Refreshing Investment in Children’s Health:
Using the Sugary Drinks Tax to improve healthy food access in schools
Authors
This report, surveys and in-depth consultations informing the case studies were conducted by Vera Zakharov, Sustainable Food Places Local Action Coordinator, and Ren Piercey, Sustainable Food Places Local Action Officer at Sustain. Guidance and input were provided by Barbara Crowther, Children’s Food Campaign Coordinator, and Ben Reynolds, Deputy Chief Executive, at Sustain.

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Executive summary

Context

Health inequalities persist in 21st century Britain, hitting the nation’s youngest generation especially hard. The twin burdens of widespread food insecurity and proliferation of cheap, unhealthy food mean that children face nutritional inequality that has lasting impacts on their health outcomes and wellbeing. One in three children leave primary school overweight or obese. One in five are not getting their 5-A-Day. And 2.3 million are at risk of or experiencing food insecurity. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to be at risk of obesity or overweight.

Sustain has long campaigned on healthy eating and children’s food. Our work has included calling for fiscal measures such as the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) to drive down consumption of sugar, curbing unhealthy food promotions, as well as supporting healthy food environments and healthy eating engagement at a local level, especially in schools.

During 2020, rising levels of both food insecurity and obesity have come into even sharper focus during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has revealed how those from the most disadvantaged and low-income communities, and those living with overweight, obesity or diet-related diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes or high blood pressure may incur higher risk should they become infected. As a result, actions that improve access of disadvantaged children to healthy food, or which reduce the obesogenic environment in which they are growing up, are a critical part of any plan to Build Back Better. In the National Food Strategy Part 1, lead author Henry Dimbleby sets out a vision for ensuring the most disadvantaged children are not left behind, underscoring that “Eating well in childhood is the very foundation stone of equality of opportunity. It is essential for both physical and mental growth.”

Call to action

We believe that taxation of sugary drinks, and investing the funds raised back into improving children’s health via schools is a triple win for reducing obesity, levelling children’s health inequalities and providing much-needed resource to schools and children’s food initiatives. The Sugary Drinks Industry Levy has been a huge success in driving reformulation, lowering sales of drinks high in sugar, and raising money to benefit children’s health. A Government commitment to ringfence the SDIL is the right policy approach to achieve further wins for our nation’s health. It requires leadership and collaboration between the Treasury, Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care.

Sustain is calling for the creation of a new Healthy Food Innovation Fund, inspired by investments facilitated by the 2018/19 Healthy Pupils Capital Fund (HPCF), to be available to local authorities and schools to invest in infrastructure and project innovation specifically around food – from new cookery or kitchen facilities to growing spaces, food and nutrition programmes, water fountains, new food activity clubs, etc. We would like to see a multi-year funding commitment, allowing local authorities and schools to plan ahead to identify their most pressing funding needs.

Survey and case study results

Our survey and case studies, completed by schools, local authorities, charities and enterprises working on school food projects, gave a detailed picture of both the positive impact and the challenges experienced by local authorities and schools in accessing the funding. But crucially, these insights have offered up plenty of inspiring examples of local funding allocation and individual school projects that have made a meaningful difference and are worth replicating in the future. We hope you are likewise inspired in the following pages by the dedication and ingenuity of local teams making the most of this funding. These results and insights inform our key recommendations around a new Healthy Food Innovation Fund.
A Healthy Food Innovation Fund designed to help local authorities and schools give children the best start in life.

Conclusions

The overwhelming message from reflections on the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was how much need there is locally for such funding. Infrastructure and projects around healthy food in schools are typically hard to fund, so schools and local authorities were immensely grateful for the fund. The passion of the individuals involved in making HPCF a success locally highlights the importance of this type of funding.

However, our research also highlighted significant differences in the capacity and resources from one local area to another. Respondents highlighted that schools are stretched and need support to access funding. Where local authorities had capacity to offer extra guidance and fine-tune funding options, uptake was higher and project quality improved.

It’s also clear that one size does not fit all when it comes to allocating funding to meet local needs. Whilst some areas opted to target larger sums of money on schools with higher child deprivation or obesity rates, others opened applications to all based on strength of concept and sustainability. A crucial factor was informing and involving schools in an approach that was both fair and efficient. This underscored that local authorities are best placed to design an approach that is equitable and focused for greatest impact.

The case studies and recommendations included here form a blueprint for a future investment approach with the potential to drive tangible change in children’s access to healthy food and their health outcomes for years to come.

Recommendations

- Ensure at least 50% or more of Soft Drinks Industry Levy income supports food-related children’s health programmes at local authority or school level.
- Use Soft Drinks Industry Levy revenue to create a new funding mechanism to support schools to build back better on healthy food – a Healthy Food Innovation Fund – at a similar level to the previous Healthy Pupils Capital Fund.
- Continue to invest SDIL revenue in support of the scaling up the National School Breakfast Programme for 2021/22, whilst Parliament considers the proposed National School Breakfast Bill which would create a statutory requirement for all schools to have a healthy breakfast club, and provide Government funding on a permanent basis.
Introduction

Schools’ role in children’s food experience

All children have the right to a healthy and happy childhood, including access to nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food. Schools play a central role in children's lives from reception to sixth form – children spend 190 days of their year in school during these formative years. They not only provide the essential building blocks of education, but they also set behaviours and cultural norms, and create formative and positive experiences that will ultimately help shape children's values as they grow up. Hence school programmes beyond the core subjects, including the arts, food growing, culinary skills and physical education are equally as important, although these often require significant investment and facilities, meaning that the offer may differ from setting to setting.

