

## October 2008

Updates for paragraph 11.2

### **UK GOVERNMENT FORESIGHT REPORT: TACKLING OBESITY**

A major report from the Office of Science sets out recommendations on how society might deliver, over the next 40 years, a sustainable response to the increasing prevalence of obesity evident in the UK population. It was estimated that at current trends almost 60% of the population could be obese by 2050, entailing massive increases in expenditure in healthcare costs and a major loss of economic efficiency - as well as a reduced standard of welfare and increased risk of suffering from serious disease.

The pace of technological change is outstripping human evolution, because exposure to modern lifestyles (involving, for example, increased vehicular transport, sedentary occupations and high fat and sugar diets) leads, for many people, to 'passive obesity.' The report suggest that this is not because people are more gluttonous or have less will-power than earlier generations but because it is difficult for most people to escape the influence of this, so-called 'obesogenic environment'. The report makes important recommendations for policy interventions to tackle the problem.

Website reference: <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/17.pdf>

Note: Errors in some calculations were corrected in a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the report at the following website: <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/14.pdf>

### **NUFFIELD COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS REPORT ON PUBLIC HEALTH: ETHICAL ISSUES**

Obesity (along with alcohol and smoking, infectious diseases and fluoridation of water) is also one of the issues focused on in this important report. Stress is laid on the fact that being overweight or obese is a risk factor in several health conditions (such as diabetes, stroke, some cancers and lung and liver diseases).

The report examines the roles of 'obesogenic environments', food labelling, the protection of children, personal responsibility and NHS treatments. It proposes a stewardship model that outlines ethical principles to be considered by public health policy makers, and an 'intervention ladder' - a conceptual device for considering how policy decisions might affect people's food and lifestyle choices,

Website reference: [http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/fileLibrary/pdf/Public\\_health\\_-\\_ethical\\_issues.pdf](http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/fileLibrary/pdf/Public_health_-_ethical_issues.pdf)