

Malnutrition in Norfolk and Waveney – Statement from the Director of Public Health – Cabinet 8th April 2024

1. Background

A report by Future Health entitled Health, *Hiding in plain sight: Tackling malnutrition as part of the prevention agenda* was published in October 2023. The report stated that Norfolk & Waveney ICB has amongst the highest estimated rates of malnutrition nationally, at 6.7%.

This has prompted a number of questions to Cabinet and a motion to Council.

At the request of the Portfolio Holder the Director of Public Health asked the Council's Public Health analytics team to review the findings in the report and analyse local data to provide an assessment of the actual rates of malnutrition in Norfolk & Waveney.

2. Key points

- The data used in the report **is estimated and is strongly influenced by Norfolk's older age profile**. The authors use the age of the population (with some weighting for deprivation) to estimate what the rate would be in Norfolk. As our area has one of the oldest populations in the country, they estimate that we would have higher expected numbers of malnutrition under this definition.
- **Our analysis is based on actual healthcare usage which shows that:**
 - The actual rates of hospital admissions for related malnutrition conditions for all ages are **lower than national averages** and are associated with long term conditions (LTCs).
 - Although we would expect a higher total number of people with malnutrition because of our older population, **we have lower than expected hospital admissions** and recorded malnutrition in secondary care **is lower than we might expect**.

3. Data Analysis by Public Health, NCC

Children and Young People (CYP)

- There are very few hospital admissions for CYP (*around 10 per year*¹) recorded with malnutrition, which is a similar rate to the national average. The causes are largely associated with long term conditions, which include childhood cancers, congenital heart disease, cystic fibrosis and cerebral palsy.
- National evidence for CYP receiving social care indicates that 'underweight malnutrition' (which excludes malnourishment associated with overweight or obesity) is rare and that these cases will be known to safeguarding agencies.

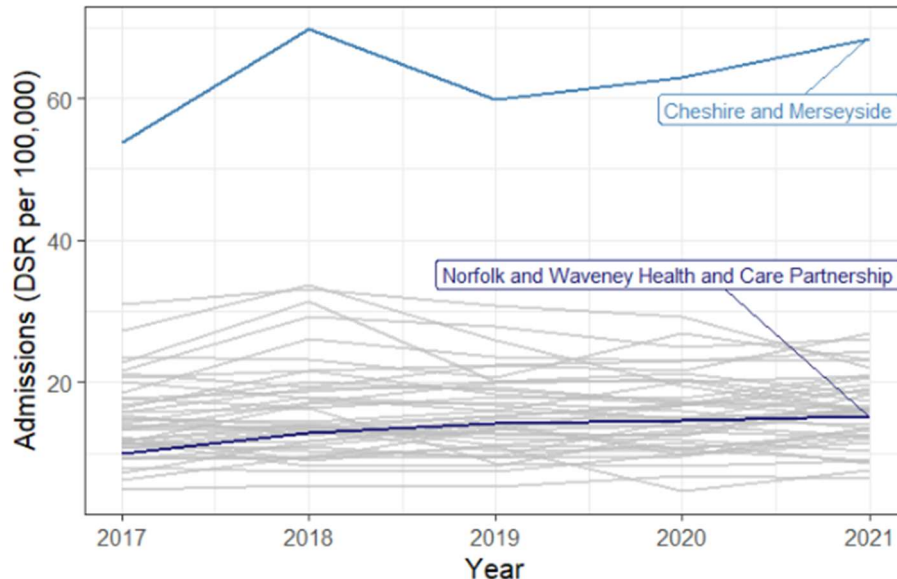
¹ Data governance prevents further breakdown of very small numbers to protect the identity of patients

- For looked-after children (LAC), overweight and obesity are common and **underweight distinctly uncommon**.
- This picture is supported by the latest local child measurement programme data (NCMP), which is commissioned by NCC public health, and which measures heights and weights of children in state schools at Reception and Year 6. **The most recent data (2022-23) shows that 0.8% of Reception children and 1% of Year 6 children are in the category of ‘underweight’. This is significantly lower than national averages for both year groups.**

Adults and Older People

- Local analysis shows that, when taking age into consideration the rate of admissions, malnutrition is **below the national average**, and the rate of hospital admissions for people aged over 75 is **significantly lower than other areas**.
- There were 155 hospital admissions of all ages related to malnutrition in Norfolk and Waveney trusts in 2020/21.
- **At least 80% of these admissions also have a long term condition associated with malnutrition** (such as cancer, COPD, dementia, or serious mental illness).
- The percentage increase in admissions locally is broadly in-line with the increases seen nationally.