Schools also provide a time to sit down and enjoy a healthy meal. For many children whose families struggle to make ends meet or afford healthy food, schools offer a nutritional safety net and can help shape a positive relationship with food. Over one in four children enter primary school overweight or obese, and this number rises to one in three when they move on to secondary. While the rate at reception has risen slightly between years 2017/18 and 2018/19 it has levelled off at Year 6. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to be at risk of obesity or overweight.

Reducing child obesity rates requires a holistic and multi-sectoral approach, including retail, hospitality, high streets and public engagement, but there remains a need to have strategic emphasis on school settings, where both behaviour change and healthy food access can be influenced.

The Covid-19 emergency has further exposed the levels of deep inequality around food access, as well as risk of overweight and obesity in poorer outcomes, and the need for renewed action to deliver a more equitable and healthy food environment for families.

The challenges brought on in 2020 have also shown how dedicated school staff and public health teams are to the wellbeing of their communities, but equally how stretched resources are in both sectors. It is imperative that both are well resourced to support the most vulnerable, especially children, both in times of relative prosperity and in times of crisis.

Pip Moreton
School Kitchen Manager, County Durham

“My years as a school cook taught me that for many children the meal they have at school is the only hot meal they have all day. Investing in school kitchens and dining halls is absolutely crucial to help our children enjoy meals and lunchtime.”

Sustain, via its Children’s Food Campaign and nationwide network of Sugar Smart campaigns, has backed calls for greater Government investment in children’s health and food access. We remain concerned that money already allocated for these purposes – via the £336m income from SDIL for 2019/20 alone – is unaccounted for in the current financial year, beyond the £11m for the National School Breakfast Programme and £160 for the Primary PE & Sport Premium. We are asking Ministers to consider the huge potential of the remaining unspent income in supporting schools through this challenging time and furthering the Government’s ambitions around the levelling up agenda.

The Soft Drinks Industry Levy

In 2016, the Government announced a Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL), popularly known as the Sugar Tax, as part of its Child Obesity Strategy. This came after many years of campaigning and modelling by charities including Sustain and prominent figures such as Jamie Oliver. When the SDIL came into force in April 2018, it
had already won wide praise for the impact it
did in triggering a 44% reduction in sugar
levels of soft drinks, according to Public Health
England. This compares to just 3% reduction of
sugar in other product categories covered by the
voluntary sugar reduction programme, where the
current target is 20%, which is due be reached in
2021.11

In preparing for the legislation the Government
stated that “Every penny of England's share of
the spending raised by the levy will go
towards improving children's health”12, and this approach
to target a tax for direct public health drew
support from across all three major political
diaries.

In 2018-19, Levy income was allocated towards
doubling the Primary PE & Sport Premium (from
£160m to £320m), establishing a National School
Breakfast Programme (up to £26m over two
years, later extended for 2020-21 by another
£11m), a one-year Healthy Pupils Capital Fund
(£100m), and the Essential Life Skills Programme
(£22m over two years).

Current spend of Levy income

The Government pledged the Levy amount to
be ringfenced to children’s health investment for
these purposes at £575m in 2018-19 and that
the amount schools would receive would not
fall below £415m per annum for the remaining
period of the Comprehensive Spending Review.13

Following the postponement of the CSR in 2019,
HM Treasury confirmed that this commitment had
been rolled over in the November 2019 Spending
Round. In 2020, the Department for Education
had confirmed the continued allocation of the
Levy to the Primary PE and Sport Premium (at
£160 million per annum), and to the National
School Breakfast Programme (at £11 million per
annum). In Autumn 2020, HM Revenue & Customs
had announced that the Levy had raised £336

million in 2019/20. The Department for Education
has not yet publicly accounted for the entirety
of money despite repeated requests by Sustain
and others, and there have been no further
details released by the Department on how
the remaining £165 million is being allocated to
support children's health.14 Millions of pounds are
therefore unaccounted for.

Healthy Pupils Capital Fund

This 2018/19 fund was administered in England
by the Department for Education (DfE), with the
funding intended to boost children’s and young
people’s physical and mental health by improving
and increasing availability to facilities for physical
activity, healthy eating, mental health and
wellbeing and medical conditions. The money
was allocated to local authorities, multi-academy
trusts, locally coordinated voluntary-aided
programmes, and independent institutions on the
basis of the number of pupils in their catchment.
The fund also made stipulations around
accountability and reporting. Initial feedback from
local networks, and in our research for this report
revealed that the funding was often difficult to
track down within local authorities, and, without
further support from council teams, was difficult
for many schools to apply for. To date, reporting
has not yet been undertaken by DfE. Thus, at the
time of publishing this report, we don't yet have a
national picture of its spend nor impact.

In calling for continued hypothecation of SDIL
income to benefit children’s health, Sustain
consulted schools, food partnerships and local
authorities via our Sugar Smart and Sustainable
Food Places networks, as well as education
settings within the School Food Matters and Soil
Association Food for Life networks. We set out to
gather learning from the Healthy Pupils Capital
Fund – what had been delivered, what worked
well, and what didn’t – in order to ensure that
any recommendations for a future fund using
SDIL revenues are in line with what works best
for schools in terms of implementation, and for
local authorities in terms of assessing impact
and adding further value as part of their healthy
eating and obesity reduction measures. This
report outlines the key messages that emerged
from both our schools survey and our individual
case studies from local areas that made the most
of the fund.
The case for a new Healthy Food Innovation Fund

Despite its challenges around implementation, the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was gratefully received by local authorities and schools, with many citing it as an opportunity to invest in facilities and projects that are otherwise difficult to fund. This is evident in the great lengths individuals within local authorities went to support schools, especially those most in need of funding, to apply.

