FAST FOOD TAKEAWAYS: A REVIEW OF THE WIDER EVIDENCE BASE

1. Introduction

Concern regarding rising levels of obesity has in recent years focused attention on contributory factors within local environments. Fast food has come under the spotlight because it tends to be more energy dense and has a higher fat content than meals prepared at home\(^1\), and the frequency with which it is consumed has been shown to be linked to increased body weight and obesity\(^2\). Many local authorities are developing strategies to tackle the impacts of fast food takeaways in their local communities as a result. The recently launched *Takeaways Toolkit*, produced by the London Food Board and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health has recommended that a three pronged approach should be adopted. This includes working with takeaway businesses and the food industry to make food healthier, encouraging schools to introduce strategies aimed at reducing the amount of fast food children consume during lunch breaks and on their journey to and from school, and using regulatory and planning measures to address the proliferation of hot food takeaway outlets.

In developing strategies for work with fast food outlets however, the wider role these outlets play within local communities needs to be appreciated, and the implications of adopting particular policies fully understood. This briefing is intended to highlight some of the wider issues and thus help inform the debate in local boroughs. It includes research and evidence that addresses the non-health impacts of fast food and fast food outlets thus emphasising the complexity of the issue and the need for partnership approaches spanning a variety of policy and service delivery areas. The central role local authorities will play in delivering public health from April 2013 provides an opportunity for considering how the various local government services can be co-ordinated to enable a more holistic approach to be taken to tackling these impacts and the local fast food environment.

**Who is the briefing for?**

The briefing should be relevant to all those concerned with the fast food sector including local and regional policy makers or practitioners who are working on issues related to fast food and public health, as well as those who are engaged in non-health issues such as youth and education, economic and community development, and environment and planning.

**The issues covered.**

Three broad areas are covered by this briefing. These have been chosen to compliment the work already undertaken by the London Obesity Board and in particular the strategies outlined in the *Takeaways Toolkit*. They are also areas that have received less attention in the existing fast food literature and evidence base. Finally they provide some of the contextual background information that can help explain why some of the policies and
strategies advocated in the *Takeaways Toolkit* may be harder to implement with certain groups and in certain areas than others.

The first topic, **The wider role played by fast food outlets** covered in section 2, explains how fast food consumption is now a key aspect of youth culture and identity. Peer group pressure may make it socially unacceptable for young people to consume healthier food in some group settings – making it particularly challenging for healthier eating interventions working with this age group. Secondly the important role fast food outlets play in providing employment opportunities and a culturally acceptable meeting place, particularly for disadvantaged and minority communities in certain areas is highlighted. Finally, the contribution fast food outlets make to the night-time economy is discussed, and the problems and benefits which may result where outlets with late night opening hours are located close to bars and clubs are highlighted. These issues all need to be considered when developing a strategy designed to restrict young peoples’ fast food consumption, curb the expansion in the number of outlets, and/or or limit their trading hours.

Section 3 addresses **Fast food and litter**. Fast food packaging and waste accounts for an increasing proportion of the waste found on local streets. This has public health implications but also decreases the environmental quality of an area, and business and consumer confidence. This section outlines the legal framework which can be used to help deal with those responsible for fast food litter. It also suggests voluntary guidelines and initiatives that have been designed to engage with the sector in tackling the problem. This section is intended to help local public health and environmental health teams to identify potential areas for joint working – where joined-up engagement with local fast food outlets can support improvements around both nutrition and environmental outcomes.

Section 4 covers **Healthier catering initiatives and health inequalities**. It is designed to help explain how and why healthy catering schemes tend to meet more resistance from businesses operating in deprived areas. Interventions which do not impact on costs and profits such as behaviour change strategies and healthier frying practices may be more appropriate with the least healthy businesses that tend to be concentrated in these areas. They may also have a greater impact on reducing health inequalities. However it is unlikely that such schemes will be able to compensate for the basic economic inequalities which are usually the root cause of health inequalities. A wider set of policies which address economic disadvantage are needed.

For each of the three areas covered a brief overview of the evidence is provided together with policy implications and examples of good practice.

The briefing focuses predominantly on independent outlets rather than the big global chains. Independent outlets tend to be particularly prevalent in urban areas and have been largely by-passed by mainstream central government initiatives designed to encourage healthier fast food provision. Ostensibly, given their scale and localness, these independent businesses represent a sustainable alternative to the global chains they are competing with. However they often struggle to survive and have difficulty addressing some of the sustainability and healthy catering issues that are of increasing concern to local authorities. They therefore merit special consideration and support.
2. The Wider Role Played By Fast Food Outlets

Research and policy to date has been predominantly concerned with the physical and economic access to food, whilst more complex social and cultural influences which tend to influence choice, opinion or satisfaction, have been largely overlooked. The wider role played by fast food outlets in contributing to young people’s lifestyle image, the night-time economy, providing local employment and leisure spaces, also needs to be considered. These issues are discussed below.

2.1. Fast food as part of young people’s life style image

Fast food is particularly popular with young people. Research by market intelligence group MINTEL shows that the heaviest users of chicken and burger restaurants, in the UK, are young consumers, aged between 16 and 24. Fast food is thought to be important to teenagers as it is one of the few types of food that they can afford to purchase outside the home and therefore (ostensibly) beyond the influence of their families. A fast food meal of chicken and chips can cost as little as £1.99, and in many areas large children’s portions cost just £1, whilst 50p buys a snack of two chicken wings.

