

HEALTH ADVOCACY IN ACTION: INFLUENCING PLANNING PROCESS INVOLVING FAST FOOD OUTLETS

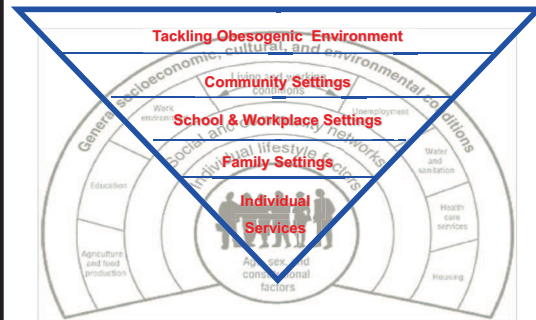
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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, over half (54%) of adults living in Wrexham [1] and approximately 1 in 4 children aged 8/9 (Year 4) were overweight or obese [2]. Wrexham's Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership Board established a multi-agency group to tackle this. In recognition of the barriers citizens face in terms of making healthy lifestyle choices, a comprehensive Healthy Eating and Being More Active (HEBMA) Strategy focussing on tackling obesogenic environments was developed (see Box 1). A fundamental priority of the HEBMA Strategy is to advocate for environmental changes, making healthy choices the easier choice. Evidence suggests that efforts to improve the diets of children are undermined by the presence of fast-food outlets close to schools. As such National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend local planning authorities restrict planning permission for fast food take-aways, and other food retail outlets, within walking distances of schools [3]. This calls for effective advocacy and lobbying at a local level.

Box 1



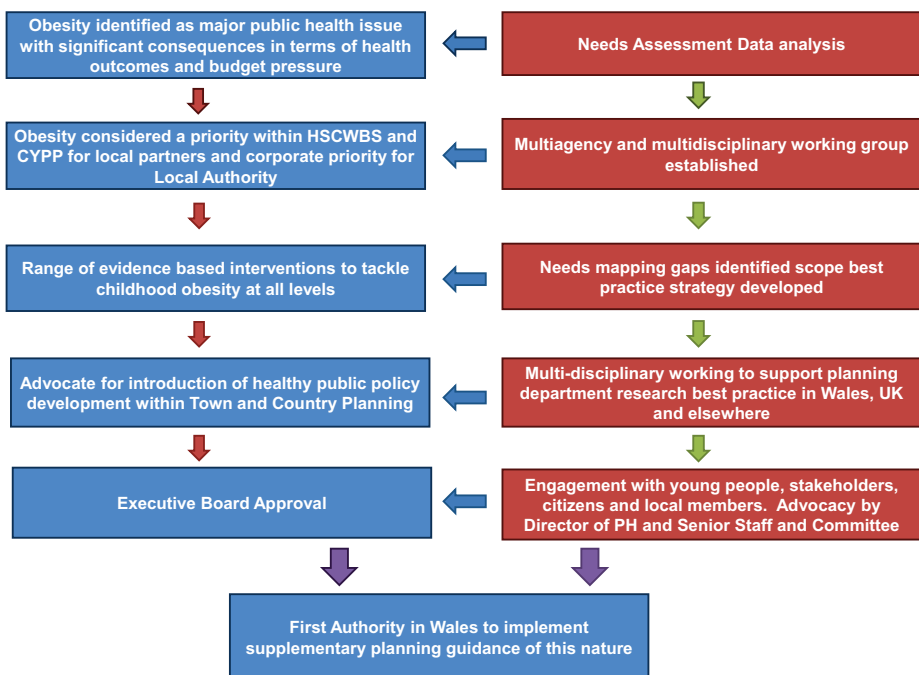
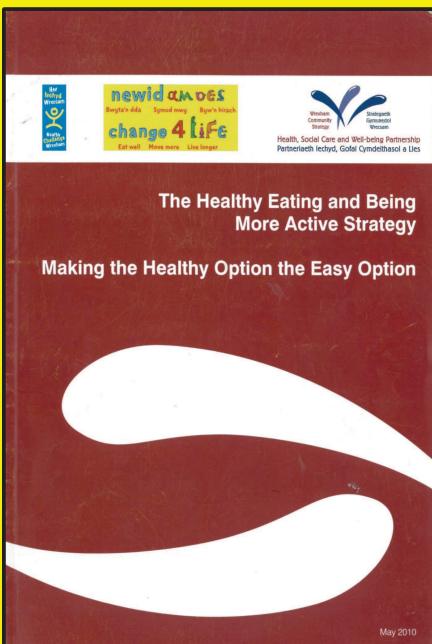
AIM

To advocate for healthy food environments; by developing a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note to prevent further proliferation of (new) fast-food outlets within 400m (10 minutes walking distance) of a school or tertiary college.

PROCESS/ KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The key issue – or challenge - for HEBMA was to effectively lobby Local Authority Elected Members, advocating that the benefits of challenging planning guidance outweigh the risks of potential costs associated with a Public Inquiry (should an application for a fast food outlet be refused). As no other Local Authority in Wales had successfully advocated to amend Planning Guidance, information was sought from other UK Authorities, predominantly lessons shared by London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest. The experience collected from these other Authorities was instrumental in the lobbying/ advocacy process.

This alone was not sufficient however to convince elected Members. Various public consultation events were held with representatives of young people, Wrexham Schools and local people, supported by AVOW (County Voluntary Council) to marshal additional support. Moreover, the media, the Executive Director of Public Health and many of the Council's partner organisations, were invited to advocate for change. Overall it was this process (see flow chart below) that was instrumental in lobbying for changes to local policy, influencing all future Fast Food Planning Guidance in Wrexham. This policy will support Wrexham Council, HEBMA and partner organisations to implement their comprehensive strategy tackling childhood obesity. Members are particularly positive that the proliferation of fast food outlets near schools will be halted and regard this as a legacy for future generations of Children and Young People in Wrexham.



REFERENCES :-

- [1] The Welsh Health Survey (2010) Statistics for Wales; Welsh Assembly Government.
- [2] Measuring Childhood Heights and Weights in Wales (2010) Public Health Observatory for Wales, Public Health Wales.
- [3] Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease (2010) National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

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