The general shift in diet towards energy-dense foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat is contributing to the high levels of overweight and obese children. Whilst we acknowledge the valuable role of PE and Sports in maintaining children’s overall health and fitness, maintaining a healthy weight relies on both a healthy diet and regular exercise.

We believe that a dedicated investment in healthy food is as important – if not more so – than continued funding of the Sports and PE Premium. And yet almost none of the SDIL revenue aside from the National School Breakfast Programme, is being used for this purpose. This must be addressed. Sustain is calling on the Government to implement a new multi-year Healthy Food Innovation Fund for schools, similar to the previous Healthy Pupils Capital Fund, to enable schools (and/or local groups working to improve children’s health and well-being) to invest in infrastructure and project innovation – kitchen facilities, growing spaces, nutrition programmes, water fountains, new food activity clubs, etc.

SDIL revenue has been incorporated as part of the £2.2 billion increase in budget for 2021/22 for the Department for Education during the November 2020 Spending Round. Based on the most recent Office of Budget Responsibility forecast, the Soft Drinks Industry Levy is projected to raise an estimated £340 million per year until 2024. We call on DfE to commit a minimum of 50% of forthcoming SDIL receipts to healthy food investment. This should include continuing support for the National School Breakfast Programme, as well as establishing a new Healthy Food Innovation Fund to deliver investment where it is most needed: in our schools and communities, especially in areas of highest deprivation or risk of obesity.

Catherine Hutchinson
Senior Public Health Strategist, Waltham Forest Council

“Schools play a vital role in establishing life-long healthy eating habits. A new fund similar to the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund would make it possible for our local authority and schools to work together to improve children’s diets, tackle child food poverty, and increase nutrition knowledge and cooking skills.”

Key principles for a future fund

**Food-focused**: A fund that can meet local demand for food-related projects to improve children’s health in schools that are otherwise difficult to resource.

**Flexible**: A fund that allows for a diversity of locally-designed approaches that enable joined up working, targeting for greatest impact, and better local evaluation.

**Future-proof**: A multi-year commitment to a fund that is not limited solely to capital, allowing continuation of investment, local innovation and building on previous learning.
Learning from Healthy Pupils Capital Fund

A one-off capital funding opportunity is a great way to kick-start new or improve existing projects and infrastructure. And in some cases, the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was spent on innovative and beneficial projects in schools, like new playground surfaces or improved dining facilities.

Due to a multitude of reasons, and not to the fault of the school recipients of the fund, a proportion of the funding was not used as intended, with some schools reporting ‘fixing leaky roofs’ or ‘removing asbestos’. From our analysis of the spending of the HPCF allocated through local authorities, under 15% of the fund was actually spent on health and wellbeing projects, a majority of which were for sports-related infrastructure.

In August of 2020, Sustain launched a Healthy Food Innovation Fund survey, which was open to schools, local authorities, third sector organisations and other entities involved in school food projects. A total of 90 respondents completed the survey. The survey explored how the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was spent, and asked how schools and others could best utilise a future fund for capital and other one-off projects improving children’s access to healthy food.

Key insights

After surveying a range of local authority public health and school leads, we have outlined the following successes and challenges. These can be used to shape a future fund to ensure it’s not only efficient, effective and sustainable but delivers wider and longer-term benefits to children’s health as well.

1. Types of projects funded by the HPCF

HPCF funding was spent on a variety of projects, including outdoor facilities, Daily Mile tracks, school gardens, edible playgrounds, drinking fountains, sensory/nature connection spaces promoting mindfulness, cookery teaching facilities, fridges and storage, dining facility improvements, and in some cases, the building of entire kitchens to bring school meal catering in-house. A number of respondents cited that the funding was spent entirely on physical activity-related projects where the role of funding allocation was offered to council bodies focusing on physical activity. Projects highlighted in our case studies where longer-term impacts and whole school community engagement were cited included food-growing polytunnels, dining facility improvements that encouraged more social eating, and a student-run portable healthy tuck shop.

2. Well-resourced local authorities & schools benefited

Where the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was spent well (see case studies), it is clear that the local authority and/or school recipients were well resourced or highly engaged and therefore able to spend the money more efficiently and as intended. In some cases, the local authority had put in the ground work, creating a support package for schools to apply for that didn’t require extra capacity for teachers to come up with projects. Whilst the case studies here highlight how money has been spent effectively and inform recommendations for future school funding, these examples are not indicative of the national picture.

Laura Flanagan

School Food Improvement Officer, Croydon Council

“School food and water access improvements have made a real difference to Croydon families. The impact on pupils’ readiness to learn and long-term health is significant. It would be so good to have access to this kind of funding again. There is so much potential.”
3. **Thinking beyond capital project funding**

The Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was limited to capital-only projects and infrastructure, meaning that staff time could not be factored into the fund, nor could anything which could create revenue. Whilst some local authorities got creative to overcome this (See Durham case study), limiting funding in this way may lead to projects difficult to maintain in the longer term. Investing in kitchen facilities without the cookery teachers, or a growing space without the knowledge of food growing is unlikely to have a meaningful effect on children's nutritional knowledge and health.

Local authorities should have more autonomy regarding how and where funding is spent to have the biggest impact. Our consultations and surveys revealed a variety of effective approaches based on local needs, geographies and public health priorities. One size does not fit all, so it’s important to have flexibility in how and where the fund is spent at a local level, and to involve experts from local organisations and schools in the entire process of utilizing the funding.