It is not just the cheap cost of fast food that attracts teenagers however. Fast food also seems to have become a key aspect of youth culture and identity. Research has suggested that fast food is used by young people as a medium for expressing a youthful self and/or lifestyle image. One study involving focus groups with young people to identify barriers to healthy eating found that they used food choices to help construct a desired image, as a means of judging others, and to signal their conformity with acceptable friendship and peer norms. It was emotionally and socially risky to be seen to be interested in healthy eating. Other studies have also found that young people may express a negative view of people who care about health and make inferences about peers based on their consumption choices.

Fast food consumption has been shown to be an integral part of gaming culture. Groups of young people getting together to play video games often eat more fast food than they would normally eat as both gaming and eating excessive amounts of “bad” food offer rebellion and fun. To eat healthily in such an environment is likely to be frowned upon by peers. Consuming fast food whilst gaming thus forms part of gamers’ collective identity. It has been suggested that manufacturers need to produce healthier foods for consumers involved in gaming subculture which should offer convenience, sensory pleasure, and should expropriate certain symbols to appeal to the rebellious eating habits associated with the gaming subculture.

For young ethnic minorities eating fast food may be a means by which the second generation assert their westernised identity. The younger generation of British Asians, for example, are more likely to be found in fast food restaurants than curry houses. Similarly Wilkinson and Pickett quote a recent immigrant to the USA from Puerto Rico who explained why they liked going to fast food restaurants, ‘We feel good when we go to those places ... we feel like we’re American, that we’re here and we belong here.’
However research is also beginning to emerge which suggests that there may be distinct class differences in young people's attitudes towards fast food consumption. In a qualitative study of UK teens', moral judgements about fast food were found to be steeped in classism. Middle class teens avoided fast food not only to be healthy but also to formulate themselves as “good” middle class citizens who took up the “authentic” health and dietary messages sanctioned by experts in contrast to their working class peers.

Thus young people's propensity to consume fast food is not just about cost and taste but is often also a means of differentiation. Peer group pressure is likely to play a key role in shaping identities and influencing consumption behaviour within this age group. Any intervention designed to encourage healthier eating behaviours in young people needs to take this into account.

2.2. Fast food a key part of the night-time economy

Fast food is now a key feature of the night-time economy in many cities throughout the UK. Many fast food outlets stay open until the early hours of the morning to meet demand from pub goers and clubbers for a late night snack or meal on the way home. Visiting takeaways after going to bars and clubs has been identified as a ritual young people in the UK engage in and such venues often become a location for violence. Managers of fast food outlets interviewed in the Whitechapel area of Tower Hamlets often complained about rowdy behaviour, broken shop windows and fighting, as being the price they had to pay for staying open late at night. A GLA Economics report on Alcohol consumption in the night-time economy notes that fast food outlets can act as flashpoints for alcohol-related crime and disorder. However the report also cautions against attempting to close the outlets down, highlighting the potential costs. Firstly, if people use them to eat to break up their drinking they can act to reduce the rate of alcohol intake and therefore reduce alcohol related harm. Secondly, reducing the number of fast food outlets may increase violence as more people gather at fewer premises.

There is clearly a need to be aware of the potential problems that can occur in areas where fast food outlets with late night trading licences are located close to bars and clubs. However the potential benefits also need to be assessed.

2.3. Fast-food outlets: providing culturally acceptable food and a social meeting place

Many independent fast food outlets run by ethnic minority communities in London have adapted their offering to suit their local community's tastes. A local version of KFC’s fried chicken formula, often marketed as Perfect Fried Chicken (PFC), with meat sourced from halal suppliers and cooked to a spicier recipe, is particularly popular with the Muslim community and widely available throughout the capital. A number of the global fast food chains have attempted offering halal-only menus at a limited number of their restaurants and takeaways. However, many Muslims prefer to shop at Muslim-owned outlets that can be trusted to serve halal meats slaughtered according to religious laws.

These outlets also perform an important social function within the community. Many, whether they are registered as takeaways or restaurants/cafes, have a small seating area
and thus provide a useful meeting place, particularly for young men and women. This role is particularly important in areas such as Whitechapel, Stepney, and Mile End in Tower Hamlets where the businesses are catering primarily for the local Muslim community who are expected to abstain from drinking alcohol and are therefore less likely to use pubs, clubs, or restaurants as a social meeting space. The Muslim community’s culture of abstention shapes its members’ access to and use of space with many leisure facilities being off limits to the community because they serve alcohol\textsuperscript{20}. Thus by serving halal fast food in an alcohol free environment the outlets are providing a culturally acceptable social space and an affordable opportunity for dining out.

2.4. Fast food outlets as a vital element of the local economy

In more deprived areas local economic disadvantage fuels not just a demand for cheap fast food, but also contributes to business start-up in the sector as those with limited qualifications or contacts often have few alternative employment options. Fast food outlets provide a relatively easy entry into self-employment. Basic fast-food outlets require limited skills and a capital investment in equipment of only £15,000 to £20,000\textsuperscript{21}, and thus entry thresholds are low. The cash-based nature of the business is a further attraction, allowing for declared turnover to be kept below the VAT threshold\textsuperscript{22}.

