

## **COSLA's Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation, "A Healthier Future – Action and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight"**

### **Introduction**

1. COSLA welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's Consultation, [A Healthier Future – Action and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight](#) (the Consultation).
2. COSLA is the voice of local government in Scotland. We provide political leadership and representation on national issues, and work on behalf of councils to strengthen local democracy and improve local services. COSLA's members deliver services that support citizens' health and wellbeing, and have a significant interest in national proposals on diet, activity and healthy weight. This is evidenced by COSLA's support and joint publication of several national food and health strategies including:
  - [Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: a route map towards healthy weight](#),
  - The obesity toolkit, [Beyond the School Gate](#); and
  - [Better Eating, Better Learning a New Context for School Food](#).
3. COSLA understands that the Consultation's proposals will build upon the ongoing implementation of existing food, health and activity strategies. COSLA's Consultation response has been informed by Trading Standards Scotland, Integration Authority Chief Officers, Scotland Excel, Public Health Directors, VOCAL, Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health Scotland and the Federation of Small Businesses.

### **COSLA's Policy Position**

4. Scotland's obesity rates are amongst the highest in the developed world. The Scottish Government has indicated that meeting the [Scottish Dietary Goals](#) is proving challenging. Local government has a central role in delivering public health and prevention and early intervention services. Local authorities are well placed to take a holistic approach to tackling obesity, inactivity and health inequalities.
5. Integration provides us with the opportunity to improve and evolve communities' health and wellbeing. Central and local government are jointly politically accountable for the health and wellbeing outcomes that are to be achieved through integration. Achievement of the Consultation's cross-cutting policy proposals will be dependent on a meaningful partnership between central and local government and relevant stakeholders.
6. COSLA is generally supportive of the Scottish Government's ambitions to change our food culture, and to implement the cross-cutting policy interventions that will rely less on individual choice and more on changes to the wider environment, including:
  - Transforming the food environment;
  - Living healthier and more active lives; and
  - Leadership and exemplary practice.
7. To deliver the Consultation's actions and ambitions the right resources need to be in place. COSLA has concerns that some of the proposals will have unintended consequences, and their implementation will place additional demands on local authority staff and services. Given current and future financial constraints and the increasing

pressures on local authorities' services, it is COSLA's expectation that all policy initiatives will be fully funded through the local government settlement.

8. In responding to the Consultation, COSLA has identified the following opportunities and issues it wishes to discuss in more detail with the Scottish Government and relevant partners:
  - Health Improvement and Health Inequalities
  - Leadership and Governance
  - Funding
  - Enforcement

## **Opportunities and Issues for Local Government**

### **Health Improvement and Health Inequalities**

#### *Physical Activity*

9. Councils have committed to supporting the [2014 Commonwealth Games Legacy Programme](#) and the [Physical Activity Implementation Plan: A More Active Scotland \(PAIP\)](#). Local government benchmarking data indicates that over several years there have been notable reductions in expenditure to support leisure services, despite an increase in public usage. There is a significant link between a healthy diet and physical activity in preventing and managing health conditions related to weight and diabetes and our colleagues from VOCAL have commented on the lack of prominence given to activity in the consultation document. COSLA would welcome a discussion with the Scottish Government, in partnership with VOCAL, on the progress and resources available to realise the ambitions set out in the PAIP, the Legacy Programme and the targets set out in the Scottish Government's [Active Scotland Outcomes Framework](#).

#### *Older People*

10. To support Scotland's ageing population, it is recommended that there are specific actions in the final Strategy relating to older people. In particular, advice that is focussed on diet to promote older people's health, wellbeing, bone density etc. Whilst this would run counter to the Consultation's themes of less fat and fewer calories, older people may need to think differently to ensure they get enough calories, fat, fluids to maintain their wellbeing.

#### *Public Procurement of Food*

11. COSLA is seeking clarity on the added value of the Consultation proposal to '...ensure that health and environmental sustainability are key considerations in public procurement of food'. Scotland Excel (the Centre of Procurement Expertise for Scotland's local government sector) already ensures their food procurement frameworks consider health and environmental sustainability.

#### *Deprivation*

12. Obesity rates are higher in Scotland's most deprived areas, and people with the poorest health outcomes are living in poverty. Local government has a track record in supporting communities and families in poverty, and COSLA welcomes the intention to prioritise work with families in poverty and on low incomes. The Consultation's proposals, '...to design services and approaches that meet the specific needs of families in poverty', must take cognisance of and be closely aligned to local priorities and service delivery, as well as national strategies and initiatives e.g. Child Poverty Strategy and Healthy Start Vouchers.

#### *Non-Health Referrals*

13. It is proposed that the NHS and partners will develop guidance on sustainable weight management pathways, and will look at non-health referral pathways e.g. referrals via

social work services. As local government takes a holistic approach to an individual's wellbeing, COSLA seeks further clarification on how non-health referral pathways will be implemented by social work departments. There are concerns that such referrals may not be well received by some individuals who engage with social work services.