4. **Clearer focus on food is needed**

Our case study contributors highlighted that the HPCF offered a unique opportunity for the money to be spent on food-related projects. It is rare to have money put towards healthy eating and food access improvements in schools, such as kitchen upgrades and growing projects, which, like physical activity infrastructure, require a significant amount of investment. A new fund with a specific focus on food projects is a real opportunity to support schools in making healthy eating more accessible and the norm.

5. **Importance of clear guidance and adequate lead times**

Interviews and survey responses indicated that the application process had a quick turnaround, with limited, broad guidance on how the money should be spent. Therefore, many schools were unable to apply in time, even though the funding would have been beneficial. Other schools put funding to much-needed infrastructure repairs that fell outside of the remit of the funding (such as fixing leaky rooves or potholes). These did not meet the original purpose of the HPCF, and the use of a targeted fund in this way masked the true costs of ongoing structural upkeep of school grounds and facilities.

6. **Difficulties in tracking down funding and ensuring fair spend**

The majority of the public health teams we have interviewed were not involved in the allocation of the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund, and in some cases were not even aware of the money coming into the local authority. In one area, the fund ended up in the Asset Management Team. In others, the funding was administered directly through physical activity school funding programmes. For a future fund, it is imperative that the local public health and schools’ teams are involved in the allocation of the funds from the beginning, with time to prepare guidance and shopping lists of potential spending options before the funding is allocated.
Case studies

Improved dining facilities
Courtwood Primary School, Croydon

The HPCF was allocated to schools via the Education Team in the local authority. The funding was shared between 34 local authority-maintained schools and the Education Team drew up four project options for schools to apply for. Schools were then allocated funding based on their National Child Measurement Programme Data to ensure funding reached students who needed it most. The injection of the HCPF was very useful in kick-starting new pieces of work within some schools in Croydon. The council also asked schools to send a brief impact report with details on their projects and further plans for improvement, resulting in a bank of useful projects to signpost schools to one another to offer advice.

The funded project
Courtwood Primary School used the funding to significantly improve the dining room and raise the profile of school meals in school. They purchased tablecloths, table decorations, new serving bowls, a new salad bar and waste trolley. The new dining space was launched during a whole school assembly and all midday supervisors attended a training by the Education Team to improve the dining experience and promote positive behaviour at lunchtimes. As a result of the changes, children’s behaviour improved, staff were more engaged in the importance of the lunchtime experience and school meal uptake increased.

The cost
£2,628

Key lessons
- Offering schools a menu of four options with photo guidance worked very well. There was concern that if schools were given free reign, lots of growing projects would have been funded, which, although worthwhile, may not be the biggest health priority for all schools. A future fund will benefit from more focus on different types of food-related projects.
- Offering staff training and whole school engagement alongside the capital investment can deepen the positive impact of the funding, including long-term improvements like increased school meal uptake.
- HPCF money was very difficult to track down within the local authority. Ultimately, the Council’s Education Team made the calculation based on publicly available DfE allocation data. A future fund would benefit from being earmarked appropriately when received by local authorities.
Outdoor learning and growing infrastructure
Ilfracombe Primary School, Devon

Devon County Council’s Education and Public Health teams worked together to coordinate local spend of the HPCF. The Public Health team offered expertise on how to get the most out of the funding to improve children’s health. Larger amounts of money were offered to a smaller cohort of schools. 18 schools were identified based on greatest need and deprivation factors, using data from the National Child Measurement Programme, the index on children affected by poverty, and the English indices of deprivation. The county’s schools capital funding committee and schools were consulted on the approach. Targeted schools were invited to apply for up to £25k. Additional Public Health team guidance included support for schools to involve children in development and track impact. Only two of the 18 schools applied for food-related investment, one for kitchen refurbishment, and the other for expanding food growing education.

The funded project
Ilfracombe Primary School used the funding to greatly expand food growing and education on school grounds. The funding covered a garden canopy, which will help in facilitating outdoor learning and cookery in all weathers, a polytunnel, a greenhouse and garden infrastructure like planters, tool shed and seating. The school has great links with the community via their food growing activities, and involves volunteers in keeping on top of school allotment produce, especially during holidays, and utilises produce in school food and education.

The cost
£10,000

Key lessons
• Good internal relationships are important. By working together across departments, the council combined expertise on capital spending for maximum impact and improving children’s health and wellbeing outcomes.

• Schools need clearer and broader guidance to develop impactful project plans. The Council’s supplemental guidance helped schools to submit strong proposals quickly, and monitor the impact of their spend.

• Feedback from schools shows they are aware of the importance of food in improving health outcomes, but unsure how to weave it into their remit. Targeted funding for food-based projects, alongside teacher and staff training will help shift this.

• Headteachers would like to see future funding open to more schools, as schools high on deprivation lists already receive a lot of support to give more schools opportunity to develop resources, especially those that can be shared across schools.
Food growing network and training
In partnership with OASES, County Durham

The local authority in Durham worked centrally with expert partnership organisations in the region to offer themed packages for 80 schools to apply for to spend their HPCF grant on. Schools in the region were allocated £2,000 each to spend on projects to improve physical health and wellbeing of students. 43 projects supported the healthy eating agenda, including healthy salad bars, indoor and outdoor dining hall improvements and new cooking facilities. 37 projects supported increasing physical activity like trim trails in primary schools and upgraded PE equipment in secondary schools.