Research in Tower Hamlets suggests that a typical outlet employs three or four staff including the owner-manager, and on this basis it is estimated that fast-food outlets in the borough are probably providing over 1000 local jobs - not an insignificant source of local employment, albeit poorly paid\textsuperscript{23}. Whilst Tower Hamlets has one of the largest concentrations of fast food outlets in the capital it is still reasonable to assume that the sector provides a major source of employment, particularly for ethnic minorities, for around 20-30,000 people in London as a whole.

In common with the ethnic minority catering sector in general, there is a heavy reliance in the fast food sector on informal immigrant labour willing to work flexible hours for minimal wages, a practice described by businesses in other studies of the ethnic minority catering trade as 'an absolute necessity for competitive survival' in an increasingly crowded and competitive marketplace\textsuperscript{24}. These jobs do not require formal documentation and enable illegal migrants to remain ‘invisible’ but also open to exploitation as a result of having to work long hours where they endure the punishing heat of ovens, stoves and grills\textsuperscript{25}. However such employment opportunities do enable new migrants to by-pass cultural barriers (for example racism, and lack of language skills) that may restrict other employment opportunities\textsuperscript{26}. Many also view employment in a fast food outlet as an established route to better-paid work, including in chain restaurants.\textsuperscript{27,28} Employment in independent fast food outlets can therefore seen as providing important opportunities for longer-term employment and career prospects.

2.5. What this means for policy and practice

Local strategies for working with fast food outlets need to be based on a detailed appraisal of the role fast food outlets play not just in contributing to obesity but also in providing employment and leisure opportunities for different sections of the community. The NICE
briefing on *Obesity - working with local communities* (PH42) recommends that action should be culturally appropriate and take account of the community’s cultural or religious beliefs. The evidence outlined above suggests that this also needs to be the case when considering interventions with the fast food sector.

**The following specific recommendations are suggested:**

- Any interventions with young people need to take into account the role that fast food plays within youth culture, and the influence of peer group pressure in shaping identities and influencing consumption behaviour within this age group.

- There is a need to be aware of the potential problems that can occur in areas where fast food outlets with late night trading licences are located close to bars and clubs. However the potential benefits also need to be assessed.

- The role played by some fast food outlets in providing a culturally acceptable social space and an affordable opportunity for dining out, particularly for the Muslim community, needs to be appreciated. The popularity of fast food outlets may be a function of the lack of alternative culturally acceptable meeting places. Where this is the case local authorities need to consider if adequate leisure provision offering an alcohol free environment and catering to different dietary requirements is available in their area.

- The potential of fast food outlets to provide employment and career opportunities, or self-employment, for some of the most disadvantaged members of the community needs to be fully understood.
3. FAST FOOD AND LITTER

Fast food litter is defined as ‘any fast food (defined as food and drink for immediate consumption outdoors or ‘on the go’), or the packaging sold with the food substance which is found discarded on public streets’\(^{30}\). This includes leftover and discarded food, cans, plastic or paper cups, the bags, cartons and trays which burgers, chips, pizza etc are sold in, as well as sandwich packaging and other containers. Fast food waste, defined as ‘any waste from an outlet that sells fast food, is an additional problem, particularly if it is not managed, stored or disposed of correctly and becomes litter’\(^{31}\).

This section explores the extent to which fast food litter is a problem and the relevant legal framework, voluntary agreements, and initiatives which can be used to tackle it.

3.1. The extent of the problem

According to Keep Britain Tidy, who conduct annual surveys of the amount and type of litter on our streets, the volume of fast food litter has been increasing rapidly in recent years. Their most recent survey, conducted in 2011/12, suggested that fast food is the litter type that has seen the largest increase over the past 12 months\(^{32}\). The number of sites affected by fast food litter had risen by 6%, from 23% of sites being affected in 2010/11 to 29% of sites in 2011/12. The amount of fast food litter on our streets is now at its highest level since Keep Britain Tidy started measuring it in 2004/05. Keep Britain Tidy also conducts regular surveys designed to determine the most littered brands in England. The 2011 survey found that branded fast food related litter was the most prevalent type of branded litter found across the sites surveyed accounting for a third (33%) of all branded litter observed during the study\(^{33}\). London seemed to have less of a problem than most other towns included in the survey with branded fast food litter accounting for 13% of the litter found in the City of London and 19% in West End of London.

Since fast food is relatively cheap consumers have few qualms about eating what they want and discarding the rest. Research by WRAP, the government agency concerned with waste, found that in 2009 UK pubs, restaurants, takeaways and hotels produced around 3.4 million tonnes of waste. Of this, 1.5 million tonnes was sent to landfill and has an associated carbon impact of around 4 million tonnes of CO2e. WRAP estimates the costs associated with avoidable food waste to be more than £720 million\(^{34}\).

Fast food litter causes a number of problems for the local area, its residents, and local businesses. Torbay Council, an authority that has adopted a number of initiatives to tackle the problem, highlights some of the reasons why on its website. These include:

- ‘It looks bad and can smell unpleasant.
- It can attract scavenging animals including rats and seagulls.
- It is expensive to clean up.
- Littered areas are more likely to attract further anti-social behaviors and crimes.
- Food litter can make an area appear rundown and neglected.
• Local people deserve to live in a clean and safe environment.
• Visitors are less likely to want to return to Torbay if it is littered and dirty.\textsuperscript{35}

In fact research by the National Pest Technician’s Association (NPTA) suggests that waste from fast food outlets has been found to be one of a number of key factors contributing to the increasing problem of rodents in urban areas\textsuperscript{36}. Litter also contributes to the perceived quality of the local environment. As Defra’s \textit{Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse} notes: ‘High local environmental quality helps to:
• secure quality, long term commercial investors;
• attract and retain workers with scarce skills;
• meet landowners’ and tenants’ legal obligations and liabilities;
• attract good, long-term tenants, minimising voids and repairs costs;
• deter anti-social behaviour and some criminal activities;
• secure the approval of electors, for whom local environmental quality is a fundamental test of an administration’s efficiency and effectiveness; and
• create environments that are more easily maintained and less subject to vandalism’\textsuperscript{37}.

