Evidence Base for Policy LP39 (Hot Food Takeaways) May 2018

Figure 1 shows that Hackney has a relatively high concentration of hot fast food outlets. In 2014, there were almost 300 hot fast food outlets in Hackney, which is equivalent to a per population density that is 40% higher than the national average (122 vs. 88 fast food outlets per 100,000 people). Some areas of Hackney have much higher concentrations of fast food outlets; for example, in 2014, Hoxton East and Shoreditch ward had almost six times the national average (522 per 100,000 people).

Figure 1: Density of fast food outlets in Hackney, by neighbourhood (ward and LSOA, 2014)

The most recent National Child Measurement Programme (2016/17) data shows that over 40% of Hackney children are overweight or obese (15% and 27% respectively), while in some wards up to 51% of year 6 children are overweight or obese. This is compared to 39% in London and 34% in England. Excess weight in Year 6 children in Hackney is concerning. Tackling childhood obesity is one of Hackney’s key objectives in the Hackney Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a large programme of work led by the Chief Executive aims to tackle rates of obesity through a raft of initiatives including promotion of healthier food choices.


2 Data from the National Child Measurement Programme.
Evidence shows that when fast food outlets are located close to schools, children will eat more fast food, and will be more likely to be overweight or obese than when fast food outlets are not located close to schools. Thus a study in Hackney found that 54% of 11-19 year olds make a purchase from a takeaway at least 1 day per school week (9% do so every day); 39% purchase from takeaways for lunch during the school week, while 32% do so on the way home from school.\(^3\) Other studies, including in neighbouring Tower Hamlets, similarly find results that children commonly make purchases from takeaways near to their school, and even find ways to do so when policies restrict them from leaving school during lunchtime.\(^4\) In an Oxford University review,\(^5\) 10 of the 15 studies examining associations between fast food outlets’ proximity to schools and children’s weight found a statistically significant association that children who attend schools located near to fast food outlets are more likely to be overweight or obese than children at other schools. Other studies similarly find that easier access to fast food is associated with higher consumption of unhealthy food and higher BMIs in children and adolescents, especially in those of low socioeconomic status.\(^6\)\(^7\)\(^8\)\(^9\)\(^10\)

Fast food outlets tend to sell food that is high in fat and salt, and drinks that are high in sugar. Increased use of fast food outlets is associated with obesity and excess weight gain over time, as well as an increased risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes as a result of insulin resistance.\(^11\) One study in Cambridgeshire found that people exposed to the highest numbers of takeaways are 80% more likely to be obese than those with the lowest exposure.\(^12\) Research also shows that there are higher levels of obesity in communities with higher concentrations of fast-food outlets and that concentrations of fast-food outlets are highest in the most deprived areas.\(^13\)\(^14\)

\(^3\) Rockpool Research Associates. Healthy Living in Hackney: young people’s health behaviours and attitudes. Accessed at: https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/2893/Childhood-obesity-Appendix-1/pdf/Appendix_1_Analysis_of_Young_peoples_health_behaviours


Given the high numbers of takeaways and high levels of child obesity in Hackney, addressing the role of the food environment in limiting or supporting local efforts to reduce obesity is an important area of focus locally.¹⁵

There are additional studies that provide further support for the link between fast food, school proximity and obesity. For example, it has been shown that children of low socioeconomic status attending schools near fast food outlets are significantly more likely to be obese than those at schools without fast food outlets nearby.¹⁶

There is also evidence (including from the UK) that children and adolescents with high exposure to / higher access to fast food are significantly more likely to visit fast food outlets more frequently, consume unhealthy food, and have higher BMIs than children and adolescents with less exposure / access.¹⁷ Ḷ⁸ ¹⁹

There is extensive evidence that purchases in fast food outlets are unhealthy, containing high fat and energy intake and low micronutrient intake.²⁰ ²¹ ²² Increased use of fast food outlets is associated with obesity and excess weight gain over time, as well as an increased risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes as a result of insulin resistance.²³

Takeaway foods are associated with high fat and energy intake and low micronutrient intake.²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶ A study in the West Midlands found that of the over 250 take-out foods they analysed, 70% did not

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comply with the guideline that meals should have less than 30% of the Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) for fats and salt, 81% contained more than 50% of the GDA for saturated fats, over 30% contained more than the children’s GDA for fat or saturated fat, and almost 30% contained more than the GDA for salt. A recent study in Tower Hamlets (a neighbouring borough which similar characteristics to Hackney) found that competition leads to fast food takeaways providing larger portion sizes and using cheaper ingredients with higher fat contents. Another study in Tower Hamlets found that fast food very commonly contains trans fats. Eating fast food thereby increases the risk of obesity, diabetes, increased blood pressure and stroke, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and behavioural problems, especially in children.

The Tower Hamlets Local Plan topic paper on town centres states that “while it is accepted that not all hot food takeaways sell unhealthy food, it is considered that there is no guarantee that a healthy business model would continue into the future under an A5 use class and that it is not an unreasonable prospect that pressures on the business could lead to a change in the nature of the food sold despite the current best intentions of the appellant. A similar position was reached by a planning inspector at a recent appeal”. 

LBH therefore has a responsibility to regulate the proliferation of A5 outlets, especially near schools, regardless of whether or not other A Class premises provide healthy or unhealthy food.

A study conducted with over 800 11-19 year olds in Hackney found that 54% make a purchase from a takeaway at least 1 day per school week, with 9% saying they do so every day; 39% said that during the school week they purchase from takeaways for lunch while 32% do so on their way home from school.

There is further evidence that students frequently make purchases at A5 outlets near to their schools:

- More than half of children in a study conducted in Tower Hamlets buy food or drinks from fast food outlets two or more times a week and 10% do so every day.
- Another extensive study conducted in Tower Hamlets found that even when schools have a policy where children must stay in school during lunch time, adolescents still find ways to get

access to fast food outlets located near to the school by, e.g. buying food from a fast food outlet on the way to school, or skipping lunch and picking up food from a fast food outlet on the way home from school.  

- In a study of Year 7 and Year 10 students in Brent, of the children at schools with takeaways located within 400m of the school, 62% purchase from a takeaway on their way home from school at least once a week, compared with 43% who attend schools without nearby takeaways.  

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