



Resource W: Developing the draft whole system action plan¹

The core working team (CWT), with support from senior colleagues, can now begin the process of drafting the whole system action plan using the information collected in phases 2 and 4. This is a critical phase which should be completed shortly after Workshop 2 to maintain momentum. The action plan will bring together the current and planned actions (phase 2) with the proposed actions (phase 4) into one document. When completed, the action plan will be presented back to the system network, so that elements of the plan can be verified or refined and actions for implementation prioritised.

The following 2 steps need to be completed when drafting the action plan:

1. Overlaying proposed actions onto the systems map.
2. Transferring information (such as actions from phase 2 and 4) into the draft whole systems action plan.

Step 1: Overlaying actions on the systems map

The objective of this step is to overlay proposed actions (phase 4 – Workshop 2) onto the collated systems map with current and planned actions. This will enable stakeholders to understand the breadth of current, planned and proposed actions and help identify gaps in the proposed approach. You can then consider the gaps in phase 5.

Resources required

- collated systems map with current and future actions
- list(s) of proposed stakeholder actions (captured in phase 4, Workshop 2)

¹ This resource is part of Public Health England's wider whole systems approach to obesity programme. Please search to find the main guide and additional resources.

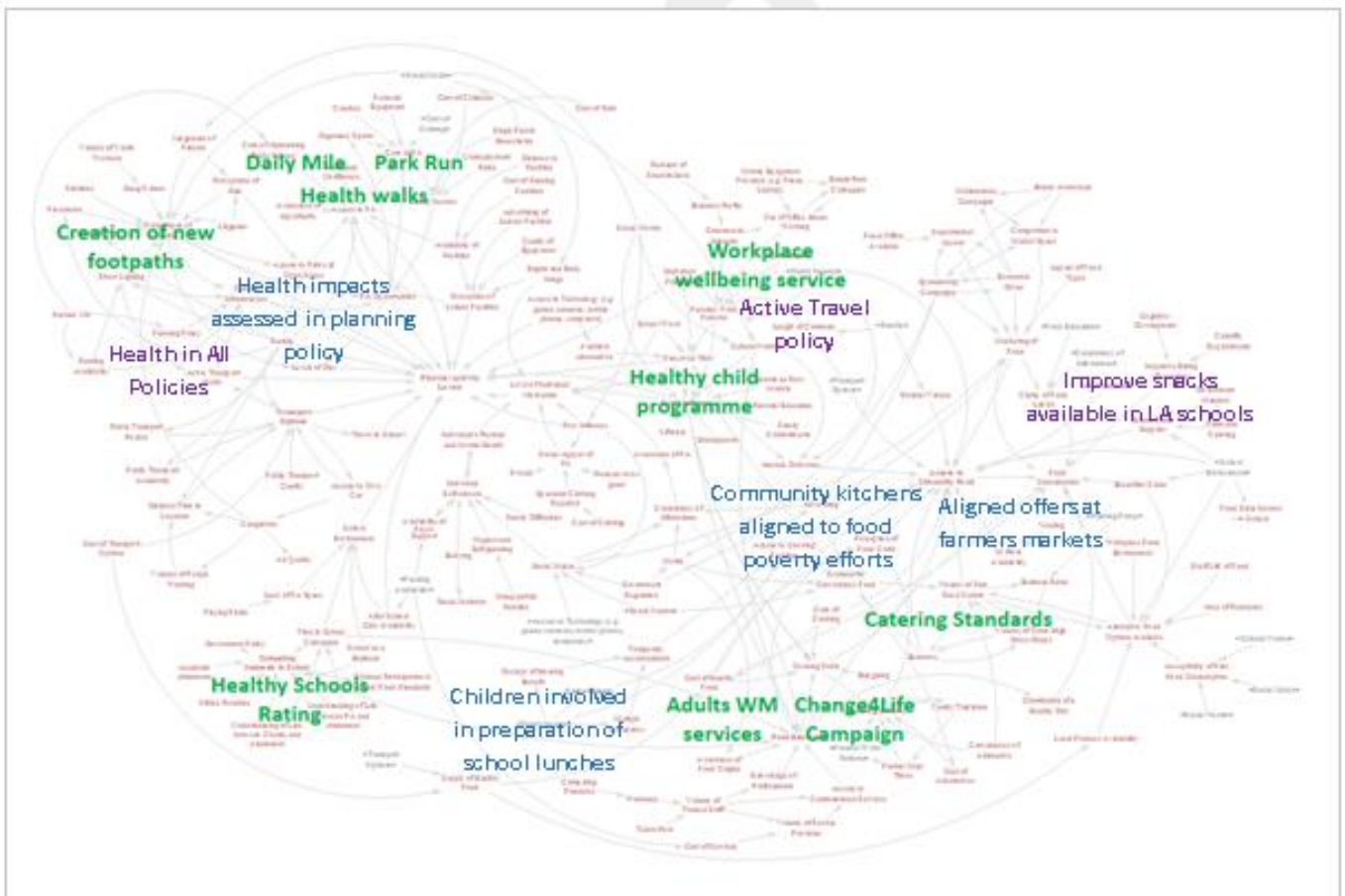
Process

This step builds on the work completed previously in phase 4 (resource Q- preparing for Workshop 2).

1. Open the collated system map that has the current and planned actions overlaid on it. Save a copy of this systems map under a new name (for example: system map with overlaid actions).
2. Using the list(s) of proposed actions from Workshop 2, begin to add the proposed actions onto the systems map. This is achieved by opening your system map (in PowerPoint), creating text boxes for each action, and then overlaying these onto the system map. Tips are provided below:
 - write the proposed actions in a different colour to the current actions to ensure that they are distinguishable
 - place the action as close as possible to the area of the systems map where you think it would intervene
 - you may wish to discuss with colleagues where you think the proposed action best intervenes in the systems map (such as what is the action aiming to change in the system, for example a cause or relationship between causes). The proposed actions could intervene in multiple places so duplicate copies of the action can be overlaid on the map
3. If any additional current actions were identified in the Workshop 2, add them to the system map at this step.

Figure 1 provides an example of a system map with existing, planned and proposed actions.

Figure 1: Example system map with existing, planned and proposed actions



Key: current actions (green), planned actions (purple), and proposed actions (blue).

With the actions now overlaid on the system map, the CWT can assess the comprehensiveness and alignment of the proposed approach as follows:

- if gaps are apparent, the CWT can reflect on whether further actions are required to bridge these gaps, or if these gaps should inform the scoping and development of future work
- additional actions can be proposed by the CWT. These can be overlaid on the systems map and presented back to the system network with the other elements of the action plan

