

## News links from July 2020

### Baroness Benjamin and Andrew Selous MP welcome the Announcement of a New Obesity Strategy

Baroness Floella Benjamin welcomed the Government's new obesity strategy, but renewed the call for a Cabinet-level Minister to drive the strategy forward and asked for more measures specifically designed to combat child obesity.

Co-chair of the APPG on a Fit and Healthy Childhood, whose reports have called for many of the recommendations now proposed by the Government, Baroness Benjamin called on the Government to strengthen the proposals to recognise that the obesity problem begins in childhood, and that a more comprehensive strategy should include recommendations on physical activity and play.  
[Read more here.](#)

Chair of the APPG on Obesity, Andrew Selous MP also welcomed the announcement, saying "overweight and obese children grow up to be overweight and obese adults." He also pointed out the disparity between children, with more than twice the number of most deprived children living with obesity compared with their least deprived classmates.  
[Read more here.](#)

### Children's Right2Food Charter Launches

Calling for Government Action on Food Insecurity, the [Children's Right2Food Campaign's](#) Young Food Ambassadors have published their [new Charter](#), which provides an evidence-based road map for the government to ensure that every child has access to a healthy diet. The Charter is accompanied by a [new report](#) which points to a lack of action, slow progress and Covid-related delays in children's food policy across all four UK nations despite two million children experiencing food insecurity since lockdown.

### Levelling Up

Andrea Leadsom MP has been appointed Early Years Health Advisor and will focus on the first 1001 days of a child's life, from conception, to provide input on how to improve health outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings will inform the Government's "Levelling Up" agenda.

The review will build on earlier work done in 2018/19 when she chaired an Inter-Ministerial Group that looked at support for perinatal mental health and support measures.  
[Read more here](#)

## Widening Inequalities in Childhood Obesity

[BMJ Opinion](#) also picks up on the inequality aspect, saying that the recent [Public Health England report](#) on childhood obesity trends in England "makes for uncomfortable reading". The proportion of children with overweight or obesity remains extremely high, and is increasing over time in most groups; disproportionately in the case of children from deprived areas, and those of Black or South Asian ethnicity. The piece continues:

*"The inequalities by ethnicity and deprivation seen in these obesity figures echo those seen in Covid-19 among adults, and serve to amplify the need for urgent action."*

adding

*"Any obesity strategy must place tackling the root societal drivers of poor health and wellbeing at its centre, taking a cross-government and cross-sectoral approach to health inequalities . . . A second key part must directly target the environmental drivers of obesity."*

[Read the full article](#)

# The Children First Alliance - and others - call for food and welfare programmes in England to be extended beyond the summer holidays

**Baroness Frances D'Souza**, President of the CFA, called for an extension of summer food provision for children, saying *“The number of children now suffering severe hardship has risen by 100,000 to 1.4 million. This, in addition to reports of increased hospital admissions of children with malnutrition, indicates the scale of the problem which CFA believes may intensify if, as seems likely, a second wave of Covid 19 occurs in the coming winter. CFA, together with many other child centred organisations, wishes to ensure that Government and Local Authority food and welfare programmes continue beyond the summer vacations and become a permanent feature. We believe that the appointment of a cabinet level minister to promote these much needed programmes is essential. CFA is working with the Youth Parliament to promote awareness of child hunger and create a popular movement to urge Government to act now.”*

Footballer **Marcus Rashford** also called for an extension of free school meals to a further 1.5 million pupils following the publication of the [National Food Strategy Part 1](#), which recommended (amongst many other things)

- extending the programme to all children from households claiming Universal Credit
- extending the holiday activity and food programme to all areas in England
- increasing the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week and extend the scheme

The report's author, Henry Dimbleby, said *“In the post-lockdown recession, many more families will struggle to feed themselves adequately. A government that is serious about ‘levelling up’ must ensure that all children get the nutrition they need.”*

## Internet Watch Foundation

The [IWF](#) has reported an almost 50% increase in calls to its hotline. The charity, which receives, assesses and traces public complaints about child sexual abuse content, received almost 50,000 reports between 23 March and 9 July this year, an increase of almost 50% on the same period in 2019.

[Read more here](#)

## Mental Health

A second survey by children and young people's mental health charity [YoungMinds](#) found that 41% of young people with mental health problems said it had made their mental health “much worse”, up from 32% in the previous survey in March. This was often related to increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, a loss of coping mechanisms or a loss of motivation.

[YoungMinds](#) is calling for a Government Recovery Plan for children and young people. [Read more here.](#)

## Childcare and Early Years

[Sir Keir Starmer](#) said that parents would be in an impossible position if they have to stop working from home but do not have access to childcare, summer clubs or grandparents, while the [Early Years Alliance](#) predicted that thousands of nurseries and childcare providers (around 25%) could close within the next year.

The Children's Commissioner **Anne Longfield**, meanwhile, called on the Government to overhaul the Early Years System, recommending:

- An emergency recovery package for childcare providers
- Changes to Universal Credit in the way childcare costs are repaid
- An expansion of free childcare
- A cross-government 'Best Beginnings' strategy led by a Cabinet Minister for the Early Years
- A guarantee of support for under-fives and their families
- A national infrastructure of Children and Family Hubs
- A Government review of early education and childcare funding
- A single system for supporting families with early years education and childcare
- A national workforce strategy for the early years
- Better sharing of data between different services

[Read more here](#)