

'More Than Weight': A compassionate approach to weight management in the East Riding

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Introduction

Traditional weight management approaches focus particularly on BMI and bodyweight. Research now demonstrates this can be ineffective in achieving sustained healthier weight change, being associated with cycles of weight loss and regain (Rothblum., 2018). Such fluctuations can detrimentally impact on individuals' wider health, with evidence of a greater risk of stroke, diabetes, and all-cause mortality compared to those with stable obesity or moderate weight gain (Mann et al., 2007). Emotional wellbeing is also at risk, with increased depressive symptoms amongst those continuously fluctuating in weight (Quinn, Puhl & Reinka., 2020). Furthermore, many weight loss campaigns operate by stigmatising obesity and overweight in order to motivate individual behaviour change, however this can reinforce shame around weight and also negatively impact on emotional wellbeing (Rathbone et al., 2020).

Growing recognition of the complexity of weight management, including of the interacting factors which influence obesity (GOV.UK., 2007), illustrates how focusing on BMI in isolation is misaligned with the reality of achieving and sustaining a healthy weight. Evidence aligns with this, showing the greatest levels of sustained weight loss are achieved when multiple components such as nutrition and education are considered alongside physical activity (Luckner et al., 2012). Crucially, such interventions can still have health 'gains' regardless of the changes to BMI, with 'healthy habits' such as diet, regular exercise, and not smoking reducing the risk of mortality regardless of BMI (Matheson et al., 2012).

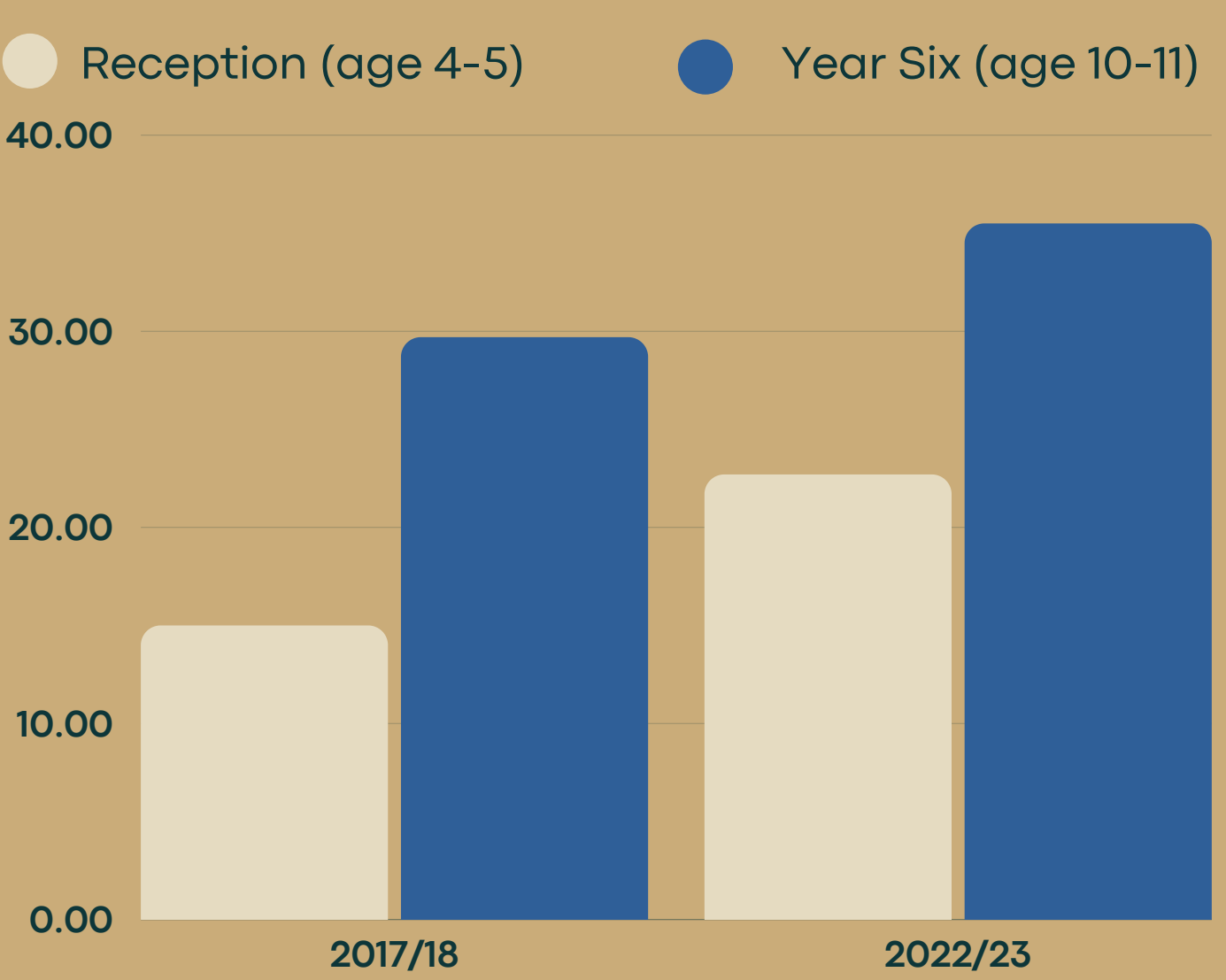
Aim: To reframe perceptions of healthy weight in the East Riding to be more inclusive and compassionate, shifting the emphasis across weight management services and the wider health system away from fixation on BMI and towards a more holistic view of the 'health gains' that can be made. Taking a "More Than Weight" approach advocates sustained healthier lifestyle changes, conducive to increasing the healthy weight population across the East Riding.

