

Tackling obesity

The Chief Executive of APSE, one of the country's fastest growing local government organisations, today welcomed the government's calls for personal responsibility but said that more needs to be done to create the circumstances where people feel safe in their local communities to go out and take part in physical activity.

Paul O'Brien, APSE CEO said " **Whilst the Government is right to encourage people to take up simple changes, such as walking to the local shops, we must remember that streets need to feel safe and welcoming before people will venture out without cars**". Mr O'Brien went on to say " **Whilst we have seen record levels of investment in the NHS, used in treating obesity related ill health, we have not seen match funding going into local government for basic services that could contribute to reducing some of the causes of obesity**".

1. In a recent study on the impact of improved street lighting, which encourages people to walk more within the local environment, for every £1 spent in Stoke (on improved street lighting) a further £27 was saved on the impact of crime. In Dudley the benefits of the £1 street lighting investment was a £47 saving on the impact of crime.

2. Living near a park or open space can increase life expectancy by up to 10 years but money is often diverted by councils into street cleansing initiatives at the expense of investment in local parks.

3. Where street warden initiatives are in place fear of crime has been shown to reduce by as much as 28% but street warden schemes are not universally available in all areas.

4. A healthy breakfast can reduce obesity by 33%. Councils have the 'Power of Community Well Being' available to them to offer free breakfasts to school children. Despite the health benefits few councils are able or willing to offer free breakfasts without additional investment

5. Mortality statistics show that children from the lowest socio-economic group are four times more likely to be killed in pedestrian accidents than richer children. APSE amongst many organisations has campaigned for safer streets to encourage outdoor play with children and more walking by adults and older people in particular. This means investment in pavements and street lighting and traffic calming measures.

Mr O'Brien concluded " **If the Government genuinely wants to tackle obesity it must encourage, and support, investment in local services as a means to generate better take up of physical activity in day to day life**" adding. " **That means where there is a need, creating breakfast clubs to engender healthy eating, creating a local environment where the public feel safe in walking the streets and using local parks, and, making leisure services accessible both geographically and financially. Obesity and deprivation are all too often uncomfortable bed-fellows**"

Ends

1. APSE is a not for profit local government body working with over 300 local authorities throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
2. APSE is the foremost representative body of local service provision within the UK.
3. APSE provides a range of services to member authorities including, performance information, training and development, ethical consultancy support, advisory services, lobbying and seminars.
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