact' to address obesity.
6. The HWB considers the development of a HWB website to increase its visibility and provide a key point of interaction with the public on future engagement around health and well-being.

## Background

7. Modern Western life makes it easy to eat more and do less - the availability of energy rich foods and mechanised support for most aspects of everyday life means we are likely to increase our calorie intake but expend less energy unless a conscious effort is made.
8. Data from the latest Sport England's Active People Survey suggests that around one in four adults in Staffordshire are obese (188,760 people) with rates being higher than England, furthermore one in three adults undertake less than 30 minutes of moderate exercise a week .
  - In England and Staffordshire around a fifth of children are obese by year 6 in school (age 10-11 years)
  - At the current rate of increase 60% of men, 50% of women and 25% of children could be obese by 2050.
  - Aside from the impact on quality of life and the wide range of illness and chronic disease obesity is associated with vast cost to health and care services.
  - The annual UK costs associated with obesity for the wider economy, NHS and social care systems are estimated to be £27 billion, £6.1 billion a year and £352 million respectively.<sup>[1]</sup> This equates to £425 million, £96 million and £6 million annually in Staffordshire.
9. Evidence suggests that the best way to approach excess weight and obesity is through a whole-system/ societal approach<sup>2</sup>. This includes addressing the obesogenic environment and understanding and optimising public attitudes. Support from a wide range of partners, including local people and communities is critical.

## The debate

10. The *debate* aimed to raise awareness of the key messages around obesity (see 2.0) and engage with the public by creating dialogue around tough or controversial questions relating to the obesity agenda to gauge public opinion and ideas on tackling obesity. The related social media campaign reflected these aims but also aimed to encourage partners and stakeholders to support and own the programme.
11. A branded social media campaign 'The Big Fat Chat,' (BFC) ran throughout January and February. This included
  - Website development and related social media to create public interest in the BFC and promote public interaction with the website;
  - Themed weeks and events e.g. sugar free week, Man versus Fat;

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Public Health England, Local Health and Care Planning: Menu of preventative interventions, 2016 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/565944/Local\\_health\\_and\\_care\\_planning\\_menu\\_of\\_preventative\\_interventions.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/565944/Local_health_and_care_planning_menu_of_preventative_interventions.pdf)

<sup>[2]</sup> Government Office for science and Department of Health, 2007:Tackling obesities: Future Choices <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tackling-obesities-future-choices>

- Dissemination of digital information packs to enable partners & stakeholders to provide ongoing support to the BFC activities;
- Direct engagement with a range of voluntary sector fora (e.g. Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth services), local workplaces, Chamber of commerce, and district councils (e.g. Stafford Borough Council Health and Well Being Board, leisure centres).

12. A public event was held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 at the Aquarius Ballroom in Cannock. This had an expert panel and sought views from the audience, including their views on the central debate question about individual versus state responsibility for maintaining a healthy weight.

## Outcomes

13. The BFC exceeded all targets set for reach and engagement on social media: campaign messages reached 80,891 people via the county council's channels alone (many more if including support across social media by our partners); 3,700 people watched part of the live stream of the public event on Facebook and 1,768 people interacted (e.g. made comments or shared/retweeted on Facebook/Twitter or the BFC website).
14. Press coverage was good with stories in 12 Staffordshire newspapers, 2 of which were front page. Whilst the brand name, the Big Fat Chat, created some controversy overall the response was positive with only 1 critical newspaper story, whilst 78% of Blog /social media comments were positive.
15. Utilising social media as a lead in was very successful in creating interest and recruiting to the event in an 8 week period. The level of controversy may have contributed to attendance.
16. The Public event was well received, stimulating varied and interesting discussion – the pre and post-debate vote was overwhelmingly in favour of a 'shared' responsibility (i.e. state/ personal) or 'mainly personal' responsibility for maintaining a healthy weight, with 97% of the audience (of 72 people) favouring one of these options in each vote. However, the second vote saw an increase in the 'mainly personal responsibility' vote - from 23% to 29% of the audience.

**Table 1: Voting on personal versus state responsibility for a healthy weight**

	<b>Vote before debate</b>	<b>Vote after debate</b>
1 Only personal responsibility	2%	1.5%
2 Mainly personal responsibility	23%	29%
3 shared responsibility	74%	68%
4 Mainly state responsibility	0%	1.5%
5 Only state responsibility	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

## **Learning (Future strategy development)**

17. Overall there was encouraging support for the debate and the notion of personal responsibility for health and well-being from the public, partners and stakeholders. Direct engagement via the public event was invaluable, providing key insights into local public attitudes, knowledge and sensitivities around obesity. In particular:
- The need for information, guidance and support: whilst ready to take personal responsibility, a lack of knowledge about cheap and healthy eating remains a barrier to change for many people.
  - The ability to tap in to hitherto unknown individual and community resources (e.g. Overeaters Anonymous) to build community capacity to address obesity;
  - Problems with food in relation to health and obesity are a potent and emotive mix and this was reflected in the debate. Obesity can have strong links to mental health and individual psychology, requiring different solutions. People are therefore clear they have preferences for how they are helped (e.g. self-help versus group support).
  - There is not a one size fits all solution and effective approaches will need to consider individual and target audience differences (e.g. men and women) to engage them effectively as well as the mental health associations.

## **Learning (future public engagement)**

18. The programme was very successful but the process of planning and development highlighted issues that could have been avoided or considered.
- Future engagement should be tailored to the subject matter and likely public sensitivities anticipated. Different health and wellbeing issues may require different engagement processes (e.g. End of Life).
  - Preparation is key and this includes establishing clear aims and desired outcomes from the outset, as well as planning a realistic time frame, The involvement of Staffordshire County Council (SCC) communications alongside partners and stakeholders is vital from an early stage.
  - Campaigns which have 'edge' and successfully attract public attention and interest may also be perceived negatively. There is a balance to be struck here and testing messages with key groups prior to launch is essential.
  - HWB Identity: the BFC was invariably perceived as a County Council initiative, by the public and press, despite being badged as a HWB debate. Lack of a visible HWB presence (e.g. via a bespoke website) is probably the reason for this. The HWB should consider the development of a HWB website to increase its visibility and provide a key point of interaction with the public on future engagement around health and well-being.