The quality of public space matters to business. Clean public spaces attract customers whilst litter is bad for business. Produce and its wrappings discarded as litter degrades the perception of a business and will reduce trade. A recent branded litter study suggested that the presence of litter negatively affects consumers’ attitudes towards the brand concerned. The study found that consumers were not willing to pay as much for a brand that is associated with litter as for brands that do not have this negative association\textsuperscript{38}.

Keep Britain Tidy’s annual Branded Litter Survey highlights which brands need to work harder to reduce their contribution to the problem. Some of the major fast food chains have taken action as a result. For example all of McDonalds packaging now carries an anti-littering symbol to actively encourage customers to dispose of their litter responsibly and litter bins are provided outside all of its restaurants\textsuperscript{39}. In contrast small independent outlets tend to purchase their packing from independent suppliers who generally do not offer packaging which encourages its responsible disposal. Additionally these independent businesses may not have the resources to provide litter bins or to keep the street outside their outlets tidy.

\section*{3.2. The law}

There are a number of powers and duties which local authorities have to deal with litter and waste. Individuals can be fined for dropping litter. Local authorities (amongst others) have a duty to keep their land clear of litter and refuse, and they must monitor and report on how clean it is. Businesses must control their waste and store it properly. Through license agreements or special notices, businesses can be required to clear litter within a specified distance of their frontage.
The Environmental Protection Act 1990 sets out the duties of the individual, occupiers of premises, and the power of the local authority regarding litter. The most relevant sections of the Act relating to fast food businesses are the following:

**Sections 87: offence of leaving litter**

It is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then to leave litter under section 87 of the 1990 Act. The offence, as extended by section 18 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, applies to all places that are open to the air, including private land and land covered by water.

**Section 88: fixed penalty fines**

A person found guilty of the litter offence may be fined. The fine is between £50 - £80, and if not paid a magistrates’ court can impose a fine of up to £2,500. Fixed penalty notices for litter may be issued by an authorised officer of a litter authority (including Parish Councils), by National Park Authorities, Police Community Safety Officers and accredited persons.

**Sections 93 and 94: Street Litter Control Notices**

These sections of the 1990 Act give local authorities the power to tackle street litter generated further to activities on adjacent premises. The type of commercial and retail premise in respect of which a notice may be issued are specified in the Street Litter Control Notices Order 1991 (SI 1991/1324). There is no restriction on the type of litter for which this may be used, but it is intended primarily to help deal with food and drink packaging, and other litter caused by eating ‘on-the-go’, as well as litter from cash points and lottery tickets dropped outside shops. The legislation enables local authorities to serve Street Litter Control Notices requiring businesses to clear up the litter and implement measures to prevent the land from becoming defaced again. Amendments made to the 1990 Act by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 have made it immediately an offence to fail to comply with the requirements of a Street Litter Control Notice, and fixed penalties may be issued as an alternative to prosecution.

Local authorities should work in partnership with others to resolve the problem of street litter and seek to remedy it, where possible, through joint working and good management practice. Such an approach is fostered by Defra’s voluntary code of practice, *Reducing litter caused by ‘Food on the Go’*, which sets out recommendations to help businesses, local authorities, and other public and private sector bodies to work together. See 3.3a below.

### 3.3. Initiatives to tackle the problem

The following provide some examples of initiatives that have sought to tackle the problem of litter caused by fast food businesses.

**a) Defra’s Voluntary Code of Practice**

Keep Britain Tidy was commissioned by Defra to research and develop this voluntary code which was published in 2004. It provides a suggested framework to help all concerned to take some responsibility to reduce the litter and waste that comes from selling and
consuming food ‘on the go’. The code recommends how local authorities and businesses could work together to tackle litter problems. Local authorities already have powers to require local businesses, and others, to clear up litter in certain circumstances. However, one benefit of effective joint working could be that these powers need not be enforced.

The Voluntary Code provides a framework for businesses to firstly identify how, when and where their worst litter problems arise, and secondly to work out the best ways, in partnership with other agencies, to solve these issues. Solutions could be as simple as putting posters up in windows to discourage customers from littering, storing waste correctly, and keeping the premises and surrounding area clean. The code provides a check list of things to consider and guidelines for local authorities and Town Centre Managers are also suggested. Recommendations include:

- **Public education** including anti-litter messages and campaigns on posters in premises and on litter bins;
- **Packaging** – minimising packaging, asking customers if they need a bag, displaying the tidyman symbol on their own packaging;
- **Waste**: guidelines on waste disposal and management ensuring that the business contains all of its waste securely and has sufficient appropriate containers that prevent waste escaping; assesses the extent of litter arising from business and clears all litter from the frontage of the business, sends staff out on regular litter picks, provides litter bins – negotiating their supply with local authorities

The Voluntary Code provides advice and case studies on working with businesses to reduce the amount of packaging used. A copy of the code, *Reducing litter caused by ‘food on the go': A Voluntary Code of Practice for Local Partnerships*, can be accessed from [http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/fotg/publications/vcop.pdf](http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/fotg/publications/vcop.pdf)

**b) Using Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs): Waltham Forest**

Adequate litter management provision can be a re-requisite for the granting of planning approval for a new fast food takeaway. The London Borough of Waltham Forest has added the following clause to its Supplementary Planning Document on hot food takeaways.

