Health Secretary John Reid published the Government’s White Paper on improving public health in England on Tuesday 16th November 2004. As the foreword by John Reid outlines, there are three principles that run throughout the long awaited Public Health White Paper:

- helping people to make healthier choices for themselves;
- protecting people’s health from the actions of others;
- recognising the particular needs and the importance of emotional and physical development of the young.

The White Paper states that Government “has a role in taking the lead on issues where strong national and public concern about health indicates the need to do more. This includes concerted action with industry to increase awareness of the benefits and supply of healthy options – in particular supporting opportunities for exercise and a healthy diet – and action to reduce demand for less healthy foods, tobacco and alcohol, particularly among children and young people.”

The Department of Health (DH) will lead on action to promote health by “influencing people’s attitudes to the choices they make through a strategy that extends across all aspects of health and involves a broad range of different Government departments and agencies” e.g. those involved with the NHS, food, sport, the environment and transport. DH will appoint an independent body to implement the strategy on its behalf.

The strategy will include new communications, which will build on previous successful campaigns, e.g. on smoking and salt, and will be extended to include obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in different groups. There will be a focus on tackling health inequalities.

**Aspects addressed to the food and drink industry**

The White Paper acknowledges “the commitment that retailers and food producers have already made towards promoting healthier eating” but also notes that “the Government recognises the scope that exists within the food industry’s policies and practices for further action”.

In summary, “further actions” that are noted in the Paper include:

- Communications campaigns
- Labelling & sign posting information
- Promotion and pricing
- Product development
- Customer information and advice
- Voluntary action around on the promotion of foods to children
- Voluntary social responsibility scheme for alcohol producers and retailers

In some instances, the White Paper provides further direction about how it expects these actions to be initiated, implemented and even evaluated. Where such directives exist, these are detailed below.

**Communications campaigns to support healthy choices**

The Paper states that:

- DH intends to simplify messages about 5 A DAY, including what a portion means for children and adults, for example introducing the use of “a handful” as the measure of a portion.
- DH will lead on action to promote health by influencing people’s attitudes to the choices that they make. A strategy will be developed in order to achieve this.
- The new strategy will include new communications to disseminate information on obesity, healthy
eating, physical activity. This will also build on previous campaigns, such as on salt and smoking.

- Obesity will be an early focus of this strategy, through a new cross government campaign to raise awareness of the health risk and how diet and physical activity can be used to manage an individual’s body weight.
- in the long term it is expected that a significant part of the overall strategy will be jointly funded by Government and industry.

Government will encourage industry involvement in campaigns to ensure consistent messages reach people through a number of sources that actively and consistently promote health.

With regard to information on health in the media, from the beginning of 2005, the Department of Health will:

- expand the existing programme of expert briefings by the Chief Medical Officer to include regular and co-ordinated updates on a wider range of health-related topics
- establish an independent national centre for media and health.

**Labelling and signposting**

The White Paper suggests few consumers can understand the current nutrition labelling, and consumers need to know where particular foods fit into a healthy balanced diet to enable them to make informed choices.

In response to this, the White Paper states that:

- the Government will press vigorously for progress during 2005 (during the UK presidency of the EU) to simplify nutrition labelling and make it mandatory on packaged foods.
- by mid-2005 the Government aims to have introduced a system that could be used as a standard basis for signposting foods. The signpost to be used on the front of food packaging is expected to help people understand at a glance which foods can make a positive contribution to a healthy diet, and which are recommended to be eaten in moderation or sparingly.
- the criteria, which will build on the criteria being developed for use of the 5 A DAY logo, will take account of fat, salt and sugar levels.
- the Government recognises the form of signposting can vary, and will work with the food industry, on completion of research being conducted by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), to develop a clear coding system to be commonly used by early 2006. [The FSA is conducting two relevant pieces of research: a project to identify a nutrient profiling system for foods and a project to assess consumer understanding and preferences for five different signposting options, several of which would be reliant on underpinning nutrient profiling of foods, i.e. a ‘traffic lights scheme’.]