The funded projects
20 of the schools were supported by OASES (Outdoor and Sustainability Education Specialists) to build food growing projects. OASES created a programme which included CPD sessions to train staff in the basics of food growing, a consultation and growing design of the school site, a seasonal planting plan, advice about resources and purchasing equipment. The offer of external expert services meant that schools were able to invest in a more sustainable, longer term and efficient way. Nurseries, right the way through to colleges were able to access OASES services through the scheme. However, because the fund was limited to capital, the services offered by OASES were at a fee of £500 which schools had to source from alternative funds.

The cost
£2,000 allocated per school

Key lessons
• The success of the spending of the HPCF in County Durham was largely thanks to how engaged and resourced the local authority was and its existing relationships with relevant community organisations, like OASES, who were able to support schools with the allocation of funds.
• The centrally organised offer meant that OASES were able to develop a programme that benefitted a large number of schools at a reasonable price, which also prevented the risk of the HPCF grant from being absorbed into spending on infrastructure or projects not directly promoting children's health and wellbeing.
• The inflexibility of how funding could be spent meant schools had to purchase the external services from alternative income to ensure their HPCF was spent efficiently, which in itself, is inefficient.
Rochdale Council’s School Organisation and Development Team, with input from Public Health and Wellbeing Team, administered the funding. Schools utilised the HPCF guidance from DfE to inform their bids. Applications were open to all schools, and the Public Health team provided further input on whether any of the schools who had submitted bids had other circumstances, such as higher child obesity or deprivation rates, and thus could further benefit from extra funding. A total of 18 schools received funding. The application process also asked for the long-term sustainability of projects and plans to continue them beyond the funded period. Of the applications, half focused in part or entirely on projects that improved children’s access to food (via schools meals or breakfasts) or food education (via food growing or cookery activities). The Public Health team also conducted visits with some of the schools who had received financial allocation, which were put on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The funded project

Lowerplace Primary applied for funding to purchase and decorate a moveable fruit market caravan to run as a healthy tuck shop for children and their families. Children from year 5 and 6 led on developing the project and business plan. The school pledged future funding allocation for the upkeep of the equipment. Year 6 children prepare and sell fruit pots to the rest of the school at break time. Proceeds go toward funding school outdoor activities. The fruit caravan was also featured in the Rochdale Food and Drink Festival.

The cost

£2,000 toward the tuck shop and play equipment

Key lessons

- Long-term sustainability of funded projects is key, and should be planned out from the outset, whether by ensuring schools can allocate ongoing resourcing such as maintenance, planning future fundraising, or allocating staff or student time to looking after the projects.
- Projects that can connect the school with the wider community, whether parents or other members of the public, can be a great way of raising the profile and importance of healthy eating in schools.
- It was difficult to determine which schools were ultimately successful. As the schools were directly commissioning the work themselves it was a challenge to collate progress on schemes. Future funding of this sort would benefit from a longer lead time to enable the council to develop a mini programme of works to enable forecasting timescales and capturing impact.
Ready Steady Cook
Mission Grove Primary, Waltham Forest

The Public Health team in Waltham Forest collated a shopping list of recommendations of infrastructure that schools could spend the money on to support health and wellbeing of pupils, with a focus on health and nutrition-based projects, including installing new water fountains. Schools had to individually apply for the grant, and the local authority brought together a panel with relevant expertise to review the applications. 20 schools applied for the fund, out of approximately 70 eligible schools in the borough, and 14 schools were allocated funds. Additionally, there were 6 voluntary aided schools who used their allocation on water fountains.

The fund went on a range of food-based projects including installing water fountains, vegetable gardens, dining space upgrades, refurbishment of kitchens as well as physical activity-based projects like sports provision, changing room upgrades and bike shelters.

The funded project
Mission Grove Primary School spent their allocation of the fund on installing a kitchen in their reception classes for their Ready Steady Cook Kitchen project. The school had already been running Ready Steady Cook sessions but they were being run in classroom as their only kitchen space was used for cooking of school meals. The funding allowed for students to gain kitchen experience and skills and made the sessions much more practical and useful for learning.

The cost
£8,793 (£7,000 from HPCF)

Key Lessons
• Flexibility to build upon previous work within a school is very helpful as some schools need further investment to make a project a true success.
• There was little preparation time for schools and strict application criteria from DfE meant that a limited number of schools had capacity to apply for the funding.
• To improve efficiency and efficacy of the money being spent, resources should be provided by the DfE (or an organisation like Sustain) alongside the allocation of money, including a shopping list of recommended projects to spend the money on, with average costings, as well as templates for funding guidance, invites to apply and reporting.
• Funding should be allocated based upon existing deprivation maps to target those who would benefit most
A case for local authority-led, borough-wide funding

Lewisham Training Kitchen

Although the Lewisham Training Kitchen was not funded by the HPCF, we chose to include it as a case study and model of what might be possible through pooling together local allocation of a school fund to benefit multiple schools in a local area, particularly for work involving significant capital investment.

The Lewisham Training Kitchen (LTK) is a local community facility run in partnership with Chartwells, Lewisham Council and Phoenix Community Housing. 50 schools in the borough contracted with Chartwells are able to access the training kitchen where their students can attend free sessions led by in-house cookery staff and nutritionists. Sessions include: cooking skills, curriculum-based lessons, for example making beef stew whilst learning about the Iron Age, or cooking Middle Eastern dishes while learning about Eid, as well as family cookery sessions with students and their care-givers. The facility was funded through the Department for Education (unrelated to HPCF) and the local authority but is run by an external catering company. Access to the kitchen is offered at no cost for local schools and the wider community, which is achieved through peppercorn rent offered by the housing association and costs absorbed into catering contracts.