Step 2: Transferring information into the whole system action plan

The next step is to transfer current, planned and proposed actions into the whole systems action plan template (resource X – a Word template or Y – an Excel template are available). Three examples have been included in the whole system action plan template in resource Y. The aim of this step is to bring all actions into a single document (separated by the themes identified in phase 4).

Note: Sufficient time should be allocated to complete this action plan. You may wish to reformat it to align with similar action plans created by the local authority.

Resources required

- system map with current, planned and proposed actions
- whole system action plan template (you can use either resource X- Word document or resource Y- Excel document)

Process

The following steps will help you draft the whole system action plan:

1. Align actions with common themes (such as, those identified in your collated system map in phase 4). The whole system action plan will have a sub-document for each theme. If an action is relevant to more than one theme, it should be included in each theme's sub-document.
2. Create a sub-document for each theme and title it with the name of the theme.
3. Input the name/description of the current, planned and proposed actions into the first column of the action plan. Where similar actions have been proposed, these can be collated to form a single action. The CWT should judge whether proposed actions are sufficiently unique to warrant their own row.
4. Complete the remainder of the table for each action. The information below highlights what can be included in each column of the action plan.

Additional information for completing the whole system action plan

The CWT may need to request further information from members of the systems network to complete the draft action plan. This co-productive approach is likely to increase accountability, buy-in and engagement of the members. The action plan should be seen as dynamic and adaptive and will need to be revisited and revised on numerous occasions. This is a key role of the system network.

Brief description of action

The CWT should consider the action in the context of the action scales model presented in Workshop 2. Actions may be seen to target:

Events – These are happening now and can be seen in our day-to-day lives. They are the behaviours and outcomes that arise from how the system functions. Two examples include few families walking to school and people consuming high sugar drinks. Actions at this level generally provide short term fixes, but do not address the underlying

structures that caused the behaviours/outcomes to occur in the first place. For example, the introduction of a walking bus initiative, or information campaigns on the risks of consuming too many sugar-sweetened beverages.

System structures – These are the underlying structures that cause the events to occur. These could include the physical infrastructure, relationships between parts of the system and the flow of information across the system. Actions at this level, which seek to reshape or redesign these structures, are more likely to reduce the frequency of events occurring in the future. For example, providing physical infrastructure (for example, pavements, street lighting, safe cycle storage), encourages active travel or reducing the marketing and advertising of high fat, salt, sugar foods and drinks, encourages reduced exposure / consumption.