### **Leadership and Governance –**

14. Strong Public Sector Leadership is needed to support the public, private and third sectors to prioritise obesity related issues. We need to ensure appropriate linkages to the public health agenda and the new Public Health Body. Tackling obesity is a public health priority and leadership cuts across a number of sectors including education, community planning, learning and leisure, the third sector and the food and drinks industry.

#### *Leading by example*

15. It is proposed the Scottish Government will invite and support a select number of local government and health leaders to enhance and share their improvement work on weight and diet in their area. COSLA seeks clarity on how local authorities will be selected, and a discussion on the Scottish Government's proposed 'support' that local authorities will need to enhance and share their work.

### **Funding**

16. COSLA request an early discussion with the Scottish Government regarding the following:

#### *Type 2 Diabetes*

17. COSLA welcomes the investment of £42m over the next 5 years to establish healthy weight management interventions to tackle growing number of people with type 2 diabetes. However, the proposals focus on NHS interventions and treatment services. Local authorities have a central part to play in tackling the causes of type 2 diabetes in its engagement through early learning and childcare, schools, social work and social care and leisure services. This funding presents an opportunity for collaboration between local government, Integration Authorities and partners to tackle type 2 diabetes.

#### *Soft Drinks Industry Levy*

18. Councils are best placed to decide on local spending priorities. COSLA will be directly lobbying the Scottish Government that local government's allocation of the *Soft Drinks Industry Levy* should come to councils as non-ring-fenced funding.

#### *Early Learning and Childcare Provision*

19. The Consultation proposes to use the early learning and childcare workforce to promote healthy eating, and where appropriate to offer referrals to healthy weight interventions. The expansion of early learning and childcare provision estimates 15,000 to 20,000 more staff will need to be recruited and trained. This provides an opportunity to refresh existing guidance and training to include healthy eating and referrals to healthy weight interventions.
20. The Scottish Government has committed to fully funding the expansion of early learning and childcare, and COSLA will continue to engage with the Scottish Government to ensure this commitment is realised. All children accessing funded full day early learning or childcare are entitled to a free meal. Children in unfunded places at a private nursery (those under 3 years of age or not using their funded hours) are not entitled to a free meal. Any requirements for the provision of additional food in early learning and childcare settings would be subject to agreement on the level of additional funding required.

### *Active Travel*

21. COSLA welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to increase investment in Active Travel from £40m to £80m per year. However, this increased investment is conditional on a local authority's capacity to match the funding. This will be significantly challenging for local authorities given existing service pressures and cuts to budgets. The condition of match funding may limit the development of active travel. Given these concerns, COSLA is seeking a discussion with the Scottish Government about their rationale for pursuing a match funding policy.

### **Enforcement**

#### *Restrictions on Price Promotions*

22. COSLA is supportive of measures that reduce the harm to public health, and recommends the forthcoming strategy considers increasing the attractiveness to retailers to put healthier food on promotion. The Consultation proposes introducing legislation that will restrict the promotion of food and drink high in fat, sugar and salt. If an enforcement duty is delegated to a local authority's Trading Standards department, there is concern that this duty will create additional bureaucratic and financial burdens. The new duty may divert resources away from other priority areas such as, doorstep crime, product safety and illicit trade. COSLA and Trading Standards Scotland would welcome a joint discussion with the Scottish Government on the enforcement proposals, and on additional resources and monitoring that would be required to implement a new duty.

#### *Portion Sizes and Calorie Labelling*

23. Local authority environmental health officers are in a key position to tackle diet and obesity working in partnership with others. They have significant experience in running projects where diet and nutrition advice is delivered to food businesses via official control interventions under food safety legislation. Local Authority Food Enforcement staff are uniquely placed to give face-to-face advice to caterers on matters including portion sizes, salt, sugar and fat content as well as cooking methods. Such advice can change behaviours in the SME food sector. The Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee (SFELC) is working on a proposal to produce an intervention spectrum for diet and nutrition, where each Local Authority could select the level of engagement it has with the food industry within its area, and it is important that any new strategy takes account of this work.
24. Many hot food takeaways are operated by single traders who may find it more challenging than national operators to provide consistent portion sizes and to calculate calorific content. COSLA and the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health Scotland would welcome a discussion to clarify how portion sizes and calorie labelling should be enforced and resourced. In taking forward this agenda, there are potential resource implications given the many other challenges facing environmental health including reducing budgets and Brexit.
25. The ability to read labels is not a given, some people may have literacy issues and an inability to understand what labels say hinders the ability to make healthy food choices.

#### *Food Outlets in the Vicinity of Schools*

26. The Consultation proposes researching powers on how food outlets in the vicinity of schools can be better controlled. A discretionary power to control food outlets near schools could be a useful tool for councils in tackling the sale of unhealthy food options, and COSLA would welcome further joint discussions with the Scottish Government and Heads of Planning Scotland.