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INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF THE GROWTH OF HOT FOOD TAKE-AWAYS: THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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Introduction

Eating a poor diet can significantly contribute to increasing the risk of developing a number of chronic and fatal conditions (PHE, 2014a). The health of people in South Tyneside is generally worse than the England average, for example 22.7% of children in year 6 are obese and 26% of adults are obese (PHE, 2014b). The “Foresight report” remains the most comprehensive review into obesity and its causes (Butland et al, 2007). As a complex issue one action is to modify the environment so that it does not provide easy access to energy dense food (PHE, 2014a). Environmental Health has an important and unique contribution to improve public health and reduce health inequalities. This research focuses on understanding Hot Food Take-Aways (HFTA) by using existing data held by Environmental Health. This data can then be used to inform public health decision making and develop a response at a local level.

Methods

It is a legal requirement for all food businesses to register with their local Environmental Health Service; takeaway is one of eighteen categories of premises. At South Tyneside Council this local data is held on an Environmental Health database alongside other premises information. Data regarding HFTAs was extracted including exact location, category and risk rating. Using Geographical Information Systems this was mapped on to local political boundaries and overlaid with public health data including child and adult obesity levels, deprivation levels, town centres and location of schools shown with a radius of 400m. All data presented is in the public domain.



Results

- Analysis of South Tyneside Environmental Health data shows a 67% increase in outlets classed as HFTA over a 5 year period (see Table 1).
- Some categories have seen significant increase especially Indian, Pizza/Kebab and Sandwich outlets.
- Levels of obesity and overweight for children and adults in South Tyneside are higher than the national average with strong links to deprivation.
- HFTAs in South Tyneside tend to be clustered in areas of high deprivation; predominantly within town centre, District Centres and Neighbourhood Centres.
- Due to the compact nature of development in South Tyneside, some HFTAs are currently positioned within close proximity to schools and educational establishments (see Figure 1).
- The majority of units are situated within designated shopping areas in line with current planning policy.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Delicatessens	3	3	3	3	3	4
Chinese	21	22	22	23	25	28
Indian	19	20	24	24	26	31
Pizza/ Kebab	13	15		16	23	34
Fish & Chips	22	22	22	25	25	29
Sandwiches	10	11	12	14	17	21
Total	88	93	98	105	119	147

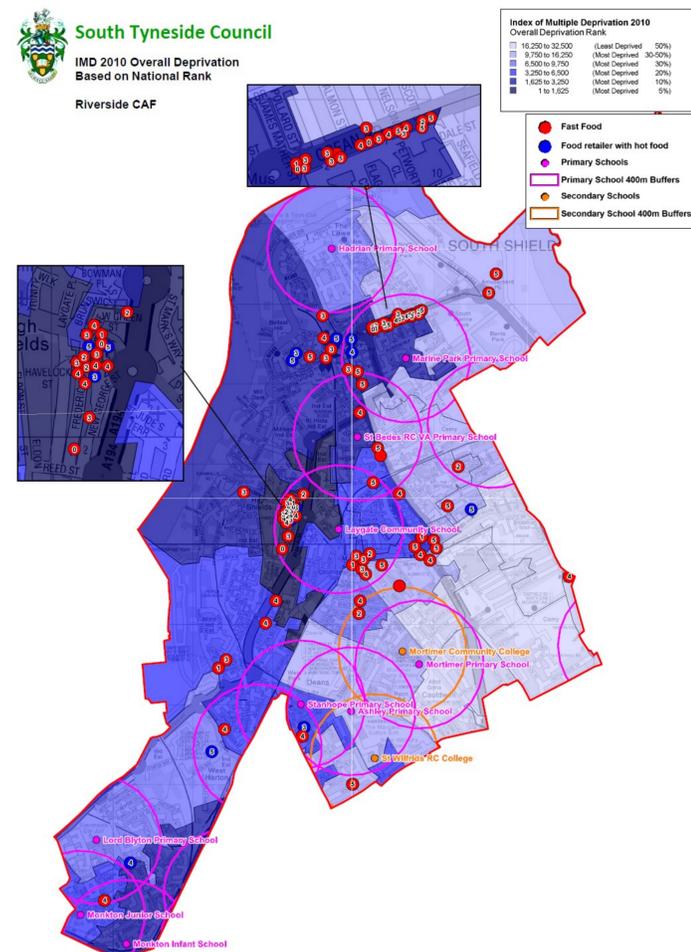
Conclusions

This research provides an example of existing data held within Environmental Health teams that can be used as a source of public health intelligence. Addressing complex challenges requires a multi-disciplinary and multi sectoral public health workforce and Environmental Health Practitioners play a key frontline and strategic role in local health improvement. The food choices within an area can influence the type of food and energy intake for individuals, although this is just one factor within a more complex relationship that underlies the development of obesity. Whilst use of the planning framework is often cited as a solution, there remains a degree of caution about the practicalities of using this systematically to control the growth of this sector. National planning policy encourages Local Plans to promote healthy communities but must be based on clear evidence and potential impact. This takes time, for example, in South Tyneside the next Local Plan is not expected to be adopted until 2016/7 and this cannot take into account existing businesses. The regulatory measures delivered through Planning and Environmental Health are limited due to statutory procedures and legislation. In addition to the regulatory role, EHPs work closely with Small Medium Enterprises providing advice and guidance to achieve compliance and protect the public. Through analysing existing data and developing area profiles this provides an opportunity for Environmental Health to work with partners including Public Health to take a more systematic approach.

References

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Figure 1: Map showing Riverside area



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