**Test HFT9 - Litter**

A planning condition requiring the installation of litterbins on land within the applicants control will be applied to every application for a hot food takeaway establishment. It is the proprietors’ responsibility to maintain and empty these litterbins on a regular basis and to keep the area in front of the premises clear.

It is the operators’ responsibility to ensure litterbins are regularly maintained and emptied, and the surrounding area remains litter free. Where a litter problem is found to be directly linked to specific takeaway premises, the Council can issue a Street Litter Control Notice. Any operator seen to be non-compliant with such a notice, can incur a fine.

Other boroughs have adopted similar clauses in their SDPs.
c) Keep Britain Tidy’s Dirty Pig Campaign

Keep Britain Tidy runs a number of initiatives designed to tackle the problem of litter. In 2009 the Dirty Pig Campaign was launched with the aim of reducing the amount of fast food litter on our streets through a hard hitting national outdoor advertising campaign directed at 18-24 year olds to encourage them to put their litter in a bin. The high profile campaign promoted the message that ‘Litter Louts Have Snouts’. The concept played on the idea of being a ‘dirty pig’, striking a humorous, visual anti-litter message pitched at this highly image conscious target group by encouraging them to think about how they appear to others when they litter.

Takeaway food premises were also encouraged to take positive steps to reduce any litter associated with their premises. Posters and other marketing material were provided by Keep Britain Tidy. The campaign was piloted in ten locations across the UK including Islington in London. Overall, the results from the campaign showed a significant reduction was achieved across the country in monitored areas, revealing that the campaign was highly successful in achieving the aim of positively changing the littering behaviour of this age group. A 14% reduction in fast food litter was achieved overall, with some monitored areas seeing a massive decrease of up to 54%. A 33% reduction in litter was recorded in Islington over the 1 month pilot period.

Although the campaign has not been run since 2009 the Dirty Pig Campaign marketing material can still be obtained from Keep Britain Tidy.

d) The Love Where You Live Campaign

Established by Keep Britain Tidy, Defra, McDonalds, Wrigleys and Imperial Tobacco the Love Where You Live campaign is the latest Keep Britain Tidy Campaign designed to encourage individuals, businesses, local authorities and schools to think about how they can all help to reduce litter. A particular novelty, launched by the campaign, is a newly designed litter bin that tackles litter by ‘telling’ the authorities when they need emptying, thereby saving time and money in the collection process. These Big Belly Solar Compactor bins can cut the cost of street cleaning services by almost £100 per bin per week as they send a text or email to the council or land manager when they are almost full. Following trials with 120 councils across England, this unique feature has been proven to reduce the number of street collections by 86%.

To inject some fun into bins and the nation’s behaviour around littering, Love Where You Live has also introduced Talking Bins in London and Liverpool. These were piloted in October 2011 for two months, with 25 London bins being installed in Westminster. The bins offer a light-hearted way of encouraging people to do the right thing and put their rubbish in a bin.

e) WRAP

WRAP is the government agency dedicated to waste reduction. It is working with businesses in the hospitality and food service sector to encourage them to sign up to a voluntary agreement in which they commit to:

a) reduce food and associated packaging waste arising

and
b) increase the overall rate of food and packaging waste being recycled, sent to Anaerobic Digestion (AD) or composted.

WRAP has a range of online tools and resources specifically designed for SMEs to help businesses:

- **Identify the main causes of food and packaging waste** in their business by carrying out a food waste review
- **Engage customers and staff** in preventing food waste and increase recycling rates.
- **Consider offering different portion sizes** and reducing amounts of high waste items from the menu;
- **Work with suppliers** to reduce food waste and optimise packaging such as the use of returnable packaging;

Examples of good practice are available on their website [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk).

These tools and guidance notes could be used with independent fast food businesses.

**3.4. What this means for policy and practice**

With the exception of the surveys and studies mentioned here there has been very little research which has looked at the problems specifically caused by fast food litter and few specific initiatives to tackle the problem since 2009. However the lessons learnt from these initiatives, as outlined above, are still relevant today, and could form part of a strategy for work with fast food outlets in the future.

Research by ENCAMS, the environmental charity which runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign, suggests that campaigns alone will not be sufficient to reduce or prevent littering. A multi-faceted approach must be adopted to increase the chances of reaching as many of the different litter dropping segments as possible. Streets should be cleaned to a consistently high standard at all times of the day and night. There should be bins in the right places and information about what to do with litter in the event of a bin not being available or alternative disposal options. However for some litter droppers, enforcement is the only thing that will change their behaviour.

The following specific recommendations are suggested:

- Work with fast food outlets should re-enforce the need for the proper management of litter and waste through the provision of advice and support as outlined in the codes of good practice produced by Defra and WRAP.
- Where advice and voluntary agreements are not adhered to then the existing legal framework should be used to take action.
- Work with suppliers should encourage them to think about how the amount of packaging needed for fast food meals can be reduced, ensure that packaging is designed to minimize the impact it has on the environment and/or can be recycled, and that it incorporates the tidyman litter symbol to remind consumers to dispose of it responsibly.
• Clauses regarding the provision of litter bins outside fast food outlets and the proper management of fast food litter should be included in Supplementary Planning Documents on Hot Food Takeaways.

