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**A Report of the Education, Skills and  
Culture Scrutiny Committee Task and  
Finish Group:**

**Promoting Healthy Living  
Among Pupils in Neath Port  
Talbot Schools**



**June 2019**

**Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**

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## TERMS OF REFERENCE

<b>Title</b>	<b>Promoting Healthy Living among pupils at Neath Port Talbot Schools</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<p><b><u>Elected Members</u></b></p> <p>Cllr. A.L.Thomas Cllr S. ap Daffydd Cllr. S. Renkes Cllr. H.N.James Cllr. R Mizen</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Members</u></b></p> <p>Adam Amore</p> <p><b><u>Advisors/Support Officers</u></b></p> <p>Charlotte Davies Chloe Plowman Aled Evans Andrew Thomas Chris Millis</p>

<b>Reasons for undertaking Inquiry</b>	To Promote Healthy Living Among Pupils at Neath Port Talbot Schools
<b>Key Questions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the current state of play in Neath Port Talbot Schools on the Health of the student population?</li> <li>2. What is the current State of play of Physical education Lessons in Schools and School dinners etc? (anything that is in relation to what the schools can control)</li> <li>3. What is the current state of play of the knowledge and research of how to promote healthy living in relation to diet and physical activity amongst children?</li> <li>4. What can we be doing differently for outcomes of our children within the current budget constraints?</li> <li>5. How can we monitor the success of any interventions we make?</li> </ol>
<b>Intended Outcomes</b>	Increase levels of Physical activities, knowledge of healthy eating to reduce the levels of obesity in Neath Port Talbot.

<b>Background Information</b>	<a href="http://www.itv.com/news/wales/2017-12-07/warnings-over-obesity-crisis-facing-welsh-teens/">http://www.itv.com/news/wales/2017-12-07/warnings-over-obesity-crisis-facing-welsh-teens/</a>
<b>List of potential key officers, stakeholders, partners or other agencies to involve</b>	Officers – as stated above  Welsh Government, Celtic leisure, Sporting Bodies, Teachers (P.E), Other CBC's
<b>Timescale for completion of the task</b>	To be completed by May 2019
<b>Meeting Dates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 4<sup>th</sup> May 2019 (School Visit)</li> <li>○ 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019 (School Visit)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019</li> <li>• 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019</li> <li>• 15 May 2019</li> </ul>

## CHAIR'S FOREWORD

“We need to think about the next generation and there's a real risk that, if we don't get serious, they will live shorter lives than their parents.”

Dr Frank Atherton,  
Chief Medical Officer for Wales

Concerns about declining levels of activity and rising obesity rates amongst young people are growing. As the stark warning from the Chief Medical Officer indicates, it is now incumbent on all levels of government to act to ensure that today's young people have the healthiest start in life possible. In this context the Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee considered it appropriate to form a Task and Finish Group to investigate the ways in which Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council can contribute to this goal.

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group I would like to offer sincere thanks to all those who helped in the investigation and the development of this report. From the many Council Officers who helped us compile our evidence, through the school staff who welcomed us into their classrooms and canteens, to the external experts who gave generously of their time and knowledge. An especial thanks must go to the pupils of the four schools we visited for their enthusiasm, candour, and invaluable insights.

As a final prefatory note, I would say that, without minimising the need for concerted action or the size of challenge ahead, the Task

and Finish Group found much that would give cause for cautious optimism. There are, most certainly, a host of systemic factors ranged against us – the ubiquity of digital entertainment, the decline of active travel, the ready availability of unhealthy food, and many others. At the same time, we have students in our schools who are enthusiastic about sport and more knowledgeable about nutrition than previous generations; we have Officers with truly impressive expertise and dedicated teachers who will go above and beyond for their pupils; outside the Council we have a host of professionals to whom we can turn for advice. In short, we have, already, many of the components of the solution; in our view, it is the Council's prime responsibility to bring these together in the most effective way possible.

*Former Chair of Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Alex Thomas*

## BACKGROUND

As noted in a 2016 World Health Organisation (WHO) report: “Childhood obesity is reaching alarming proportions in many countries and poses an urgent and serious challenge.”<sup>1</sup> It has, for over a decade, been described as an “epidemic” and a “public health crisis”.<sup>2</sup> In Wales, data from the Welsh Child Measurement Programme suggest that 26.3% of four and five year olds in Wales are now overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup>

The long-term health consequences of this phenomenon are deeply concerning. Unhealthy weight is a major risk factor for a host of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers.<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that, within Wales, obesity is overtaking smoking as the single biggest health risk.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the toll of lives unnecessarily cut short, this trend, if allowed to continue unchecked, will have devastating consequences for our health and social services.