Methodology

In response to the rising prevalence of obesity, overweight, and inactivity in the East Riding (see below), an innovative systems thinking approach is being utilised in order to implement change across our local healthy weight system. This operationalises a 'soft systems' methodology (see right) to aid us to collectively understand the needs and issues currently linked to healthy weight, the challenges and barriers people with lived experience, and where we can begin to implement changes. Given evidence of the detriments of typical BMI-centric weight management systems, this alternate approach aims to transform our rhetoric and conceptualisation of weight to be more compassionate and holistic, advocating for 'gains' to be made in improved wider health outcomes in addition to weight change.

The local picture

Figure 1. Proportion of children living with overweight or obesity in the East Riding (%)



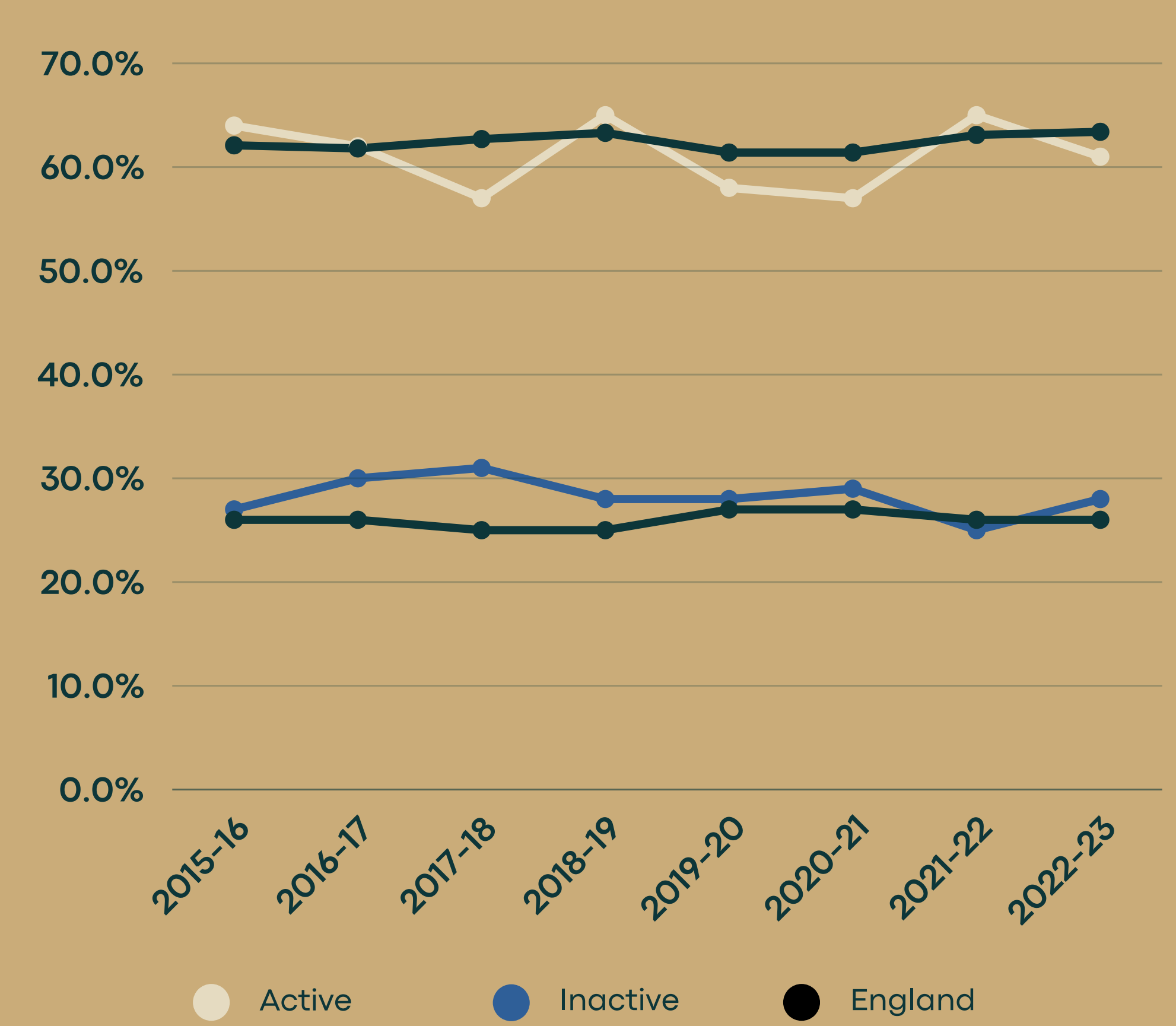
*Source: OHID., 2024
 Figure 1 shows a five year comparison for the percentage of children living with overweight or obesity in the East Riding. For both agegroups, the prevalence of obesity amongst children and young people in the East Riding is increasing.

Source: Active Lives report for Humber., 2024. >
 Figure 2 shows the 8-year prevalence of physical activity and inactivity levels for residents in the East Riding, 2015-16 - 2022-23. Activity levels are worsening, with physical activity reducing following the post-Covid-19 high in 2020 and inactivity levels increasing. The Humber region now has the second worst physical activity levels in England.



Prevalence of overweight including obesity amongst adults in the East Riding is 71.2%* (BMI ≥ 25kg/m²). Data from 2022/23 (OHID., 2024). *Significantly greater than the England average of 64.0%. This ranks the highest out of all CIPFA Nearest Neighbours (OHID., 2024).

Figure 2. Prevalence of physical activity and inactivity for East Riding, 2015/16 – 2022/23



A whole-system approach to change:

The establishment of the East Riding 'More than Weight' Network and steering group brings together system partners including practitioners, educators, people with lived experience, academics, and elected members. The diversity of this group advocates a 'conditions of living' perspective of healthy weight, recognising how different parts of the system such as education, food systems, commercial determinants of health, and digital inclusion for example have an impact on individuals' health and the efficacy of weight management services.