• A partnership approach across the variety of different council departments and external agencies who are working with the owners or managers of fast food outlets is needed to ensure that a common strategy is adopted for tackling the above issues. Those who have an established relationship with these businesses, for example Environmental Health Officers, could help re-enforce policies regarding the management of litter during the course of their work.
4. Healthier Catering Initiatives and Health Inequalities

Current government policy suggests that local authorities should ‘Work with local businesses and partners to increase access to healthy food choices’. In pursuit of this agenda, a number of local authorities are adopting healthier catering award schemes which are designed to encourage and promote those businesses offering healthier menus. In London the Healthy Catering Commitment Scheme (HCC), developed by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) in conjunction with the Association of London Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) is currently operating in a dozen or so boroughs across the capital. The HCC aims to encourage businesses in the catering trade to reduce the levels of saturated fat, salt and sugar in foods, offer healthier options and/or smaller portions, and adopt healthier cooking and preparation practices by using the ‘small changes make a big difference’ principle. Businesses meeting the required healthy criteria are able to display the HCC sticker on their premises. However for such schemes to make an impact on health inequalities they need to be adopted by the least healthy types of fast food businesses operating in the more disadvantaged areas of the capital. This section looks firstly at the extent to which the evidence suggests that there is a link between the concentration of fast food outlets, obesity and deprivation, and then at the difficulties of introducing healthier catering initiatives in deprived areas. Finally it suggests strategies which are more likely to work in these areas and offers some examples of good practice.

4.1. Fast food, obesity and deprivation.

The 2010 Marmot Review of Health Inequalities in England highlighted the fact that obesity has been shown to be associated with social and economic deprivation across all age ranges. London was shown to have the largest inequalities in levels of obesity.

Research has sought to ascertain whether fast food is more readily available in deprived areas and may thus be contributing to the heightened levels of obesity found within deprived communities. The results here are conflicting however. Several studies have suggested that obesity may be more prevalent in areas with a high concentration of fast-food outlets, and that outlets are particularly concentrated in areas of deprivation. In London the National Obesity Observatory has recently mapped the relationship between the number of fast food outlets and areas of deprivation as measured by the UK Index of Multiple Deprivation, and the results indicate that there would appear to be a relationship between the two factors. However, other studies have suggested that outlets are more likely to be concentrated in the more prosperous commercial and business districts, and along arterial roads rather than in the poorer residential areas. It has also been argued that the greater level of demand for fast food in deprived areas might be due to the higher population densities generally found in these locations, and the greater number of outlets due to fast food businesses choosing to locate in areas with lower land prices and building rental costs, and a plentiful supply of cheap, ethnic labour.

A further problem with such mapping studies in the UK is that they tend to rely on either mapping outlets recorded as Hot Food Takeaways (category A5 under the planning use class
order) which excludes many restaurants or cafes which may sell fast food. Or they just map chains outlets including takeaways and restaurants, but clearly excluding independent outlets. Furthermore not all fast food is unhealthy, but the planning system does not differentiate between healthy and unhealthy outlets.

Finally is not clear whether living near fast-food restaurants actually results in greater levels of obesity. In the US, studies have shown that the close proximity of fast food outlets to schools leads to greater fast food consumption and higher levels of obesity amongst children, but research elsewhere has found little support for the suggestion that exposure to fast food outlets in the local neighbourhood increases risk of obesity. A number of studies suggest that the socio-economic characteristics of individuals and their households have a greater influence over purchasing behaviour than the nature of the takeaway food environment. One Australian study found that the type of fast food chosen was significantly different across different socioeconomic groups; whilst better educated groups had greater takeaway consumption, the lowest educated groups were more likely to have consumed ‘less-healthy’ takeaway choices. Similarly in the UK the heaviest users of chicken and burger restaurants are less affluent consumers in socio economic groups C2 and D.

Debates on health inequalities are increasingly being linked to those concerned with food security or food poverty. The term ‘food security’ has generally been defined as existing when all people have sufficient, safe and nutritious food to live an active healthy life. It has until recently been seen as a concern confined to low-income countries in the global south, but increasing food prices now mean that many poorer families in high-income countries are forced to compromise on the quality and healthiness of the food they buy. The 2011 UK Family Food survey, for example, found that purchases of fruit and vegetables are on a downward trend, 10% lower in 2011 than 2007, with those on lower incomes most likely to be purchasing less. As incomes drop, energy-dense foods that are nutrient poor become the best way to provide daily calories at an affordable cost. This tendency to trade down is also evidenced in eating-out behaviour. Recent research by the NPD consumer and retail market research group suggests that whilst there has been an overall decline in the number and value of meals eaten out of the home, fast-food is forming an increasing proportion of these out-of-home meals, increasing from 47.3% in 2007 to 50.4% in 2011. Similarly interviews with the owners of fast food businesses in Tower Hamlets in London have found that demand for the less healthy but cheaper varieties of fast food, (notably chicken and chips) has been increasing during the recession at the expense of healthier but costlier alternatives.

