Food environment assessment tool www.feat-tool.org.uk

Feat case study: Hampshire County Council

Hampshire County Council is using the Food environment assessment tool to help tackle health inequalities and foster collaboration between planners and public health teams.

Interview with Lynn Butler, Senior Public Health Practitioner, Hampshire County Council.

What was the problem you were trying to tackle? What data did you feel you were missing?

Hampshire has a population of nearly 1.4 million, making it the third most populated county in England. Excluding London, it is home to one in seven people in the South East.

63% of adults in Hampshire are overweight or obese – slightly above the regional (60%) and national (62%) averages. We also experience significant health inequalities and see higher rates of obesity in areas of greater deprivation, mirroring the national picture. For instance, in Gosport, 26% of Reception-aged children are overweight or obese, compared to 17% in Hart. We see a similar pattern for Year 6 children (37% overweight or obese in Havant compared to 24% Winchester). In adults, 68% are overweight or obese in Rushmoor, compared to 53% in Hart.

We know there has been a proliferation of hot food takeaways across the country in recent years, which has tended to be higher in areas of greater deprivation. The research was telling us that this is likely to be influencing people's food choices and consequently their long term health, potentially exacerbating health inequalities.

We wanted to take a data driven approach to the situation locally. We wanted to know whether or not hot food takeaways were actually growing disproportionately in Hampshire compared to all other food outlets, and whether the pattern of growth in Hampshire followed the national patterns of deprivation.



We also wanted to be able to compare and rank each district in the county. But this sort of data hasn't traditionally been available, so this approach wasn't possible – until we discovered *Feat*.

What were the unique data or features of Feat that you couldn't find elsewhere?

Feat is really easy to use – very intuitive and backed up by handy how-to guides for the more advanced features. Being able to observe the current numbers in each district, and then comparing them to each other and the Hampshire average was invaluable.

Unlike other data sources, *Feat* has historic data going back to 2014, so we can look at trends over time. As well as takeaways, *Feat* also has information on lots of different sorts of food outlets, which allows us to compare growth across sectors.



How were the data from Feat used? Was there a formal output?

As well as the analysis of the data itself, *Feat* has really started a conversation here. It's highlighted an important topic and got people thinking about how their own work could impact on it.

The 2017/18 Director of Public Health's Annual Report, Shaping Place to improve health outcomes focussed on the built and natural environment. This is a really important document as it's used to inform our future work. For the report, our Public Health Intelligence Team extracted data from *Feat*, which we combined with local data to create graphs showing the number of takeaways per 1,000 population across districts in Hampshire and across deciles of deprivation at the community level.

What has happened as a result of using Feat?

The conversation that *Feat* started has helped to foster collaboration between our Planning and Public Health teams. Collectively, we're all now thinking about things more in terms of land use and food outlets and what these mean for health. The Annual Report describes the development of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which contain formal planning controls for takeaways, as a strategic priority for districts across Hampshire.

Havant Borough is already exploring this process of policy adoption. If formally adopted, this would make Havant the first district in Hampshire to have planning controls related to hot food takeaways within their local plan. We think this will make a real impact on the health and wellbeing of the local area. These regulations would be directly as a result of us having access to *Feat*.



Do you have future plans for use of Feat?

Feat has become part of our day-to-day business now, and we have plans to repeat the above use in other districts in Hampshire, as well as using the data to start conversations with other key stakeholders, such as school teachers.

Why do you think others should use Feat?

The *Feat* data gave us a new ways of working, and sparked a new focus on the food environment for health promotion. *Feat* has also helped us to tell the story of how our local food environments are changing over time, even down to changes happening at community-level.

We liked that *Feat* was produced with the aim of supporting policy, so it was exactly fit for purpose and gave us pretty much everything we needed. A major strength of *Feat* is that it saves time – which is a really useful commodity in our busy local authority. If we'd had to find the data and calculate these numbers ourselves, it would have been a mammoth task.



- Access the Food environment assessment tool (Feat): www.feat-tool.org.uk
- Contact the Feat team: feat-tool@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk
- Hampshire Director of Public Health's Annual Report, *Shaping Place to improve health outcomes* www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/publichealth/annualreports
- Contact Lynn Butler, Senior Public Health Practitioner, Hampshire County Council: lynn.butler@hants.gov.uk
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