



BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

Title of Practice

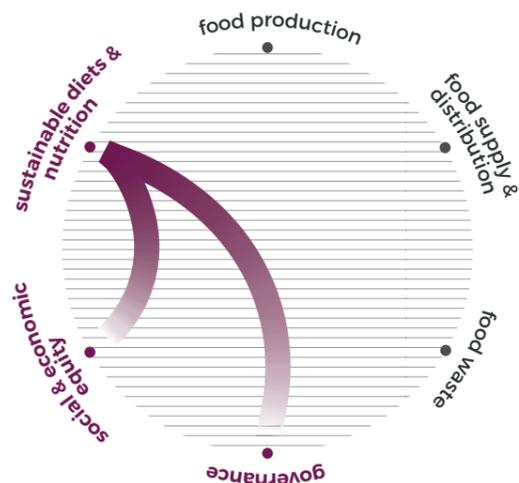
BIRMINGHAM: TACKLING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category

SUSTAINABLE DIETS AND NUTRITION



Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



Contact
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Context

Birmingham is characterized by the presence of a variety of ethnically and socially diverse communities, and the dynamic between these communities and groups is continuously changing as new needs and contexts evolve. Because of intersecting issues such as growing populations, migration, unemployment, areas of multiple deprivations associated with the highest morbidity and mortality, reduced public sector budgets and a rise in noncommunicable diseases including diabetes and obesity, a new effective approach to policy-making is needed. Obesity is a prominent issue among the population of Birmingham, with **recent studies showing that one in four children is obese** by the time he/she leaves primary school. The Birmingham Childhood Obesity Partnership is leading a coordinated effort to impact childhood obesity at all levels, including policy change, partnerships, communications as well as specific interventions.

Overview of the food practice

Since signing the Milan Food Policy Pact, the Municipality of Birmingham has been exploring and implementing innovative approaches to tackle childhood obesity, improve health and address health inequality. The main intervention focused on tackling the obesogenic environment through the creation of a sustainable food programme in an area of multiple deprivation, supported by a public health nutritionist. The **“Tackling the Obesogenic Environment Team”** has since secured GBP 400 000 funding by working with the planning department. **All schools and community centres in this area have been supported** to grow food, raise awareness on healthy diets and adopt an active lifestyle. Recognising the importance of individual behaviour, the team commissioned a behaviour change design charity, “Shift Design”, to transform the health impact of fast food restaurants. This organisation works on projects to make healthy food as visible, tasty and affordable as unhealthy food. Also, the Birmingham City Council (BCC) became the first Local Authority in the UK to display nutritional information on all public advertisements. In addition, the team commissioned a crowdsourcing platform to match funding for innovative **community-based health and well-being projects**.

This platform has a unique ability to identify specific projects and amplify funds to support innovation. The team further engaged with procurement officers in order to encourage healthier, more sustainable public sector procurement. This includes engaging in a national debate about standards. These interrelated activities have also been presented to politicians, resulting in the drafting of a “Major Policy Paper” to the Corporate Leadership team, fostering new levels of cross-sector coordination.

Results and lessons learned

The “Tackling the Obesogenic Environment Action Plan” relies on the belief that the individual is at the heart of the food system, which is a network of producers, industry and institutions. Policy has the power to affect all parts of the network in order to influence **a cultural shift towards food preferences**. In this sense, the Childhood Obesity Partnership was set up to tackle multiple determinants of health, obesity and inequality. The primary aim of the Partnership is to reduce childhood obesity rates measured via the National Child Measurement Programme. An in-house information and intelligence team analyse results to define rates by district/ward and highlight areas of most need. An National Institute for Health Research fellowship is currently assigned to undertake a comprehensive economic evaluation of childhood obesity services. Nonetheless, the **systemic response to childhood obesity** set up by the Municipality of Birmingham presents several learning points:

- Through **a partnership approach**, the group brought together a range of organisations and individuals that had not worked together previously. The key is to encourage top-down support for a bottom-up approach, and when grassroots activity is stymied we can call on leadership to help overcome the barriers. In this case, all stakeholders joined efforts in creating an environment that enables Birmingham families to make healthier lifestyle choices.
- **Crowdsourcing** demonstrated the possibility of raising funds and amplifying public sector funds for projects that address social, health and well-being concerns. This is especially relevant given the recent reductions in public expenditures, which necessitate innovative ways of ensuring sustainable funding for communities’ welfare.
- **The fast food behaviour change project** takes place in areas of multiple deprivation: one of the two areas chosen targets multicultural populations, fostering the social and economic equity of the food system.



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