SUMMARY OF THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY - A PLAN FOR ACTION

BACKGROUND
Published in August 2016, this Plan aims to ‘significantly reduce England’s rate of childhood obesity within the next ten years’.

This note provides a brief outline of the commitments made by the Obesity Plan to improving access to and uptake of physical activity particularly in schools.

The Plan states: ‘Physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits for children, such as muscle and bone strength, health and fitness, improved quality of sleep and maintenance of a healthy weight. There is also evidence that physical activity and participating in organised sports and after school clubs is linked to improved academic performance.’

OUTLINE OF THE PLAN
The Plan deals with broader issues than physical activity for children as a means to tackle obesity. Broadly it
- Introduces a sugar tax levy
- Aims to take reduce sugar by 20% in children’s cereals, yoghurts, sweets, breads etc. over the next five years
- Supporting innovation to help businesses to make their products healthier
- Developing a new framework by updating the nutrient profile model
- Making healthy options available in the public sector
- Continuing to provide support with the cost of healthy food for those who need it most
- Helping all children to enjoy an hour of physical activity every day
- Improving the co-ordination of quality sport and physical activity programmes for schools
- Creating a new healthy rating scheme for primary schools
- Making school food healthier
- Clearer food labelling
- Supporting early years settings
- Harnessing the best new technology
- Enabling health professionals to support families
- Physical activity related proposals

SECTION SUMMARY: HELPING ALL CHILDREN TO ENJOY AN HOUR OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EVERY DAY
Primary schools to be asked to help ensure pupils get at least 60 minutes of exercise a day - 30 minutes in school through PE and active play and 30 minutes outside school.
- The strategy aims to support schools on how they spend the available funds for maximum impact-
  - Ofsted shall assess the use of Primary PE / Sport Premium and measure its impact on outcomes for pupils.
  - Physical activity will be part of the new healthy schools rating scheme (see below).
• Use the revenue from the soft drinks levy for programmes to reduce obesity and encourage physical activity and provide advice to schools
  o Includes doubling the Primary PE and Sport Premium
  o Schools will continue to have discretion on how they spend the Primary PE and Sport Premium but this shall receive more funding
• PHE will provide advice to schools for 2017/18, setting out how schools can work with the school nurses, health centres, healthy weight teams in local authorities and other resources, to help children
• A new interactive online tool which will help schools plan at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day and identify gaps in the existing opportunities and recommend solutions such as school clubs, Daily Mile, active playground and active lessons.

SECTION SUMMARY: IMPROVING THE CO-ORDINATION OF QUALITY SPORT AND PHYSICAL

Sport England Strategy ‘Towards an Active Nation’ (2016) has set out a major new investment of £40m into projects which offer new opportunities for families and children to get active and play sport together

The Obesity Plan commits to producing a Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy which will
  • set out plans for investing £300m to support cycling and walking and
  • set target to increase the number of children walking to school
  • provide continued support for Bikeability cycle training for children

The Plan states it shall an annual competition to recognise schools with the most innovative and impactful projects.

It also commits to introducing a new rating scheme as part of the school inspection handbook so Ofsted inspectors may use it to account for the steps taken by the school to promote healthy eating and physical activity

In 2017 Ofsted will undertake a thematic review on obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in schools. The review will provide examples of good practice and recommendations on what more schools can do in this area.

CONCLUSION

Although the Plan has been criticised for adding little to the agenda and not having enough ‘teeth’, it does make some firm commitments to improving access to physical activity, particularly in primary schools.

Considering the potential of increased funding through the Sports Premium and the increased focus on monitoring the use of this grant, the Plan provides for the opportunity for LBH to carefully consider the offer of physical activity in schools at a local level and review Council’s current activities in an effort to identify good practice and understand areas for further support.