It must be acknowledged that the increasing policy focus on childhood obesity is not without its critics.<sup>6</sup> It has been suggested the Body Mass Index (BMI), the scale by which the categories of obese and overweight are defined, is an unreliable indicator and

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, *Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity*, (2016, WHO)

<sup>2</sup> Ebbeling, C, Pawlak, D and Ludwig, D, ‘Childhood obesity: public-health crisis, common sense cure’ *Lancet*, 2002; 9331, pp473-482

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/67795>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46883437>

<sup>6</sup> O’Hara, L., & Taylor, J. (2018). What’s Wrong With the ‘War on Obesity?’ *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018772888>

that the prioritisation of body-weight as a measure of health results in harmful stigmatisation. The potential danger of stigmatisation is a valid concern. Research suggests, however, that BMI, although not a perfect instrument, remains a more useful measure than the alternatives.<sup>7</sup> The conclusion that there is an emergent crisis of childhood health is supported by data beyond the Child Measurement Programme. A recent report produced by Swansea University highlights low activity rates and increased sedentary behaviour amongst young people.<sup>8</sup> Only 41% of 5-17 year olds now report playing outside most days. 80% of 11-16 year olds now spend more than two hours sitting in their free time on weekdays. A recent report from the National Assembly for Wales has highlighted a decline in school based PE and physical literacy.<sup>9</sup>

The situation in Neath Port Talbot appears to be slightly worse than the national average. Data from the most recent Child Measurement Programme for Wales suggest that 12.4% of four and five year olds in Neath Port Talbot are obese and 14.8% are overweight. This compares to all-Wales averages of 12% and 14.3% respectively. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, given the association socio-economic deprivation and childhood obesity, and the County's higher than average levels of deprivation.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/growing-up-scotland-report-overweight-obesity-activity/pages/5/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s76266/Active%20Healthy%20Kids%20Wales%202018%20Report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> National Assembly for Wales Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, *Physical Activity of Children and Young People*, March 2019 <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld12369/cr-ld12369-e.pdf>

## APPROACH

The following Elected Members volunteered to sit on the Group:

- Cllr. A.L.Thomas
- Cllr S. ap Daffydd
- Cllr. S. Renkes
- Cllr. H.N.James
- Cllr. R Mizen
- Co-opted Member Adam Amore

At the initial meeting, Aled Evans, Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, and Democratic Services Officers Charlotte Davies and Chloe Plowman assisted the Group in defining the scope and methodology of the investigation.

It was noted, from the outset, by all members, that the promotion of healthy lifestyles among school age young people was a multi-faceted subject. The psychological health of pupils in our schools is no less important than their physical wellbeing, and the two are intrinsically linked. In the broadest sense of the title, the topics of safe social media use, smoking, and alcohol consumption could all, also, have legitimately been included in the remit of the enquiry. Members and officers were, however, aware of the risk of casting too wide a net. Consideration of too many topics would, we feared, lead to a shallow investigation that would not produce useful recommendations. Whilst acknowledging that this would leave important work to be tackled in the future, the Group decided to focus, for the purposes of this study, on physical health.

At the same time, we wished to avoid limiting the work to too narrow a focus on obesity *per se*. Although maintaining a healthy weight is undoubtedly desirable, the concern that excessive prioritisation of body weight as the sole indicator of health can lead to stigmatisation and ineffective policy decisions appears to be a valid one. It was decided, therefore, to focus on two factors that are both key drivers of good health in general and, in their absence, significant factors in obesity: physical activity and healthy diet. It should also be noted that the inculcation of habits of regular exercise and healthy eating at a young age are two of the most significant predictors of adult health and wellbeing. These two subjects, then, would form the core of our study. Whilst it is not an explicit recommendation, we would note that the psychological aspects of wellbeing amongst the school age population would be a valid and important topic for the Scrutiny Committee to consider in the future.

In terms of the methodology, the structure upon which we decided divided the investigation into three phases: identify how healthy lifestyles are currently promoted amongst young people in Neath Port Talbot; investigate what approaches are shown to be most effective by best practice and contemporary research; and consider ways in which Neath Port Talbot's activity in this area can be improved. The constraints of meeting organisation meant that this neat tri-partite structure could not always be followed in practice – sessions intended to focus on our own current practice included advice from outside experts and vice versa. Broadly, however, the three overarching questions of 'What are we doing?'

‘What should we be doing?’ ‘How do we get from one to the other?’ remained at the forefront of the Group’s thinking.

When considering ways in which we could identify the current ‘state of play’ in Neath Port Talbot, the Group enthusiastically welcomed the Director’s suggestion that we should visit a number of schools to speak to staff and students directly. In order to access the experiences of a cross section of schools, the Group decided to visit four schools: two primary and two secondary, two urban and two rural, two Welsh medium and two English medium, and all facing different levels of deprivation within their localities.

These being:

- Tairgwaith Primary
- Eastern Primary
- Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive
- Ystalyfera Comprehensive

The Group wishes to thank Mike Daley, Charlotte Davies and Chloe Plowman for the speed and efficiency with which these visits were organised.

To ensure consistency when gathering and reviewing evidence, the Group decided that a semi-structured interview approach would be desirable and drew up a list of questions which would shape our conversations with pupils and members of staff. These explored the themes of exercise and good nutrition in the school curriculum, in school more generally, and outside of the school setting. Discussions with teachers and other staff would be shaped by the pupils’ responses to these questions.