Norfolk & Waveney hospital admissions related to malnutrition compared to all ICBs in England (2017/18 to 2021/22)



Norfolk & Waveney ICB is effectively ‘lower-to-mid-table’ for relevant hospital admissions.

4. Support from Council Services

Public health services

- Through the Norfolk Healthy Child Programme (HCP) Public Health commission, a range of support, information, and guidance on healthy eating particularly during pregnancy, breast feeding and infant feeding.
- Public Health also provide free vitamins to eligible babies and mothers of newborns through community pharmacies and will soon begin distributing vitamins at all health visitor mandated visits to those that are eligible.
- In recognition that families with young children arriving from abroad can be vulnerable to nutrient deficiency Public Health have funded a supply of healthy start vitamins for infants and mothers who would otherwise not be eligible for the scheme, as well as a pilot scheme in Central Norwich, working with a local food pantry as a distribution point for the vitamins.
- Public Health will be examining options for widening access to vitamins, to become a universal offer, and developing the existing CYP Tier 2 weight management programme, with a new service model in October 2024, which will include dietary and nutritional advice for the whole family.
- Public Health is also supporting adults through the Ready to Change online tool to support healthier diets, along with wider healthy lifestyle advice.

Other NCC services

More widely, Norfolk County Council also provides relevant support through Children's Services and other Council departments such as:

- Children's Services community and partnership teams engage with families to enable them to connect with the increasing network of community supermarkets/stores across Norfolk as part of the *Nourishing Norfolk Network*, Norfolk Community Foundation, and which is being supported by the Council.
- Children's Services' early help community workers maintain strong links with local food banks and community groups to ensure wider support that families might need is available, including access to local groups or links with libraries to reduce social isolation and loneliness, as well as there being practical help such as the NCC Client Hardship Services, where debt management and emergency financial assistance is available.
- Children's Services continue to promote take up of free school meals and, with almost 100% take up, there are currently around 30,000 children who access means tested free school meals. This is in addition to all children in Year Reception, 1 and 2 who automatically receive free school meals. In addition, during the past year, as part of Norfolk's wider Household Support Programme worth £13.8m, £7.2m has been used to support families with

children eligible for free school meals to receive monthly cost of living support vouchers.

- The Children's Services Inclusion and Opportunity Team supports schools to take a whole-school approach to delivering an effective needs-led RSHE curriculum which includes physical health and mental wellbeing, as well as what constitutes a healthy diet, including understanding calories and other nutritional content. The team is also developing an oral health toolkit to support schools with this issue at a whole school and individual pupil level. The toolkit will collate high quality resources and helpful signposting and will include a focus on ensuring that the curriculum is effectively delivered in ways which increase awareness around healthy eating and nutrition.
- Through Children's Services' engagement in the DfE-funded Start for Life and Family Hubs programme we are extending our early childhood focus to include families with children up to the age of 19 (25 with SEND), joining up and enhancing existing services, so that children, young people and their parents and carers can access the early support they need when they need it. As part of this development, recognising the importance of the first 1001 days of children's lives, face-to-face 'pathway to parenting' programmes are on offer to families that include the health and wellbeing of parents as well as supporting newborn babies. The sessions have been very well received by families, and our school and community teams are delivering a number of community-based group programmes supporting parents/carers with home learning for their children that include healthy eating. Through this joined-up approach, services are taking a 'make every contact count' approach to supporting families, including with healthy eating even when this is not the primary reason for their engagement.

Cabinet minutes 8th April 2024 [Document.ashx \(cmis.uk.com\)](https://cmis.uk.com)