

2. Response to Nicky Hall from the Chair of North Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board:

Dear Nicky Clare-Hall

Thank you for addressing the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) at our July and October meetings and I apologise for the delay in providing a response. This response was prepared with input from officers across the health team, but it is from me as Chair, and not the Council or the Board.

Background

Food, farming and health has a wide reach across Council work areas. This means it has been much more difficult than I expected to coordinate a meaningful response. In the process, I have started to learn about what other Councils are doing to protect farming, food, health, education, climate, nature and economy. Several Councils have Food Strategies encompassing some or all of these areas.

By many definitions, there is a food crisis. But as you know the Council has severe resource constraints and we face increasing costs, particularly from social care, which we are required by law to provide. To be very honest, this prevents us from taking a wider and longer view of the risks of a food production crisis, made worse by the climate and nature crisis.

The Council is not the national government and we can't "do everything". But the Council can lead, it can show others what we think is the way forward which fulfils the "best value duty" required of public bodies.

I acknowledge that the response below only partly answers your questions and also that we are unable to provide assurances on others. We can only promise what we can deliver. At the same time, I acknowledge that they are important questions that impact the future health and wellbeing of residents in our area. **Therefore I am requesting the Council's relevant scrutiny panels to consider setting up a Working Group to explore whether to create a Food Strategy encompassing farming, health and climate/ nature.** Policy and scrutiny panels exist to help the Council create policy, so I think this would be a productive next step.

Policies

In North Somerset, our commitment to improving people's access to healthy foods and to addressing food-related ill-health is demonstrated through prioritization of food, nutrition and oral health in our **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy**, and through action with the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Partnership (ICP).

First, BNSSG ICP are currently working together on a system-based and compassionate approach to supporting healthy weight, which will include addressing the food environment and enhancing people's access to nutritious foods. This work will be underpinned by opportunity for the BNSSG ICP to make an active commitment to recognising the role they have in creating an environment where everyone has the access and ability to eat well, feel well and be active. A set of commitments are currently being developed and actions will be implemented across partners, commencing next year. **There is a right to public participation at BNSSG ICP and I welcome your input.**

The current **North Somerset Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2024** includes 'food, nutrition and food insecurity' as one of seven priority themes. Our forthcoming, refreshed strategy for 2024-2028 similarly includes 'food, nutrition and oral health' as one of the priority themes, in continued recognition of the high population prevalence and the long-term consequences of an unhealthy diet and of living with overweight and obesity. Data from 2022-23 highlights that 66.3% of adults in North Somerset were living with overweight or obesity (compared to 64% in England and 62.5% in the South West), while 64% of adults do not meet the recommended 5-a-day consumption of fruit and vegetables on a usual day. Among children, 31.3% of children aged 10-11 years are living with overweight or obesity, which ranges between 19% and 40% across North Somerset and is strongly associated with deprivation.

The 'food, nutrition and oral health' theme was selected as one of two priorities for new investment as part of **Health and Wellbeing Strategy implementation for 2024-2028**. Actions to be developed and implemented include (but are not limited to): contribution to the whole system approach, led by BNSSG ICP, to supporting people to eat and live well; support for community and school-based activities to enhance access to, and consumption of, healthy foods; continued preventive activity around oral health among children and young people; and 1:1 and group support for healthy lifestyles. Through these, and other actions, we will prioritise work that addresses inequality in people's access to the conditions needed to eat live a healthy life and to eat well.

We also utilise and apply national guidelines relating to nutrition and eating well through all of our work. Nationally, there is the National Food Strategy which is an independent review commissioned by the (previous) Government published in 2021, which was followed by the Government Food Strategy in 2022. There is also the EAT-Lancet report to be updated in 2025 about healthy diets from sustainable food systems. I think they are useful references for the Council's work.

Importantly, we note that while our actions aim to improve relevant health and wellbeing outcomes for our population, evidence suggests that actions that may have the greatest impact on addressing the prevalence of overweight and obesity are those implemented

at a national level: [Blueprint - A blueprint to halve obesity in the UK](#), for instance, via changes to policies related to unhealthy food and drink products. Many of these changes would ensure that healthier options are more widely accessible and affordable for the population.

Thank you for raising this important issue with the Health and Wellbeing Board which I want to see taken seriously by the Council.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Jenna Ho Marris
Chair, North Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board
January 2025