The Group then produced a list of Council Officers and external practitioners, experts and stakeholders, who we felt could provide relevant information. This was further adapted to respond to findings from the school visits. Unfortunately, practical constraints prevented some of these lines of investigation from coming to fruition – it was not possible, for example, to visit a best practice school in another Local Authority area. We were, however, able to speak to all of the most significant stakeholders that we identified and to gather a robust evidence base on which to form our conclusions. Over subsequent meetings the Group received evidence from the following:

Internal Stakeholders:

- Mr Paul Walker - Operations Co-Ordinator
- Mr Mark Napieralla - Active Young People Co-Ordinator
- Mrs M Lewis - Disability Sport Wales Development Officer
- Mrs Allison Harris - Think Family Partnership Manager at NPTCBC
- Mr Paul Hinder - Project Development and Funding Manager at NPTCBC
- Mr Neil Hapgood - Duke of Edinburgh's Awards Development Officer at NPTCBC

External Stakeholders:

- Mrs Catie Parry – Healthy Schools Co-ordinator, NHS
- Professor Simon Murphy - Director of School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

The process concluded with a final meeting at which members considered in detail all that we had heard and read over the previous weeks and drafted a list of recommendations to Council.

## **KEY EVIDENCE**

### **School Visits**

So as to avoid limiting our evidence gathering to pupils who might be anticipated to have a positive attitude nutrition and exercise, the Group specifically requested to meet with a broad cross section of the student population. We are pleased to report that the schools were more than happy to facilitate this. In addition, the Group met with Head and Deputy Head Teachers, PE and Food Technology teachers, and members of catering staff. We also had the opportunity to visit the sports halls, canteens, and classrooms in most of the schools we visited. We are extremely grateful to the staff and students of these schools for their enthusiastic engagement in this investigation.

### **Extra-Curricular Sport**

It was evident, and encouraging, that the pupils had a clear understanding of the influence of nutrition and physical activity on a healthy lifestyle. The majority of the young people with whom we spoke had a positive attitude to exercise, regularly engaged in some form of sport or other physical activity, and had a good knowledge of healthy food choices. It was, however, noted by a number of children that they were not able to take part in activities and sports that would be their first choice. This sentiment was, particularly noticeable amongst students who were less enthusiastic about traditional team sports.

The barriers to participation in alternative activities were varied. Choices are constrained by the clubs available in a given area, especially in more rural locations. In some cases, sadly, the financial circumstances of families are a barrier to involvement. In terms of extra-curricula sports provided through the schools themselves, as Head and Deputy Head Teachers noted, the provision of after school clubs and activities is, in part, reliant on the voluntary effort and sporting expertise of staff members. Uniformly, the senior teachers were hugely appreciative of the efforts and generosity of their staff in this area. They recognised, however, that there was a limit as to what could be expected from teachers volunteering on top of an already substantial workload. The use of third-party providers to supplement the school's own resources was clearly one potential solution. This option, unfortunately, has cost implications. Additionally, in the Primary sector a lack of clarity around potential legal liability may also be a concern for Head Teachers. It was also noted that, in KS3 and KS4 settings involvement in after school sport dwindles as the years progress and the academic workload increases. In schools that have consciously developed a sporting culture, sport does, however, remain a powerful tool for helping disengaged students in later years.

## **PE Lessons**

A striking finding from the school visits was that a substantial majority of the pupils wanted to see more time given over to formal PE lessons in the school schedule. It was noticeable that

enthusiasm for PE was particularly high in schools where a broad variety sports and activities are taught. In the Primary setting, the incorporation of PE into rich task based, thematic learning, was particularly appreciated by the pupils. Whilst this may not be possible in all schools, the model of having a specialist PE teacher in primary schools able to teach lessons to all classes also appears to be extremely effective.

The two main constraints that teachers noted, in terms of PE lessons, related to facilities and timetabling. The sports facilities in certain schools are facing maintenance issues and are in need of investment. In some, the geography of the school's location, and the siting of sports facilities, present additional challenges. In one school the condition of a connecting lane was a barrier to regular use of their playing field. Physical limitations affect the variety of activities that can be offered in classes. Teachers reported that, whilst, resources were potentially available to them in other nearby schools, the expense of arranging transportation was prohibitive. For schools without access to their own or a nearby swimming pool, the cost of transport associated with swimming lessons, equally, appears to be a concern. The way in which the time required to change into and out of kit encroaches on lesson time was noted in several schools. Particularly in primary settings, the length of time spent actively learning can be considerably less than slot in the school timetable. Some schools have paid particular attention to this in their scheduling of lessons. In cases where, in a primary setting, each class is able to have close to one full afternoon of PE a week the impact, in terms of engagement and enjoyment, is noticeable.

## **School Meals**

We noted considerable variation in attitudes to school meals across the various schools. Even in the primary sector, where the standardisation of menus might be expected to produce a uniform experience, the catering staff, clearly, still, have an influence on the lunchtime experience of the pupils. In one school, the work of the senior dinner lady is evidently a significant factor in the pupils' enthusiasm for school meals. In primary schools the importance of breakfast clubs was emphasised by the staff. There was concern, however, that these were not always being accessed by children who could most benefit from them.

In the secondary schools, pupils and teachers alike, acknowledged that the quality, variety and presentation of food options were critically important to encouraging healthy food choices. We saw some examples of excellent practice in this regard. One school had established a School Nutrition Action Group, as part of their work towards the next level of the Healthy Schools Scheme, through this they gathered the views of pupils as to what healthier options they would wish to see available. Pupils from the SNAG were involved in the design, development and testing of new recipes. Since the new menu was introduced the school has seen a considerable increase in the number of students opting for school dinners and an increased uptake of healthier menu options. The importance of pupil voice in this transformation cannot, it appears, be underestimated.