**Developing Partnerships with Industry to promote health**

The White Paper states that:

- the Government intends to discuss with the food industry how they might contribute to funding national campaigns and other national initiatives to promote positive health information and education.
- Health Ministers and the FSA are leading discussions with industry to identify and implement a range of proposals to increase opportunities for people to make healthier food choices. These are aimed at:
  o increasing the availability of healthier food, including decreasing levels of salt, added sugars and fat in prepared and processed food and drink, and increasing access to fruit and vegetables
  o reversing the trend towards bigger portion sizes
  o adopting consistent and clear standards for information on food, including sign posting.
- the Government will be working with industry to develop voluntary action on:
o long term and interim targets for reducing sugar and fat levels in different category foods
o development of guidance on portion sizes to reduce energy, fat, sugar and salt intake.

The White Paper recognises two other areas for key action from the food industry. These include:

• promotion and pricing – **communication strategies to promote healthier eating**, including fruit and vegetables, through point of sale information, leaflets and websites
• **customer information and advice** – including healthy eating and the promotion of sensible drinking messages.

In line with the commitment in the Sustainable Farming and Food report published by Defra in 2003, the White Paper states that the Government will work with the farming and food industries to co-ordinate action through a **Food and Health Action Plan** – to be published early 2005. This will be backed up with wider action in the **Food Standards Agency Strategic Plan** and the 5-year plans of other Government departments (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, DCMS, Defra). A **Physical Activity Plan** is also promised.

**Promotion of foods to children**

Following a review of evidence and the Choosing Health Consultation, the Government considers "there is a strong case for action to restrict the advertising and promotion to children of those foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar". Furthermore, to have maximum effect, the White Paper states that "action needs to be comprehensive and taken in relation to all forms of food advertising and promotion, including broadcast, non-broadcast, sponsorship & brand-sharing, point of sale advertising including vending in schools, and labels, wrappers & packaging".

The White Paper outlines **various options to enhance and strengthen the rules governing advertising**, including:

• when, where and how frequently certain advertisements and promotions appear
• the use of cartoon characters, role models and celebrities to promote foods, and glamorisation of foods children should eat in moderation or seldom
• the inclusion of clear nutritional information and/or balancing messages in advertising, to counteract the influence of advertisements for foods high in fat, salt or sugar.
• These options will be dependant upon the nutrient profiling scheme developed by DH and FSA – the development of which was outlined earlier, for use with coding/sign posting systems.

The Government will look to **Ofcom to consult on proposals** on tightening the role on broadcast, advertising, sponsorship and promotion of food and drink, to ensure that "children are properly protected from encouragement to eat too many high fat, salt and sugar foods" both during children’s programming and at other times when large numbers of children are watching.

In relation to other forms of food advertising and promotion, the White Paper states:

• the Government will work with industry, advertisers, consumer groups and other stakeholders to encourage new measures to **strengthen existing voluntary codes in non-broadcast areas**, through:
  o setting up a new food and drink advertising and promotion forum to review, supplement, strengthen and bring together existing provisions
  o contribute funding to the development of new health initiatives, including positive health campaigns.
• **sponsorships of food and drink in schools** will be considered as part of the overall approach.

The White Paper reports that the Government is committed to ensuring that measures to protect children’s health are rigorously implemented and soundly based on evidence of impact, and indicates that:
• the effect of these actions will be measured by considering the balance of food promotion to children and children’s food preferences
• failure to change by early 2007 will result in action, either through existing powers or new legislation to implement a clearly defined framework for regulating the promotion of food to children.

The Paper also notes that:

• the Government are keen to see Industry use positive campaigns to promote healthy lifestyles.

Alcohol and health

In terms of industry involvement, Government will work with industry to develop a voluntary social responsibility scheme for alcohol producers and retailers to protect young people by:

• placing information for the public on alcohol containers and in alcohol retail outlets
• including reminders about responsible drinking on alcohol advertisements
• checking identification and refusing to sell alcohol to people who are under 18.