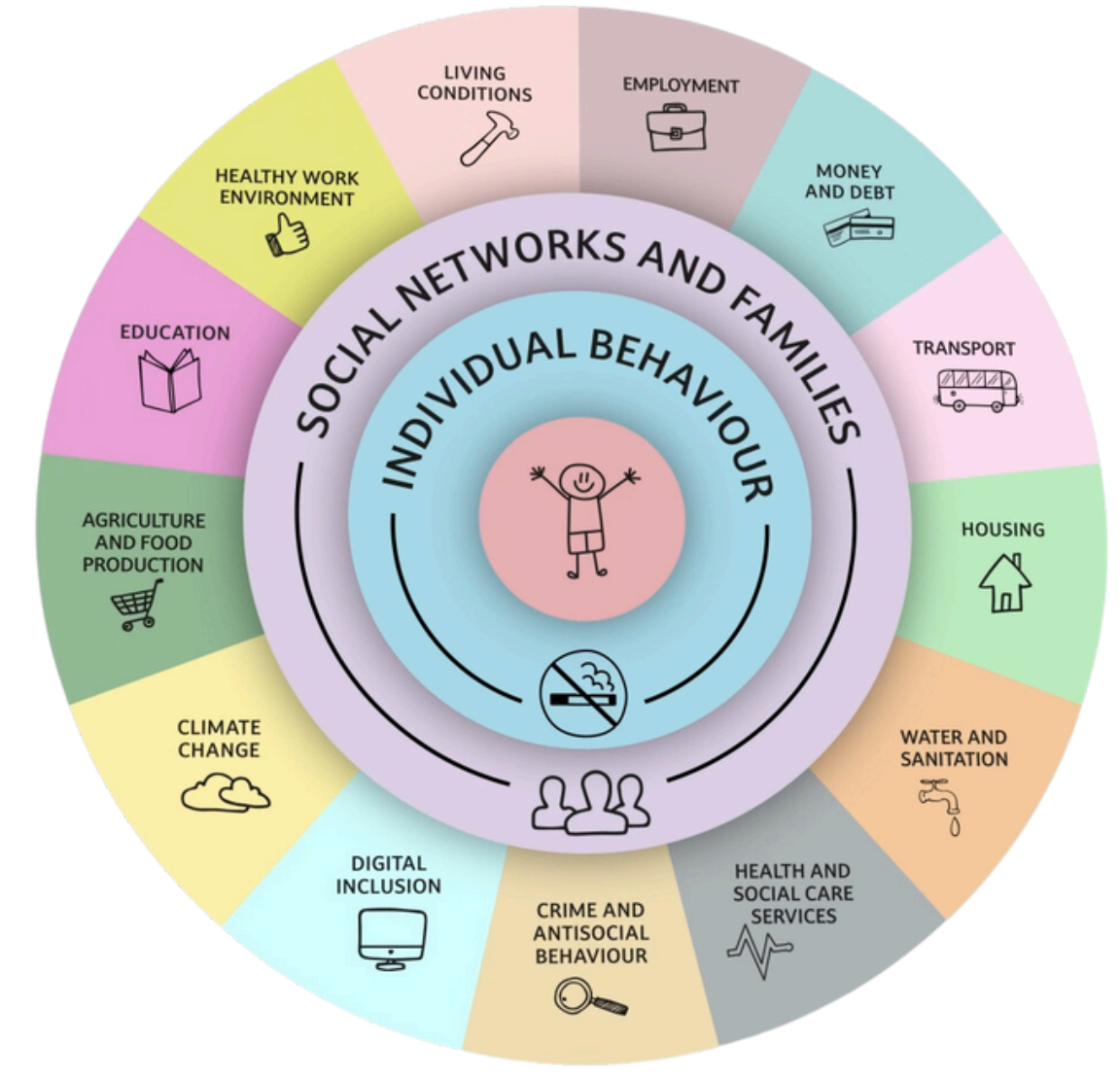


Figure 3. Conditions of Living wheel >

Understanding the system and changing attitudes

- Systems mapping
 - What are the boundaries of our system?
 - What do we measure already?
 - What are the gaps?
- Rich picture analysis
 - What are the different perspectives of weight management?

Overcoming barriers and transforming services

- Workshop sessions with the steering group identified seven key themes where changes are needed
- Deep dives into each theme are revealing of what the key issues are and changes we could start to

Strengthening the influence of people with lived experience

- Embedding co-production into our service design, reviews, and strategy development
- Using stakeholder analysis to identify the individuals with the most influence and connections



Figure 4. Key themes identified by the 'More Than Weight' steering group as priority areas to focus work on. Deep dive sessions will now be undertaken with the group to understand more about the issues for each theme and how action can be taken in response.

Literature

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