## **Nutrition and Food Technology**

The considerable majority of pupils we spoke to demonstrated a good understanding of nutrition and healthy diet. The knowledge shown by those studying PE GCSE was particularly impressive. In general, we saw evidence that messages about healthy food choices were in general effectively communicated across multiple subjects. There was, however, some evidence that these messages did not always reach beyond the school gates.

Teachers noted that packed lunches, for example, were not always nutritionally balanced.

In secondary school setting, it appears that there may be some issues in the delivery of food technology classes. Several students who had not taken this option to GCSE noted that their experience of this subject was limited in both terms of time and scope. They had had fewer lessons than they would have liked in this subject at KS3. Some pupils also questioned the extent to which the lessons they did have had imparted practical skills. As noted by pupils and teachers, the timetabling of classes may be a factor here. Pupils in the one secondary where Food Technology classes are scheduled for double slots appear to have had a more positive experience of the subject.

## **Healthy Schools Scheme**

All of the schools visited had engaged with Healthy Schools Scheme. This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section, for now we will note that it is a 'kite mark' scheme through which

schools move by demonstrating progress against several health criteria. Given the proliferation of such initiatives in contemporary education, it might have been anticipated that teachers, and particularly head teachers, would have had limited enthusiasm for it. This however was not the case. In at least two schools the Healthy Schools Scheme was credited as a very significant factor behind the achievements they had made in terms of promoting healthy lifestyles. It was described as a flexible but powerful tool for shaping and sustaining change. One school, that had progressed particularly far along the Healthy Schools Scheme pathway, commented that the, not inconsiderable, effort that this had entailed was undoubtedly worth it for the results it produced.

### **Evidence from Internal Stakeholders**

#### **School Sports Survey**

Officers presented the Neath Port Talbot and all-Wales findings of the 2018 Sport Wales Schools Sport Survey. The Survey has been conducted periodically since 2013. Its aims include the measuring and monitoring of participation in sport as well as the provision of insights, which will help guide future interventions and investments. Response rates are increasing, with over 1000 schools across Wales taking part in the most recent survey in 2018. This figure included all secondary and middle schools in Neath Port Talbot, with the exception of Cymer Afan, along with 33 of the Council's primary schools. The survey received responses from 3,837 pupils in Neath Port Talbot. Results were weighted to be representative of the Council's pupil population.

Broadly, Neath Port Talbot was close to the Wales-wide averages in terms of participation in extra-curricular sport. 64% of Neath Port Talbot pupils reported participating in organised extracurricular sport at least once a week; the national rate being 66%. 50% of pupils in Neath Port Talbot participated in extra-curricular sport three or more times a week; the all-Wales figure was 48%. 69% of Neath Port Talbot pupils reported attending a community sports club at least once a week, above the Welsh average of 65%. Less positively, the survey indicated that Neath Port Talbot schools may provide less formal PE lessons than is typical for schools across Wales. The responses from the schools surveyed suggests that Neath Port Talbot schools provide, on average, 82 minutes of curricular PE a week compared to a Wales-wide average of 99 minutes. The difference appears to be more marked in primary schools (NPT: 80 mins; Wales: 99 mins) than in secondary (NPT: 91 minutes; Wales 95 mins).

Reported enjoyment rates for PE and extra-curricular sport were relatively high. 68% of Neath Port Talbot respondents said that they enjoyed PE a lot; 52% reported enjoying extra-curricular sport a lot. The comparative national figures were 63% and 48% respectively. 82% of Neath Port Talbot pupils said they were either very confident or quite confident to try new sports activities. Whilst this is encouraging, it should be noted that there was significant gender and age variation in this overall figure. Broadly, confidence declined with age and, in each age category, male reported confidence was higher than female. 30% of year 10-11 girls reported that they were either not very confident or not confident at

all. The extent to which pupils considered that PE and sport helped them have a healthy lifestyle declined between year 5 and year 11.

Strikingly, 95% of pupils in Neath Port Talbot reported that they would like to do more sport of some kind. This was close to the all-Wales figure of 96%. In investigating the barriers to participation, the survey asked pupils to complete the statement “I would do more sport if...” The three most frequent responses, in both Neath Port Talbot and across Wales, were

- ...my friends went with me (38%)
- ...there were more sports that suited me (35%)
- ...I had more time (34%)

19% of Neath Port Talbot respondents also noted difficulty in getting to clubs and a lack of confidence as obstacles.

Of the sports for which there was the highest level of unmet demand in the Council area, swimming was the most frequently mentioned, with 52% of Neath Port Talbot saying they would like to engage in this more. Whilst the traditional team sports of football, rugby and netball, figured significantly on this list, they were joined by mountain biking and cycling, trampolining, dance, and gymnastics.

### **Physical Activity and Sport Service (PASS)**

Despite the loss of funding streams over recent years, Neath Port Talbot’s PASS team continues to co-ordinate a significant number of sports clubs throughout the County Borough, ranging from badminton to street games. Officers have noted the results of the

Sport Wales survey and are actively working on responding to the unmet demands it indicates, for example, by expanding the current cycle and mountain biking provision. Clubs are organised to be as inclusive as possible and nine disability sports are supported. In addition, the annual Festival of Sport at Margam Park provides disabled young people with the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of activities, from archery to climbing. Alongside regular clubs, the PASS team run outdoor adventure camps at Margam Park during the school holidays.