The creation of the space was initiated by the local authority, who saw a need for the community kitchen, as cookery facilities within schools in Lewisham are generally poor. It’s a great example of how funding could be used efficiently to benefit a large number of schools by pooling funding and creating a community asset benefitting children and the wider community.

The Cost

The training Kitchen was not funded through HPCF. The initial set up of the kitchen cost approximately £250,000, with annual overheads costing around £100,000.
Conclusions

The overwhelming message from reflections on the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was how much need there is locally for such funding. Infrastructure and projects around healthy food in schools are especially hard to fund, requiring many thousands of pounds of investment. The level of need was further evidenced by the great lengths local authority staff went to supporting schools to access the funding. The passion of the individuals involved in making HPCF funding a success locally highlights the importance of this opportunity.

But the other message is the sheer difference in the capacity and resources from one local area to another. That only a small proportion of schools were able to apply is not indicative of their interest in health-related capital funding, but rather that applying for funding often requires time and external support. Numerous respondents told us that schools need all the guidance and detail they can get to put in a bid. They don’t always have time to dream big, but with a good starting point, they can innovate.

It’s also clear that one size does not fit all when it comes to local areas and the needs of their schools. The many different approaches taken by different local areas, and the successful uptake of the funding by schools, highlighted that local authorities are well placed to design an approach that is equitable and focused for greatest impact, where cross-department collaboration and capacity is supported.

Survey and case study contributors shared innovative approaches to make the funding even more impactful, from involving students in design and implementation, to connecting activity with the wider community, to linking up with other student and staff education work and bringing in outside expertise to add value for money.

But their innovation should not stop here. Many shared inventive ideas, such as mobile food education buses, offsite educational opportunities, addressing wider issues around junk food advertising and more. Thinking beyond capital investment and beyond the school gate can be next – but schools need new opportunities to innovate.

A new Healthy Food Innovation Fund will enable creativity and leadership to bloom, while addressing pressing issues around child food insecurity and diet-related ill health. It will make good on the Government’s promise to ensure every pound of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy is spent on improving children’s health. And the best part is that the money is already there.

Sustain will continue to call for expansion of the Levy to include other food and drink categories, and for the taxation threshold to be lowered to further encourage reduction of sugar consumption. But in the first instance we call on the Government to commit existing Levy revenue to invest in children’s health.

Laura Maclennan
Schools Development Manager, Trees for Cities

“Previous funding for schools from the Sugar Tax in 2018 was invaluable. With increasing concern over young people’s mental health and wellbeing, particularly in the face of Covid-19, there is growing recognition within the health and education sectors about the importance of healthy eating environments in schools.”
Recommendations

Ensure at least 50% of SDIL income is focused on food-related projects in schools

The general shift in diets towards energy-dense foods high in sugar, salt and fat is contributing to the high levels of overweight and obese children, with one in three children leaving primary school overweight or obese. Dedicated investment in healthy food access and education at a school level is as important as – if not more so than - continued funding of the Sports and PE Premium.

Feedback from schools on how the HPCF money was spent shows a diversity of innovative and holistic approaches that resulted in deeper pupil and community engagement around healthy eating, improved school meal uptake and skill-building among pupils and staff. According to our survey respondents and case studies, funding at such scale and focused on food is difficult for schools to access otherwise.

Ensure Local Authorities have time and resource to support schools applying

Our main recommendation is to ensure that local authorities are given advance notice and supported to have a coordinated approach to allocating the funding locally. This will allow an approach that meets local needs and contexts, and will help with monitoring outcomes and impact from the funding. This includes having a good lead time to communicate fund plans to local authorities.

Schools do not always have the capacity to engage in funding pots that have application requirements and benefit from extra support.

Ensure the capital investment, education and public health teams are involved

The majority of the public health teams we have interviewed were not involved in the allocation of the Healthy Pupils Capital fund. But where they were, uptake and targeting to higher-need areas were much better, and overall monitoring of impact was also improved.

For a future fund, it is imperative that the local public health and education teams are involved in the allocation of the funds from the beginning, with time to prepare shopping lists of potential spending options before the funding is allocated.

Make it easier to target ‘hard to reach’ schools or regions with the highest level of food poverty or obesity

The HPCF was a blanket fund that all schools, diocese schools and academies were able to apply for. To help reduce the inequality of public health spending and prevent funding from being spread too thinly, we recommend that a future fund includes guidance and advice on how to determine allocation to best meet local priorities.

Allocated money can be pooled together to fund a smaller number of schools with greater need to cover more costly projects. Or it can be offered to all schools to apply, but utilising local data on child deprivation or obesity to help with scoring alongside strength of application.

Rebecca Bushell
Secondary School PE Teacher, Buckinghamshire

“There are some amazing schemes out there to get students active, but when it comes to supporting nutrition, the resources are limited. Physical education and eating healthily go hand in hand, so surely there should be equal focus and investment in both areas.”
Local authorities can also take the Croydon approach and offer all schools a minimum amount, with schools in higher-need areas able to submit project proposals for a higher amount of funding. Councils may also opt to pool some or all of the funding for a larger capital or infrastructure project that can benefit all schools.

**Do not limit the fund to capital-only projects/infrastructure**

Limiting the fund to capital-only means that salaries and other revenue costs can't be covered. Implementing new projects/infrastructure without expertise and knowledge means that the money is likely to be spent inefficiently. Investing in new kitchen facilities without the cookery teachers, or a growing space without the knowledge of food growing is unlikely to have a meaningful effect on children's nutritional knowledge and health.