4.2. Operating healthier catering initiatives in deprived areas: Barriers

Cost and taste have been found to be the key factors influencing decisions people make about food purchases. A Defra commissioned survey of 3,000 households in 2010 found that the main reasons respondents gave for not adopting a healthy balanced diet were, ‘don’t want to give up the foods I like’, ‘healthy foods are too expensive’ and ‘can’t resist less healthy food’. In deprived areas the competitive nature of the local trading environment and consumers lack of spending power acts to drive down prices forcing businesses to sell the cheapest and often unhealthiest type of fast food in order to survive.
Recent research with fast food outlets in London suggests that businesses are willing to make healthier changes if customers will buy the food. However interviews with businesses found a greater resistance from those located in the less affluent areas. Here businesses are operating on the margins of survival and are fearful of making any changes that might increase costs or deter customers. The research found that healthier alternatives were not so popular with customers, particularly if they were more expensive. Where attempts had been made to sell healthier options such as fresh fruit or wholemeal bread these had remained unsold and often had to be thrown away. Businesses operating in more affluent areas were more willing to adopt healthier alternatives, as they identified a market for healthier food in their area. Similarly research with school children found that thin cut chips were markedly more popular than the healthier thicker cut chips or potato wedges. The Food4Health award scheme in Tower Hamlets found considerable resistance from fast-food businesses operating at the lower end of the market to making even small changes – offering fatter-cut chips and smaller portions for example, for fear it would result in a loss of customers and income. The easiest change appeared to be changing their frying oil for a healthier variety. Even this however, seemed to be a problem in other areas with businesses involved in using palm oil for deep fat frying in the less affluent parts of Kensington and Chelsea being unwilling to change to a healthier oil as it cost more and customers liked the taste of food fried in the highly saturated-fat palm oil. Thus, even where business owners are highly committed to offering healthier menus, they are constrained from doing so by lack of demand and the need to keep prices affordable.

Attempts by the Food4Health scheme in Tower Hamlets to persuade independent outlets to serve smaller portions of chips, particularly to children, were also resisted as these outlets relied on selling large portions in order to maintain a competitive advantage. The price of chips per 100g was three times cheaper in independent outlets than Mc Donald’s. Part of the problem was identified as being the packaging, as the boxes used by independents are more than double the capacity of paper bags used by Mc Donald’s. Work with suppliers is needed here to persuade suppliers to provide smaller cartons.

Grilling rather than frying food is advocated by healthier catering initiatives such as the HCC. However the cost of equipment needed for grilling may be prohibitive for some businesses. Similarly others have not been able to heat oil for deep fat frying to the prescribed healthier temperature because fryers are old, and/or not working properly, and the owner cannot afford to replace them.

Finally outlets may have difficulty in sourcing some of the healthier supplies (such as fatter chips, unsaturated oils and low fat spreads). Some are tied into using specific suppliers because they offer credit or deliver, and these suppliers may not offer healthier varieties of products or may sell them at higher costs. The GLA plans to work with suppliers to enlist their support in encouraging healthier catering practices through healthier product reformulation and the marketing of healthier varieties.

4.3. Generic, tailored, targeted or tiered schemes
Healthy catering initiatives or campaigns have variously attempted to offer a generic award which all catering businesses should in theory be eligible to apply for, or have targeted particular food types, ingredients, or communities identified as being particularly unhealthy. These have included campaigns on issues such as salt, and key food types such as chips and
pizza, as well as more generic national and local healthier catering schemes. The widely adopted national Heartbeat Award scheme targeted a broad range of catering establishments but was found to have generally had a limited positive impact on eating habits. Nevertheless it was felt by some authorities to be too inflexible and its criteria often beyond the reach of many fast-food businesses. The Healthy Catering Commitment scheme in contrast is designed to be relatively easy for all types of catering establishments, including fast-food outlets, to sign up to, thereby encouraging take-up and providing a means of engaging businesses in the healthier catering agenda. The recent pan-London evaluation of the HCC found that 25 of the 77 businesses securing the award for which data was available were selling fast food (chicken, chips, burgers, kebabs) and were able to meet over half the criteria (an average of 14.5 each from the 22 criteria).

A single branded scheme such as the HCC clearly aids customer recognition, but the evaluation concluded that whilst it was successful in engaging a wide range of businesses in the healthy catering agenda it did not differentiate between businesses of differing degrees of healthiness. It is possible to meet the minimum required criteria by just offering healthy alternatives even when most of the food on sale is very unhealthy. Some schemes such as the Food4Health scheme in Tower Hamlets offer a tiered award (bronze, silver and gold) depending on how many criteria the business meets. There needs to be a balance between ensuring that healthier catering criteria are not so difficult to achieve that the least healthy businesses are deterred from engaging in the process, but at the same time ensuring that others offering the healthiest types of food are recognised accordingly.

Generic schemes may also be inappropriate for certain ethnic menus or cultural practices. The HCC, for example, suggests that salt should not be added to the water used in cooking food, but does not address the high salt content of many ethnic sauces such as soy sauce. A further criterion requires businesses to offer smaller portions, but in some cultures, for example Lebanese, dishes are usually shared by a group. A single dish is rarely ordered by an individual alone as a result. In recognition of the specific issues related to some ethnic cuisines a number of local authorities have developed healthy catering initiatives targeted at particular ethnic groups. See 4.5 b below.

Many of the most basic fast food restaurants have a very limited menu – chicken, chips and burgers often being a standard offering in less affluent areas. These types of businesses have particular difficulties meeting healthy catering scheme criteria and in such cases a focus on frying practices or use of salt may be more appropriate as outlined below.