The PASS team work with schools on a number of programmes. These include:

- **Active Families:** Officers work with one primary school for a day a week for six days. During this time officers organise sessions for nursery pupils with parental engagement sessions. Mentoring is provided for teachers, a young ambassador club and after school sport club.
- **After School Sports Clubs:** Officers organise a summer term programme of after school sports clubs. Five weeks of sessions are planned with schools. A targeted approach is used to identify areas of greatest need.
- **5x60 Programme:** Targeted sessions are delivered in comprehensive schools, these include KS4 girls, SEN provision, ambassador clubs and selected taster sessions in sports linking to community provision.
- **Young Ambassadors:** Officers train bronze (primary school), silver (secondary school) and Gold (young adult) volunteers to promote sport sessions and deliver lunchtime clubs.

- **Balance Biking:** Selected primary schools receive teacher training, mentoring and bikes to conduct balance bike sessions. These schools are selected to form a pathway into community provision.

Officers also noted that Celtic Leisure actively engages with schools and provides sports clubs during school holidays for a small charge.

When asked about the challenges faced, officers noted a number of issues. The shift in funding, at a national level, towards elite sport has removed resources from community provision. Within schools, officers noted that there was a dearth of specialist teacher support for PE. In particular, there appeared to be a complete absence of Regional Consortium activity in this area. Transport was also acknowledged as an obstacle to participation. The cost of arranging transportation was mentioned as possibly the most significant barrier to the provision of swimming lessons in school.

## **Children's Play**

Participation in organised sport is, of course, only one way in which young people benefit from exercise. Informal play can have an equally, if not more, substantial impact on a child's health and wellbeing. Officers noted, however, that levels of unstructured, active play are decreasing. Digital play is increasingly out competing traditional outdoor recreation. It was also suggested that parents are now more reticent to allow children to play outside the home for extended periods of time. As a consequence, it is very possible that the majority of active play occurs in school break

times. Even here, however, the shortening of school break times risks reducing activity levels. Officers suggested that replacing lunchtime supervisors in schools with play workers may go some way to ameliorating this situation.

With regards to active play in the community, in 2012 the Welsh Government introduced a new duty for local authorities to assess the sufficiency of play opportunities for children up to the age of 17. The Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) is undertaken and submitted to the Welsh Government on a three-yearly cycle. An annual action plan is developed to address recommendations emerging from the PSA. It was noted by officers that the locality specific sections of this document may be of assistance to Elected Members in generating and prioritising projects in their wards. In spite of an increasingly competitive environment for grant applications, Project Development and Funding officers have been successful in securing funding to develop new play resources, in particular Multi-Use Games Areas, to attempt to address gaps in provision. The Members' Community Infrastructure Fund has been invaluable in providing match funding for a number of projects. Officers provided evidence of the transformative effect of several developments. Whilst significant progress has been made, it was commented, however, that there remained a relative lack of equipped spaces for older children. In addition, the lack of bodies, such as Town and Community Councils, able to take on the management and maintenance of new facilities has presented a challenge in some areas of the County Borough.

In addition to physical infrastructure, the Council continues to provide direct support for active play, albeit in a reduced form. Until 2014/15, Neath Port Talbot delivered a summer play-scheme programme providing free, open access, play for children aged five and over. Due to reductions in core funding, this comprehensive service unfortunately no longer exists. The remodelled service is now structured around available grants, in particular Families First funding. Officers noted that the way in which Welsh Government grant funding is disbursed often, itself, creates difficulties. Grants are frequently circumscribed with detailed and unhelpful conditions or confirmed late in the financial cycle. The Play Opportunities Grant, intended to support PSA action plans, is, for example, usually only made available in Quarter 4, which constrains the ways in which it can be spent. Despite these funding challenges, Neath Port Talbot has recently been able to appoint a part-time Play Development Officer to support the implementation of the PSA action plan and further develop links with third-sector and community groups.

Finally, Officers drew members attention to the role that other departments of the Council could play in promoting active play and active travel. In particular Planning, through policy and the use of Section 106 payments, can have a significant impact.

### **Other Programmes**

In addition to the foregoing, the Group received evidence regarding two other programmes provided by the Council.

**The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP):** SHEP is a school-based programme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays. During the school holidays, when free breakfast and school meals in primary schools are not available, some families struggle to afford or access food that provides a healthy diet. Some children also experience social isolation and a lack of intellectual stimulation. Once a week parents/carers and siblings are invited to join in with a family day and eat lunch with the children. 'Food and Fun' is the brand identity used at local level to promote the clubs to children and families. WLGA part fund the programme and funding up to 2019/20 is allocated within the draft budget to expand the programme and benefit children and families across Wales. SHEP brings together NPT PASS coaches, NPT play, Communities First Youth Service, Swansea City Football Club, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, ABMU Health Board dietetics and school nurses.

**The Duke of Edinburgh Award:** Compared to other Local Authorities, Neath Port Talbot performs remarkably well in its support for the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Officers reported that it was particularly effective in promoting lifestyle change amongst disengaged young people.