System goals – These are the goals that the system, or a part of the system, is working to achieve. For example, increasing neighbourhood walkability, reducing the consumption of high sugar/calorie foods and drinks. The system goals drive the system structures. Competing goals across different parts of the system may also make it harder for change to occur. Actions taken at this level alter the goals, targets or ambitions that the system - and people within the system - are aiming to achieve. For example, establishing targets for increased neighbourhood walkability; or healthy school accreditation schemes including healthy food award schemes and strategies for improving the local food offer.

System beliefs – These are the deeply held beliefs, norms, attitudes and values of the individuals and organisations within the system. They are the foundations that allow the system to keep functioning as it does and are reflected in the systems goals. Actions taken at this level aim to change the deeply held beliefs of the stakeholders and/or organisations who steer the direction of the system and sub-systems. For example, development of evidence to demonstrate that pedestrian infrastructure is a key factor in a sustainable and prosperous local economy, or the adoption of guidelines for healthier food procurement across all key stakeholder organisations (for example local authority, NHS and contracted service providers).

Current and planned actions or additional actions identified by the CWT should be classified against the action scales model at this stage.

Anticipated outcome

What is the intended outcome of this action and who should it impact? Consider what the intended outcome is when implementing each action. Visualise what the outcomes of the action will be if implemented successfully (within the timeframes outlined below). Think about who or what the actions are likely to impact, and who the action is targeted at. Some actions will target the entire local population, whilst others

will target specific groups. It is important to consider health inequalities at this step. The aim is that actions will align with wider priorities of the local authority; these should be noted here (for example: economic prosperity, best start in life for children, helping vulnerable groups).

Actions do not always have to be targeted at the general public or specific population groups. Some actions may seek to change internal structures and cultures within the local authority. For this reason, it is important to classify your actions using the actions scales model.

When will the action have an impact? Time is a key factor when considering a whole system approach, especially when accounting for the time delay between the implementation of an action and it having an impact. The CWT should consider when they believe the action will have an impact, in the short (1 to 5 years), medium (5 to 10 years) or longer-term (10+ years). This will also help prioritise actions and their implementation.

Feasibility

Is the action feasible to deliver at this time? Discuss if the action, or aspects of the action, can feasibly be implemented within the proposed timeframe.

The following questions will be useful to reflect upon when completing this column:

- are resources available for this action to be implemented? Resources may include budget, person hours, expertise and experience
- is there an opportunity to obtain this resource if currently not available?
- who do you need to engage with to facilitate the implementation of actions?
- are there any internal structures or barriers (for example: within the local authority) that need addressing for actions to be implemented?
- if there are barriers to an action being implemented, how could these barriers be overcome?
- what else would be required to make this action feasible?
- are there members of the systems network who could work together to make this action feasible? This may require expansion of the systems network so that the relevant stakeholders are invited and engaged

If it is not feasible to deliver an action at this time, the action should be retained in the action plan to be considered in the future. This will ensure that all actions proposed by the systems network have been documented and considered. The above questions will also encourage the systems network to identify what needs to happen to implement an

action (if not feasible at this time). These questions also support prioritisation; understanding what can be delivered now and in the future.

Responsibility

Who is responsible for the implementation of this action? This should have been documented when the stakeholders completed the action registers during Workshop 2. If this information is missing, the CWT may propose individuals and organisations (these could be from multiple sectors) who could help implement individual actions. These should be highlighted in a different colour on the action plan as the CWT will need to approach these stakeholders for agreement.

Alignment

What is meant by aligning actions?

It is important to consider whether the actions of stakeholders in the system are working in the same direction, towards the common agenda or shared aspiration, and doing so using consistent messaging. As a simple example, consider 2 different physical activity providers working in the same locality. Both are seeking to increase activity levels of the local population (therefore having a common agenda), yet one provider promotes a “10,000 steps-a-day” message, whilst the other promotes the “30 minutes of activity, 5 times per week” message. These inconsistent messages may be confusing for local residents. A greater alignment between providers would ensure that the same message is being promoted and should also encourage the 2 providers to work collaboratively to enhance the local physical activity offer.

It is also useful to assess whether there is duplication of effort across the system, which could represent an inefficient use of resource. For example, the local authority transport team may be working to increase active transport to decrease carbon emissions. At the same time, the public health team are also aiming to increase active transport to improve health outcomes. Both teams are potentially undertaking overlapping activities. Aligning these efforts, creating clear communication channels and shared agendas will maximise the collective impact of these actions.