**Commit to a year-on-year fund to help schools plan ahead and build on previous success**

We would like to see a multi-year commitment for this fund, not simply to ensure there are no gaps in SDIL investment in children's health, but also because local authorities and schools wish to be able to plan ahead and build on previous work and success.

A fund of this type has the unique opportunity to put good, healthy food at the heart of school culture, and will require ongoing investment using a multitude of approaches.

“**When children do not have access to healthy food in schools, they become unhealthy adults in the future, putting a strain on the resources of the country. Spend millions now to save billions later.**”

Timilehin Omilana
Public Health Nutritionist, Thurrock Council
## Types of projects that a new fund could support

### Food access improvements

- **Dining facilities improvements**: upgrades to seating and serving areas to enable more children to enjoy time to eat and socialise
- **Cooking facilities improvements**: upgrades to school kitchens to enable better meal provision, or even bringing catering in-house if offsite
- **Breakfast club investment**: funding toward ingredients, facilities and education materials to expand support for children to access breakfast at school
- **After-school and holiday club investment**: funding toward improving cooking facilities, equipment and healthy eating education provision for after-school or holiday clubs
- **Healthy tuck shop**: stationary or mobile facility to enable sharing fruit and vegetable snacks with children either at break time or after school
- **Drinking fountain provision**: installation of new drinking fountains, or upgrades improve health and safety, such as foot-operated or refill-friendly models

### Food education and skills improvement

- **Cookery education investment**: capital investment in facilities and equipment, or toward ingredients to enable delivery of cookery education programmes
- **Food growing investment**: investment in growing spaces such as raised beds, polytunnels, allotments, and orchards as well as equipment and growing materials
- **Food teacher training**: Staff training and asset development to support food or growing education, as well as training to support a better dining experience
- **Mobile food education bus**: converted bus to enable food education activities, as well as wider community food engagement, which could be a shared asset benefitting multiple schools
- **Dedicated food teaching facilities**: standalone facility development to benefit multiple schools with cookery education and training for both children and teachers
- **Food education beyond the school gate**: investment toward costs and materials associated with food-related activities such as farm visits or other off-site food education activities

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**Polly Tuckwell**  
Parent Teacher Rep and trainee teacher, Wiltshire

“I’ve repeatedly witnessed the truth that a hungry child cannot learn. Free school meals, fruit & veg schemes and free breakfast clubs all impact positively on this fact.”

**Helen Cheetham**  
OASES North East, County Durham

“I’ve seen how children learning to grow and prepare food to eat are empowered and grow in self-confidence as a result of their new found skills. As well as enjoying the health benefits and trying new foods, the children take ownership of their own patch of ground and this gives them a real sense of achievement.”
Appendix 1

Healthy Food Innovation Fund Survey Results

In August of 2020, Sustain launched a Healthy Food Innovation Fund survey, which was open to schools, local authorities, third sector organisations and other entities involved in school food projects. The survey explored how the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was spent, as well as school access to other funding for capital projects improving children's health. It also asked how schools and others could best utilise a future fund for capital and other one-off projects improving children's access to healthy food.

The survey was promoted through Sustain’s networks including the Sugar Smart, Veg Cities and Children’s Food campaigns, as well as the Sustainable Food Places network, and via the School Food Matters and the Soil Association Food for Life Programme networks.

A total of 90 respondents completed the survey, consisting of:

- 31 schools, including 23 education, administrative and PTA leads, and 7 chefs and caterers.
- 30 local authority staff, including healthy schools leads, food education officers, and public health leads.
- 26 organisations and community groups connected with schools and healthy eating education.
- 3 individuals not professionally connected with schools.

HPCF spend

Only 27, or one third of, respondents confirmed that their Local Authority or school accessed HPCF. Taking into consideration that the majority of respondents reached by promotion of the survey are already linked in to networks around school food and health promotion, uncertainty around HPCF uptake indicates low awareness of its availability and utilization.

HPCF funding was spent on a variety of projects, including outdoor facilities, Daily Mile tracks, school gardens, edible playgrounds, drinking fountains, sensory/nature connection spaces promoting mindfulness, cookery teaching facilities, fridges and storage, dining facility improvements, and in some cases, the building of entire kitchens to bring school meal catering in-house. A number of respondents cited that the funding was spent entirely on physical activity-related projects.

Gaynor Scholefield  
Deputy Head of Health Improvement, Calderdale

“HPCF was spent on physical activity-related projects, in Calderdale, which is important. In the future, it would be ideal to be able to support schools to invest in a more holistic programme of improving children's health, including both physical activity and healthy food access.”

HPCF issues

Of the 27 respondents that confirmed HPCF access, 18, or two thirds, reported having issues.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest issue, from a third of respondents that cited issues, was with a lack of monitoring and evaluation of impact of the fund. Except where council teams had the capacity and collaboration across departments to enable a centrally-coordinated funding application system, there was no mechanism by which to find out how the money had been spent, and indeed track whether it was spent as intended to improve children’s health.

Lack of communication and advance notice from the Government, as well as guidance on coordinating the tracking down and allocation of funding were also common concerns. What is clear from the responses is that there are wide inconsistencies in how the funding was coordinated locally, due to existing internal relationships between departments.
Insufficient guidance on targeting spend, including examples of spending, were cited, as well as difficulties in identifying capital projects that a small amount of funding could support. A number of respondents highlighted that meaningful capital investment requires bigger pots of funding.

Where people did not report issues, there was internal capacity to administer an application process with a built in system for monitoring and evaluation. Another organisation said that it was easy for schools to make use of the funding, as a wish list of difficult-to-fund capital projects already existed, but highlighted a need for a holistic approach to designing long-term impact of funding, ensuring that infrastructure is accompanied by staff and student engagement.

