

Cheshire West and Chester Nutrition and Health Needs Assessment: Executive Summary

Key Findings

This Nutrition and Health Needs Assessment shows that many adults in Cheshire West and Chester want to eat well and support their health, but their ability to do so is shaped far more by social, environmental and commercial determinants than by knowledge or motivation alone.

The majority of residents do not meet national dietary guidance, with low intakes of fruit and vegetables, and high intakes of free sugars, salt and saturated fat. These patterns are worse in more deprived communities where there are also higher levels of obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cancer and dementia.

Food insecurity remains a significant issue for many residents of Cheshire West and Chester. A sixth (16.7%) of residents live in areas at highest risk, and foodbanks as well as affordable food projects continue to play an important role. Survey and focus-group feedback shows that cost, time pressures, limited cooking facilities, lack of transport and poor mental health are often barriers for people eating well.

Access to affordable, healthy food is inequitable largely due to rurality the borough. While many residents live close to supermarkets, others particularly those in rural areas or without their own transport face significant challenges. Data from the Food Equalities Tool shows wide variation across neighbourhoods in how easy it is to access affordable food and how much of household income is spent on food shopping.

Confidence and skills in cooking healthy meals vary across different groups. The survey found that people living in more deprived areas, men, and those unable to work were more likely to report lower confidence in cooking healthy meals and greater reliance on convenience food. Exposure to unhealthy food advertising is common and is felt most strongly in more deprived areas.

At the same time, Cheshire West and Chester has strong foundations to build on. There is a well-established whole-system approach through Eat Well Be Active, the Food for All Plan and the West Cheshire Food Partnership. The borough has taken meaningful action on healthier advertising, planning and food environments, and offers a tiered weight-management pathway aligned with national guidance. There is a clear commitment to dignity-based, compassionate support rather than blame or stigma.

The main gaps identified are not a lack of activity, but uneven access, affordability and local data. More needs to be done to make healthy food easier to buy, prepare and choose especially for people facing poverty, disability, neurodivergence, mental ill health or unstable housing and to improve insight into the experiences of underserved groups.

Overall, this needs assessment has identified the need to continue shifting from individual behaviour change alone to practical, system-wide action. Making healthy food affordable, accessible and realistic in everyday life, while maintaining compassionate, joined-up support, offers the greatest opportunity to improve nutrition, reduce inequalities and support better health across the borough.

Recommendations

1. Build on existing obesity prevention activity with renewed focus on impact, as local obesity rates continue to rise in line with national trends.
2. Improve equity-focused intelligence, by developing more robust local data on diet-related disease and nutrition access among underserved groups, including people with learning disabilities, ethnic minority communities and adults with neurodivergence.
3. Embed nutrition within routine care, ensuring primary and community care settings are supported to deliver brief, compassionate dietary conversations linked to local support offers.
4. Increase cooking confidence and skills, with a focus on men, residents in more deprived areas and those unable to work, through accessible, informal cooking sessions, budgeting support and community food hubs.
5. Strengthen healthier food provision across schools, nurseries, leisure settings and foodbanks, building on existing healthier vending and food pledge initiatives.
6. Improve visibility and navigation of support, ensuring all frontline services actively promote the weight-management pathway, Live Well Cheshire West and the Food Partnership map.
7. Address survey representation gaps, with targeted engagement to better capture the views of men and ethnic minority communities in future needs assessments.
8. Expand affordable fresh food initiatives, including pop up markets, low cost produce schemes and closer links to local growers and farmers' markets, especially in deprived areas and signposting to those experiencing food insecurity.
9. Deliver cooking and nutrition support that reflects real world constraints, focusing on low equipment, low energy and time efficient meal options.
10. Integrate food support with wider services, strengthening links between nutrition, mental health, housing, welfare advice and primary care expanding on pre-existing links and integrating compassionate approaches.
11. Promote behavioural change as core to weight support, ensuring programmes focus on nutrition, habits, confidence and wellbeing, not weight alone.
12. Use the Food Equalities Tool proactively to prioritise neighbourhoods for food access interventions and transport planning, particularly for those in rural areas where supermarket access is limited and without private transport, by exploring transport solutions and local retail partnerships to improve access to healthier options.
13. Continue to resource and strengthen whole systems working, maintaining cross-sector leadership and accountability for nutrition and healthy weight.

14. Sustain and expand collaborative delivery of the Food for All Plan, continuing to centre dignity, choice and lived experience.
15. Embed compassionate, non-stigmatising approaches system-wide, ensuring consistency across primary care, community services and non-specialist settings.
16. Build on existing healthier advertising and planning policies, maintaining focus on reducing exposure to unhealthy food environments, especially within areas of deprivation.
17. Advocate nationally for stronger commercial regulation, particularly around promotions and marketing including buy-one-get-one-free offers
18. Expand access to free drinking water, pop-up promotions and healthy choice nudges across council and community settings.
19. Align nutrition and physical activity action, delivering joint approaches through the Get Cheshire West Moving Strategy 2025–28.
20. Continue healthier vending and procurement commitments, ensuring public sector settings lead by example.
21. Align local services more closely with NICE guidance, ensuring behavioural interventions meet minimum recommended duration.
22. Adapt services for people with complex needs, including learning disabilities, severe obesity, mental health conditions and older adults.
23. Promote consistent compassionate communication, especially outside specialist services with success reframes to expand beyond weight loss emphasising sustainable, health-promoting behaviours and wellbeing across all tiers.