Another way to achieve alignment is to consider how actions with similar intended outcomes can support each other. For example, a variety of similarly commissioned services could be better connected to maximise their impact (for example: holiday hunger initiatives, food banks, and waste fewer initiatives). These initiatives could share data, expertise, and become more aware of what each other is delivering. In doing so, their collective effort would have a greater impact on the system.

Does this action align with existing/proposed actions? Consideration of how actions align in your local area is imperative to whole systems working. This will enable the CWT to determine the extent in which multiple actions can have an impact across the system. Time and emphasis should be placed on considering how the actions align. A number of the proposed actions may align with work that is already happening or planned across your local system (refer to the results from phase 2, action mapping).

Where a proposed action aligns with a current or planned action, it could be useful to connect stakeholders involved to discuss how they can work together to align their actions to maximise their impact. Where actions don't yet align, efforts should be made to identify how to align them. This might involve identifying barriers to alignment and how to overcome them.

The following questions are useful to consider when completing this column:

- will alignment add value to the overall aims of the whole systems approach?
- whose work in the system does this action support?
- whose work in the system supports the proposed action?
- what current relationships would it be helpful for us to improve?
- what new relationships would it be helpful for us to develop?
- how can actions be supported (for example: shared resource)?
- who do we need to engage with to facilitate the alignment of actions?
- are there any internal structures (for example: within the local authority) that need addressing for actions to be aligned?
- will the alignment of actions enable other at-risk population groups to be targeted?
- if there are barriers to an action being aligned, how could these barriers be overcome?

Additional impacts on the system

Who or what may additionally be impacted by this action? The CWT should use the system map to help identify where unintended consequences may arise. Thought experiments (such as, running through a range of possible scenarios) are useful to help identify unintended consequences; this involves thinking through and discussing what the possible implications of an action may be if implemented. The CWT could also ask members of the system network to think through and identify positive and negative unintended consequences. You should consider here whether the action may have an unintended consequence on health inequalities; is there a possibility that this action may narrow or widen health inequalities?

Implementation timeframe

When can this action be implemented? The CWT should mutually agree a timeframe for when the action will start with stakeholders who have responsibility for its implementation. This timeframe helps to develop a commitment to action and a prioritisation of action. This section of the action plan can be completed after the draft action plan has been presented to the system network in phase 5.

Commitment

When will progress be reviewed? When agreeing an implementation timeframe, the CWT should also agree with the stakeholder(s) responsible for the action, a date for when progress will be reviewed. Many of the proposed actions will be undertaken voluntarily, as is the nature of whole systems working. This section of the action plan can also be completed once the draft action plan has been presented to the system network in phase 5.

What will success look like? How will you know that the action is working? It is necessary to agree how progress and the outcome will be measured. Visualise what the successful implementation of this action would look like, and then determine how you would monitor progress towards this successful implementation. You could include either a proxy indicator of progress towards the implementation of the action, a proxy indicator of progress towards the outcome, or an indicator of change in the outcome variable.

It is also important to consider the extent to which actions are working towards the collective goal. A whole systems approach is made up of well-aligned actions with collective goals, rather than a range of actions with only individual objectives (see box below for an example). Align individual objectives with the collective goal.

Note: There will be time delays between taking action and seeing an outcome, as is common in complex systems. Therefore, if the desired outcome is likely to take a long time to achieve, proxy measures are important interim measures to assess. In some instances, the outcomes that you are hoping to improve may actually worsen before getting better. Again, this is part of working in complex systems.

Identifying success

Each action should contribute towards the collective outcome of the whole systems approach (such as, a long-term outcome – reducing the prevalence of obesity for example). It is important to note that no single action will achieve this outcome alone.

It is also imperative that actions align with other actions to maximise impact. For example, restricting the proximity of fast food outlets to schools (a systems structure level action) could be supported by 1) dietary education in schools, 2) a mandatory healthy vendor rating scheme for existing food outlets nearby to schools, and 3) improved school food standards. All of these actions are aiming to improve the dietary intake of school children (the long-term collective outcome). It is important to ensure that these collective outcomes can be monitored (for example: regular dietary assessment of school children).

Proxy measures will be required to monitor short-term progress towards the collective outcome and the individual objectives of the action. For example, the healthy vendor scheme might have a proxy measure in place that monitors how many vendors are compliant with the scheme, and upon review, how many vendors have improved their rating. It is then clear how this action is working towards the collective outcomes of the whole systems approach. It is aligned.

The defining of collective goals and proxy measures is therefore an important step to take. These may need adapting and refining over time. These collective outcomes should be congruent with the system goals and system beliefs (see resource P- action scales model).