## **External Stakeholder Meetings**

### **The Healthy School Scheme**

Having observed the aspects of the Healthy Schools Scheme (HSS) during our school visits, it was extremely useful for the Group to receive a presentation from Ms Catie Parry in which she explained the operation of the HSS as a whole and offered insights based on her experience as a co-ordinator.

The HSS in Wales is part of the Schools for Health in Europe programme, which, itself, originated with a World Health Organisation initiative. The HSS provides a series of phases through which schools progress by evidencing, through documentation, discussion and observation, their attainment against a suite of national indicators. The indicators relate to seven topics which, taken together, encourage the development of healthy lifestyles:

- Food and Fitness
- Mental and Emotional Health and Well Being
- Personal Development and Relationships
- Environment
- Substance Use and Misuse
- Safety
- Hygiene

Within each topic, progress is subdivided into four categories:

- Leadership and Communication
- Curriculum

- Ethos and Environment
- Family and Community Involvement

To illustrate, one of the indicators found under the Curriculum element of Food and Fitness is “The school is committed to providing 2 hours of quality physical activity provision per week for every pupil.” Another, under the Ethos and Environment heading, is “Evidence of pupil involvement in discussion with caterers regarding school food provision.”

Within Neath Port Talbot, a number of our schools have enthusiastically engaged with the HSS. 41 schools are currently working towards Phase 6 of the Scheme and two have achieved the National Quality Award.

In her commentary on the HSS, Ms Parry emphasised that the framework of indicators must not be approached as a series of goals to be accomplished and forgotten, but rather a process of continuous, long term, improvement. Research, she noted, suggests that embedding institutional improvements in health takes approximately nine years. Whilst acknowledging the necessary limitations on the Task and Finish Group’s work, Ms Parry also stressed that food and fitness (in effect the substance of our enquiry) is only one aspect of the health equation. Emotional and mental wellbeing is equally essential to the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Three themes emerged from Ms Parry’s discussion with members about the characteristics of schools that had most successfully engaged with the programme: leadership, pupil voice and the

wider community. Unsurprisingly, those schools that had achieved the most tended to have Headteachers who were particularly determined to drive cultural change in this area. In addition, the need for teachers to act as role models should not be underestimated. Governors also have a vital role to play in providing leadership at a strategic level and monitoring their school's improvement. Secondly, Ms Parry noted, pupil voice is crucial. The involvement of pupils in the development of initiatives, for example through School Nutrition Action Groups, markedly increases the likelihood of genuine cultural change. Finally, engagement with the wider community, and particularly parents, is required to ensure improvements extend beyond the school gates.

Ms Parry provided the Group with example action plans from Neath Port Talbot schools. It was noted by members that these contained a number of initiatives that could be usefully be deployed in other schools. It was suggested that the development of fora in which schools share ideas and best practice could increase capacity for self-improvement.

### **Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer)**

In addition to providing comprehensive information on the HSS framework, Ms Parry furnished the Group with data from the most recent School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey. The SHRN is a collaboration between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Cancer Research UK, the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods and Cardiff

University. It is led by DECIPHer at Cardiff University. DECIPHer undertakes a biannual survey of secondary school pupils that measures indicators connected with the HSS framework. In the 2018 survey 6,109 students in Neath Port Talbot responded to some or all of the questions. A number of questions produced concerning datasets for Neath Port Talbot. In terms of diet and nutrition, only 41% of students reported eating one or more portions of fruit or vegetables a day. This figure declined from an average of 47% in Year 7 to 37% in Year 11. For each year group the figure was below the national average. Regarding physical activity, less than half (41%) of the students surveyed said they exercised at least four times a week; 13% of students reported spending seven or more hours of their free time in one day sitting down. Only 28% of students said that the main part of their journey to school involved walking or cycling. There was considerable variation between schools in the responses to this last question, but in no school did more than 50% of pupils use a form of active travel.

In the final evidence session, the Task and Finish Group was joined by Professor Simon Murphy, Professor in Social Interventions and Health at Cardiff University and Director of DECIPHer. This meeting was also attended by Neil Hapgood, who, in addition to being a Duke of Edinburgh's Awards Development Officer for Neath Port Talbot, has an academic background in Health and Community Development.

Prof. Murphy drew several key lessons from the research conducted under the auspices of DECIPHer. Perhaps most

importantly, he noted that the initiatives that produced genuine results could be characterised as whole-school, ecological approaches, in which the specific interventions were developed and psychologically owned by the school itself. The goal was a cultural change within the school community and the route to achieving this needed to be plotted by that community making use of resources that are already in the environment. This ethos does not remove the need for leadership – it was noted that successful schools tended to be those where a senior manager had responsibility for health and wellbeing – or the sharing of innovative practice, but the development of a shopping list of interventions and their deployment regardless of context is not an effective strategy. With some limited exceptions, what works in one school is not guaranteed to work in another. The two exceptions to this general rule are the promotion of active travel to and from school and the extension of lunch breaks. Prof. Murphy noted that robust evidence suggests that these two factors will have a significant impact on increasing physical activity more generally in most schools in which they are achieved. They are not ‘easy wins’ but rather ‘reliable wins’. In terms of developing a whole-school approach the most frequent weakness was in the development of links with parents and the wider community. The success of recent development in Leeds may in part attributed to surmounting this obstacle.