4.4. The implications for healthy catering initiatives in deprived areas

Unless the barriers outlined in 4.2 above can be addressed it is likely that generic healthier catering schemes will have little impact on the more unhealthy businesses operating in more deprived areas. Research to date suggests that the healthier alternatives promoted by healthier catering schemes may well be improving the health of better resourced socio-economic groups but in their current format are unlikely to be having a positive impact on social groups experiencing multiple deprivation. In fact by improving the health of those that can afford to take advantage of these healthier choices they are inadvertently widening the gap in health inequalities.
Working with the businesses in these areas remains a challenge that is yet to be solved. ‘Downstream’ initiatives such as healthier catering schemes are unlikely to compensate for ‘upstream’ structural inequalities which prevent large sections of society from having the time, skills and income required to live a healthy lifestyle. As research elsewhere has noted there is a tendency for intervention designed to tackle obesity to result in the continued neglect of the basic underlying causes and structural inequalities which lead to obesity in the first place. These are largely issues beyond the scope of local government but need to be noted as they help account for the difficulties experienced in trying to encourage healthier consumption behaviour in some areas.

Where key suppliers of fast food business operate in the local area the council may be able to exert some influence on the supply chain, for example by encouraging suppliers to supply healthier products and reduce the price differential between unhealthy and healthy varieties so that the latter become the preferred choice. Healthier product reformulation of food and packaging, for example by producing chip cartons that support the sale of smaller portions, could also be encouraged.

Finally, experience to date suggests that there are some small changes that businesses can make which do not necessarily impact on costs, deter customers or threaten profit margins, and which may as a result be acceptable to businesses and their customers. These include the following:

**a) Behaviour Change initiatives**

Behaviour change strategies or ‘nudges’ are currently being advocated by central government as a potential means of encouraging healthier behaviour. Although there is limited evidence to suggest that such strategies operate effectively in isolation, or at a population level, as part of an overall policy-making they may have a role to play. Moving healthier drinks to shelves at eye level is one suggestion. A second example that has been trialled in some areas is the introduction of salt shakers with a fewer number of holes. An outline of how Gateshead council introduced these can be found at [http://www.foodvision.cieh.org/pages/gateshead-salt-shaker-study](http://www.foodvision.cieh.org/pages/gateshead-salt-shaker-study)

**b) Targeted initiatives with key communities**

The London Borough of Lambeth has recently been focusing its healthy catering promotion work on Portuguese and Afro-Caribbean outlets since the diet of these communities was identified as linked to high levels of hypertension and heart disease. The borough is home to the largest Portuguese community outside of Brazil and Portugal. Food Safety Officers, the Primary Care Trust and nutritionists have been working in partnership with takeaways and community groups from both communities. The intervention has focused on encouraging adaptations to traditional recipes with a high fat and salt content. For example some traditional dishes such as salted fish and fried plantain have particularly high levels of salt and fat. Techniques such as changing the type of stock cubes used or using herbs as an alternative, and baking rather than frying plantain, have helped develop healthier menus.
that still taste good. As whole community approach such as this is likely to have a greater impact than one focused on businesses alone.

b) Healthy Frying Workshops

Where businesses are not likely to achieve a healthier catering award, because they do not offer a range of healthier food types, encouraging healthier frying practices will at least result in some health benefits. Healthier Frying workshops have been run successfully in a number of areas including Wandsworth, Tower Hamlets, and Kensington and Chelsea. Several of these have been delivered by The Federation of Fish Fryers, the national body for fish and chip shop owners. Such workshops generally promote the use of thicker chips which absorb less fat, frying at optimum temperatures, banging and shaking chips to reduce fat absorption, using liquid oil which is lower in saturated fat and cutting down on salt. Such action has been estimated to result in up to a 20% reduction in the fat content of the chips.

4.5. What this means for policy and practice

Businesses in more deprived areas and/or targeting more disadvantaged residents are likely to be particularly difficult to engage with as they tend to be more price sensitive than those operating in more affluent areas. Interventions which do not impact on costs and profits, such as behaviour change strategies and healthier frying practices, may be more appropriate than healthier catering awards in these circumstances and have a greater impact on reducing health inequalities. At the end of the day however it is unlikely that such schemes can compensate for the basic economic inequalities which are usually the root cause of health inequalities.

The following specific recommendations are suggested:

- Healthy catering interventions need to take account of the operational and contextual issues which influence businesses willingness to make healthier changes.
- Healthy catering initiatives with fast food businesses operating in deprived areas need to focus on healthier changes that do not result in an increase in prices.
- Suppliers need to be encouraged to sell healthier products and reduce the price differential between unhealthy and healthy varieties so that the latter become the preferred choice. Healthier product reformulation of food and packaging, for example by producing chip cartons that encourage the sale of smaller portions, should also be encouraged.
- Grants or support in securing loans to enable fast food business owners to purchase healthier catering equipment, such as grills, would enable owners to purchase the equipment they need to adopt healthier catering practices.
- Where a fast food business is not able or willing to meet the criteria required by healthy catering schemes other strategies such as behaviour change initiatives or healthier frying practices should be encouraged.
• A whole community approach designed to encourage the adoption of healthier menus and cooking practices by local community groups and fast food businesses should be adopted where possible to ensure that consumers and caterers understand and adopt healthier catering practices.

Endnotes


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