Other food and nutrition issues outlined in the Paper

Children and schools
• A national target to halt, by 2010, the year-on-year increase in obesity among children under 11 years of age.
• Improvements to public support around nutrition in the early years of childhood.
• From 2005, the Healthy Start Scheme will provide all pregnant women under 18 years and other eligible (eligibility for those aged 18+ is based on income) pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and mothers with young children, with a voucher that can be exchanged for fresh fruit and vegetables, milk and infant formula. This scheme will be replacing the current Welfare Foods Scheme, which provides infant formula to mothers with young children, and will be backed up by a new communications campaign and a training programme for health professionals.
  o This scheme is also expected to provide an opportunity for health professionals to identify and provide further advice to those pregnant mothers who need extra support.
• The Government will continue to press for Amendments to the EU directive on Infant Formula and Follow on Formula, with a view to further restricting advertising of infant formula.
• The core priorities of the Healthy School standard will be broadened to include a focus on issues that directly contribute to the delivery of national targets including those on childhood obesity.
• In line with the commitments made in the NHS plan (2000) and the NHS Cancer Plan (2000), by the end of 2004 all four to six year olds in LEA maintained schools in England will be eligible for a free piece of fruit or vegetable every school day. Materials and resources are being launched to assist schools in ensuring the scheme is integrated into the whole school approach to healthier eating.
  o Following evaluation (to be completed in early 2005), DH will consider extending the scheme to LEA maintained nurseries.
• The Government will invest to improve the nutritional value of school meals in England, over the next 3 years, by:
  o revising school meal standards, which will include the consideration of reverting to nutrient-based standards
  o Ofsted inspectors will be looking at healthy eating focused activities in schools, including school meals
  o extending the new standards to cover food across the school day, including breakfast clubs, tuck shops and vending machines (subject to legislation)
  o provide guidance on food procurement for head teachers and governors, and improve training for catering staff.
• Guidance and resources around the implementation of food-focused activities in schools will be available in early 2005. These will be based on the lessons learnt from the Food in Schools Pilot.
• Improved physical activity patterns among children will be encouraged (sport, play and active travel):
By 2010, all schools in England should have active travel plans (250 local authority based school travel advisers will be funded).

There will be support for children who want to cycle.

The national target is to increase the proportion of schoolchildren spending a minimum of 2 hours/week in high quality PE and school sport (within and beyond the curriculum) to 75% in 2006 and 85% in 2008.

**Local communities**

- DH have committed to funding community food initiatives, similar to the 5 A DAY local initiatives funded by lottery fund until 2006. Funding will be awarded to PCTs from 2006.
- Guidance on good practice for the provision of food in the public sector (including the NHS, the Prison Service and the Ministry of Defence), including food procurement and nutritional standards, is being developed.
- The Government will look at opportunities to also promote this guidance in the private sector through the introduction of a national ‘Healthy Eating’ award. To build on local initiatives, such as ‘Heartbeat awards’.
- Pilots will be established to develop the evidence-base for effectiveness in promoting health and wellbeing through the workplace.
- NHS accredited health trainers will offer advice on how to ensure a healthy lifestyle, and support on implementing such recommendations. The trainers will be from the local community and will be accredited to provide general advice on improving health and on specific issues such as changing diet.
- The trainers will be able to support individuals in developing their own personal health guides, and support them in implementing the guide.
- The White Paper does not go into detail about how nutrition training will be delivered, or how the quality of the advice provided to the public will be monitored and evaluated.

**A health promoting NHS**

- The Government will initially concentrate on improving services to help people who are overweight or obese and to prevent excess weight gain from an early age.
- Definitive guidance (from NICE) on prevention, identification, management and treatment of obesity is due to be available in 2007.
- Under the new contractual arrangements for NHS Dentistry (from October 2005), dentists will give a new focus to advice on the prevention of disease, lifestyle advice, for example advice on diet and nutrition.
- The Government will develop and implement better services through the NHS to tackle obesity. Proposed action includes:
  - to develop a care pathway, providing a model for treatment and prevention
  - coordinated activity within each PCT, with a range of appropriately trained staff to include health visitors, school nurses, practice nurses, dietitians
  - trained staff who can work in different settings, working alongside obesity prevention and management experts within the overall whole system approach
  - the Government will commission the production of a “weight loss” guide, to help people select the approaches that are healthy and most likely to help them lose weight and maintain a healthy weight
  - the Government will support the setting up of a national partnership for obesity to promote practical action on the prevention of obesity and as a source of information and evidence of effectiveness (both diet and physical activity)
  - to allocate money for training and management around the provision of evidence-based obesity prevention and treatment, as part of the National Health Competency Framework.