During discussion of the sort of systemic approach supported by comparative research, the example of a model recently pursued in Amsterdam was raised. Here, in an attempt to develop a city wide approach to tackling obesity, a chart was developed sought to plot

each factor that contributed to the rising obesity rate, and the consequences that flowed from it. Representatives from a wide variety of public, private and third sector bodies were then brought together and challenged to identify which elements of this network of cause and effect they could influence. This city-wide, multi-agency approach has, produced significant results.

Finally, it was noted that long duration approaches supported by evidential feedback are needed to produce sustainable change. In this regard school level data produced by the DECIPHer led survey could, at secondary and middle school level, provide monitoring support.

## **Sport Wales**

Owing to timetabling issues it was, unfortunately, impossible to arrange for a representative from Sport Wales to meet the Group in person. Shana Thomas, a senior officer from the organisation, was however able to contribute via a telephone conversation with the Chair.

Ms Thomas commented that increasing participation in sport at school, fundamentally, requires a change in culture of the whole school. In this regard the leadership of Headteachers, as demonstrated at a number of Neath Port Talbot schools, is crucial. The introduction of the New Curriculum provides a unique opportunity to drive this change across schools in Wales. Consistency of messaging around physical activity, and healthy lifestyles, in general is also critical. Ideally, all elements of the

school, other Council agencies, health visitors, and sports clubs should reinforce and amplify the same key messages about exercise and nutrition.

Encouragingly, Ms Thomas noted that, in seeking further improvement in this area, Neath Port Talbot was building on a position of strength, due to the considerable expertise and good performance of the PASS team. Ms Thomas suggested two strategic ways in which Neath Port Talbot might look for further development. Firstly, she suggested that additional collaboration between schools and with communities might maximise the benefit of existing resources. Secondly, she noted that it is important to consider targeting new initiatives at specific sections of the youth population requiring particular support. More specifically, she commented that immersive experiences such as week-long residential trips are especially effective at promoting sustainable lifestyle change in more disengaged young people.

Finally, Ms Thomas noted that Sport Wales would be publishing a new strategy in the near future which, it is hoped, will support the Council's efforts on this front.

### **The Children's Commissioner for Wales**

In response to inquiries from the Task and Finish Group Dr Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, provided the Group with a copy of her response to the Welsh Government's *Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales* consultation. Although directed at the Welsh Government there are a number of themes and

principles in this document that are transferable to a Local Authority setting.

The Commissioner's response urges a holistic approach aimed at changing culture around food and exercise. She advocates an emphasis on the normalisation of healthy eating and physical activity. Achieving this will require working across health, education, youth services and other organisations and agencies. The Commissioner also argues forcefully for the involvement of young people in the development and implementation of the strategy. She, for example, comments that it is essential that children and young people are involved the compiling of the list of effective interventions referenced in the consultation document.

## CONCLUSIONS

In many respects the evidence that the Group received was remarkably consistent. We would suggest that this consistency provides a good basis for the following conclusions.

Firstly, the foundation from which we are building in Neath Port Talbot is good. The competence and expertise of our teaching staff and officers was demonstrated by their own evidence and confirmed by external stakeholders. In general, pupils in our schools have a good understanding of the elements of a healthy lifestyle and actively want to engage in more sport. This was evident from their own, and their teachers, comments, and supported by survey evidence. We already have access to tools, such as the Healthy Schools Scheme, that appear to be effective. We have, therefore, many of the resources we need to achieve improvements in this area.

Secondly, genuine change requires a holistic, school-led, approach that incorporates pupil voice at every level. This approach was urged by virtually all of the external stakeholders and a number of the internal ones. The fundamental function of the Council is, therefore, not to try to offer a ready-made all-purpose solution, but rather to create structures within which schools are supported to develop and share their own strategies. Given the importance of engaging with the wider school community, these structures must encourage involvement from parents, governors and other local organisations.

Thirdly, that in supporting schools' efforts to develop their own approaches there are certain changes that the Council can recommend on the basis of robust evidence. These include the promotion of active travel to and from school and the remodelling of PE lessons to provide a greater variety of activity.

Fourthly, the Council should also look at ways in which to remove barriers to physical activity both in school and out of school. In providing this practical assistance, the key will be maximising the benefit of existing resources and targeting new resources well. This will include endeavouring to tackle transportation issues that prevent schools accessing existing facilities and using data from the PSA to guide the development of new equipment.

Finally, genuine change takes time. The Council should anticipate that continued, long-term, effort will be required to make lasting improvements in terms of promoting healthy lifestyles among our young people. Regular monitoring will therefore be crucial.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1 – That, building on existing provision, the Council prioritises the development and promotion of health and wellbeing training for school governors, including, in particular, information about the Healthy Schools Scheme and Healthy Eating Standards.**

Reason – To equip governors with the information necessary to drive change in their own schools, monitor compliance with the Healthy Eating Standards and promote the ethos of the New Curriculum.

**Recommendation 2 - That all governing bodies are encouraged to appoint a Health and Wellbeing Governor (HWG) to lead, at governing body level, on the Healthy Schools Scheme and other initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles.**

Reason – To provide leadership and ensure that the healthy living agenda is actively promoted at a strategic level in individual schools.