**Local Authority Public Health Advisor**

“As schools have not been required to report back on how the money has been spent and the impact it has been difficult to get this information. If they had to report back on this to Ofsted in the same way they report on Pupil Premium and Sports premium then this would help.”

**Other sources of capital and food project investment**

23 respondents confirmed that their areas benefit from other sources of capital and project funding to improve children’s access to healthy food. This included local authority investment in food-related school programmes, such as local Sugar Smart and child obesity reduction programmes, funding from the Soil Association Food for Life Programme, school meals catering contracts, Universal Infant Free School Meals capital fund and Holiday Hunger programmes. One respondent referenced the Mayor of London Food Flagship Schools pilot funding as another source.

**A future Healthy Food Investment Fund**

45 respondents agreed that a future Healthy Food Innovation Fund to invest in capital and other one-off projects on improving children’s food access and education is a good approach. Some added further comments, including wanting to see a fund benefitting early years as well, use of surplus/unclaimed funding on other programmes such as holiday hunger schemes and food banks that also benefit children, and a need for networking and sharing best practice among schools and local authorities as part of the fund.

Three respondents preferred that the schools themselves decide how to best spend the funding.

Four respondents expressed concerns over capital and one-off investments not having enough long-term impact or being too small to make a meaningful impact, as well as a need to invest in staff via training and capacity-building.

**Director, Multi-Academy Trust**

“We were keen in our network to use this fund to prompt additional interest and perseverance so that school staff continued to make further changes to improve children’s health. Installing new water fountains doesn’t guarantee lowered sugar intake unless combined with policy and practice on sugary drinks. It will make most impact over time when we encourage schools to adopt and promote self-reflection and a positive feedback loop for this kind of investment.”
Future allocation criteria

48 respondents gave details on how a future fund should be best allocated. 20 felt it should be targeted and concentrated on areas with most need, due to deprivation, obesity factors, or both. 13 felt it should be decided via an application process based on strength of proposal and impact. And a further five want to see a mix of equal access of funding, and extra targeted funds available to schools identified as having greater need. Six respondents felt it should be distributed equally among all schools. One felt it should be available to schools already enrolled in healthy eating programmes, and four others generally supported having a coordinated process.

Respondents also added further comments on making sure allocation is fair and efficient. One highlighted making the application process simple and accessible to schools with limited numbers and capacity (such as small rural schools). Others said funding should be linked up with third sector organisations who have solid track records of project delivery, in order to benefit from their expertise and avoid duplication.

Respondents were asked how they would spend such future funding, and gave a variety of answers. Most reflected HPCF suggested spends around food, including growing, dining facilities and cookery education. Others gave further ideas, including:

- Mobile bus projects delivering cookery sessions and produce in schools
- Project banning fast food ads near schools
- Staff and teacher training
- Offsite education in markets, community centres and farms
- Education programmes involving entire families
- Community involvement in school growing schemes
- Healthier vending options
- Funding schools joining Eco-Schools or Food For Life
- After-school and holiday cooking clubs

Local Authority Healthy Improvement Practitioner

“As an area with very small schools (50 pupils) we have very small pockets of areas in high deprivation. Allocation needs to consider this as generally we are never entitled. The application process is welcome but should not add to school pressures. Smaller schools have less staff and time to be able to do this.”
Appendix 2

Survey Questions

Questions 1-5: Personal information

6. Has your school/local authority accessed the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund?

7. If yes, what was the money used for, and what was the impact? Please provide examples of projects funded.

8. In your experience, were there issues with how the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund was provisioned, for example difficulties in targeting the spend on children’s health improvement projects, or measuring impact? If yes, please explain.

9. Has your school/local authority accessed the National Breakfast Scheme?

10. Has your school/local authority accessed the Sports Premium Scheme?

11. Has your school/local authority invested in healthy food infrastructure such as cookery or new dining facilities or food growing beyond the Sugar Levy funding? If so, what was the impact?

12. Any further details on successes or challenges around utilising funding to improve children’s healthy food?

13. Do you think the funding should be targeted in this way to fund one-off capital or innovation-type expenditure? Please add more detail in the comments.

14. What suggestions do you have for how grants should be allocated? (e.g. equally distributed each year to every school based on pupil numbers, targeted to schools in areas of high deprivation or childhood obesity, or based on application processes via their Multi-Academy Trust or local authority)

15. If you had access to e.g., a grant of £5-10,000 from a new fund, how would you spend the money to improve the food environment in your school? (We welcome any ideas, so think creatively)

16. Would you be willing to offer a local case study or quote to support our call for the establishment of this fund?

Questions 17-19: Personal consent

Sustain is proposing a dedicated fund, utilising at least 50% of the SDIL income, to be set up for the purpose of funding one-off investment and pilot projects to improve children’s access, education and experiences around healthy food. This fund would be for capital projects such as improving kitchen and dining infrastructure, setting up growing projects and pilot project funding to test out innovative ways to improve children’s health through food.

It would exclude existing funding and ongoing meal provision such as fruit & vegetable schemes and free school meals, as these should be funded through more stable government funding streams. As sugary drink consumption fluctuates year on year, so too will the levy income and thus the amount available to allocate to schools year on year.
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Refreshing Investment in Children’s Health: Using the Sugary Drinks Tax to improve healthy food access in schools

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About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote equity. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

sustain@sustainweb.org
www.sustainweb.org

Sustain, The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA
Tel: 020 3559 6777

Sustain is a Registered Charity No. 1018643