**Recommendation 3 - That the Council encourages and facilitates the creation of Healthy Schools Action Groups (chaired by the HWG and consisting of representatives from the School Council, parents, and teachers) in each school to generate initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles, drawing, in particular, on the views of pupils.**

Reason – Evidence suggests that sustained cultural change is best achieved where the school community takes ownership of developing and implementing interventions tailored to its own circumstances.

**Recommendation 4 – That the Council facilitates an annual event to bring together HWGs to share initiatives from their respective schools.**

Reason – To spread good practice and share ideas.

**Recommendation 5 – That, in a similar manner to the drive to improve attendance, the Council focusses efforts on increasing the percentage of pupils using active travel options to get to and from school where safe and practicable.**

Reason – robust evidence demonstrates that this is an effective way of increasing physical activity more generally.

**Recommendation 6 – That, acknowledging the resource constraints they face, schools are encouraged to ensure that the school lunch break provides sufficient opportunity for pupils to make considered food choices, socialise, relax and engage in active play. Where necessary, schools should be encouraged to give serious consideration to lengthening the lunch break and discouraged from shortening it.**

Reason – Robust evidence demonstrates that a longer school lunch break has demonstrable effects on general physical activity, wellbeing and learning.

**Recommendation 7 – That the Council encourages schools to review the delivery and timetabling of Food Technology and PE classes to ensure that they provide as broad a range of pupil experience as possible and that time is allowed for preparation and post-lesson activity.**

Reason – To increase the variety of sports and physical activity available to pupils and to minimise the extent to which changing and setting up/clearing away of equipment encroaches on learning time.

**Recommendation 8 – That the Council encourages schools to use all possible opportunities to communicate messages about healthy lifestyles to the wider school community.**

Reason – Evidence suggests consistent messaging and ‘buy in’ from the school community are crucial to fostering sustainable cultural change.

**Recommendation 9 – That the Council encourages secondary and middle schools to use School Nutrition Action Groups, or another appropriate mechanism, to incorporate pupil voice into the design of canteen food menus.**

Reason – Evidence suggests involvement of pupils in menu design can markedly improve uptake of healthy eating options.

**Recommendation 10 – That a step by step guide on organising after school clubs and activities is produced and provided to all schools. This should, in particular, include legal advice on the use of third-party providers.**

Reason – It was clear from the evidence provided, that a guide of this nature would reduce the burden on Head Teachers and help increase the number of after school activities available to pupils.

**Recommendation 11 - That the Council investigates ways to facilitate the sharing of sports resources between schools and collaboration in the provision of after school activities.**

Reason – to maximise the benefit of existing resources and expand the range of physical activity available to pupils.

**Recommendation 12 - That the Council works with schools, Celtic Leisure, the PASS team and DANSA Community Transport to investigate ways of reducing the cost of transport to sports facilities and other activities.**

Reason – To maximise the benefit of existing resources.

**Recommendation 13 – That the Council ensures that PE and practical food technology are supported and promoted in the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.**

Reason – To rebalance the curriculum.

**Recommendation 14 – That the Council continues to support and adequately resource the excellent work of the PASS, Project Development and leisure services teams within the Council.**

Reason – To maintain existing leading practice.

**Recommendation 15 – That training is provided for all Councillors on the Play Sufficiency Assessments and Healthy Schools Scheme.**

Reason – To help ensure effective development of future facilities and initiatives.

**Recommendation 16 - That in their consideration of the upcoming LDP review the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee investigates ways in which new planning policies may further support efforts to increase physical activity and improve the food choices of young people in Neath Port Talbot.**

Reason – Evidence suggests planning policy can have a significant effect on uptake of active travel and diet.

**Recommendation 17 - That, should sufficient funding become available, the Council gives consideration to creating a part time post for a healthy schools coordinator, to work with schools, and equivalent officers in the Health Board, to support this agenda and coordinate between departments of the Council.**

Reason – To ensure dedicated support is available for schools and help develop a coordinated approach between Council departments.

**Recommendation 18 – That, should sufficient funding become available, the Council gives consideration to piloting an approach based on the Amsterdam Model in a community in Neath Port Talbot. This would involve bringing together schools, private, public and third sector partners, and minor authorities to consider the ways in which each stakeholder can influence the factors affecting physical activity and diet in a particular locality.**

Reason – Evidence suggests multi-agency, area focussed, approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles are particularly effective.

**Recommendation 19 – That data on the following subjects are reported to the Scrutiny Committee at regular intervals:**

- progress of schools within the Healthy Schools Scheme
- percentage of pupils in each school using active travel

- **the quality and quantity of physical activity engaged in by pupils**
- **the biannual DECipher survey**
- **the Sport Wales School Sport Survey**

Reason – To monitor impact of interventions and identify, and learn from, schools making good progress.

**Recommendation 20 – That the Council encourages Governing Bodies to receive regular reports on the topics listed in Recommendation 19.**

Reason – To monitor the impact of interventions

**Recommendation 21 - That those recommendations accepted by Cabinet are kept under annual review by the Scrutiny Committee.**

Reason – Evidence strongly suggests that improvements in this area require sustained, long term effort. Ongoing monitoring of these changes is, therefore, desirable.