

News links from February 2021

Childhood Obesity

What is happening with reformulation? [The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology](#) (POST) published a briefing paper giving an overview of the most recent food and drink reformulation policies in the UK, the evidence on public health benefits and the effectiveness of different policies. It also explores challenges and opportunities for reformulation and describes some of the complementary approaches to improve public health [Read more](#)

Useful resources in the form of Powerpoint slides were made available by [Public Health England](#) (PHE) and can be [downloaded](#). The slides present the latest key data and information on child obesity and excess weight in clear, easy to understand charts and graphics and can be used to help make the case for tackling child obesity.

Georgina Bailey, writing in [Politics Home](#), noted that the Government's latest obesity strategy, which includes a welcome watershed on the advertising of unhealthy food, is the 14th since 1992 but despite the 689 policies introduced over the years, obesity rates have actually increased.

A [study last month from the University of Cambridge](#) found that "Policies were largely proposed in a way that would be unlikely to lead to implementation".

Other experts see the latest strategy as a step in the right direction: it at least recognises over-promotion of unhealthy foods and cost differentials between more healthy and less healthy foods.

[Read the full article](#)

Online Harm - Warning about Omegle

A BBC investigation exposed worrying activity on a video chat site popular with youngsters: **Omegle**. Investigators were connected with sexual material and adverts for porn on the site, which has no age verification in place and is supposed to be moderated.

[Read the full report.](#)

Anne Longfield bows out as Children's Commissioner

The end of February saw the end of the six-year tenure of Anne Longfield as [Children's Commissioner for England](#). Her widely reported final speech asked the Government:

- **Are you serious about children**, and their life chances? Will you follow this through not just this month, but this year and next?
- Do you understand the **additional harm** that has been done to children during the pandemic?
- **Are you serious about 'building back better' and 'levelling up'?** Will you put those children who were already disadvantaged at the centre of it?

Ms Longfield said: *"Once Government decides it wants to achieve something, it can focus on the steps necessary to achieve it. . . It's not that we can't do it. It's not that we 'don't know what works'. It's that we don't set out to do it."*

[Read Anne Longfield's speech here.](#)

We welcome Dame Rachel de Souza to the post, who will spend her initial time listening. We really hope that Dame de Souza will then have some success at continuing Anne Longfield's mission to get the Government to listen - **really listen** - to her.

[Read Dame de Souza's speech here.](#)

The Covid Generation

Self-harm in nine to 12-year-olds has doubled in six years, [according to the BBC](#), and hospital admissions for that age group now average 10 a week. Another [BBC report](#) summarises the wide-ranging and devastating effects of the pandemic on children, with one expert saying, *“I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say children and their families have been abandoned.”* We definitely agree with that sentiment.

At the beginning of the month came the news that the Government has appointed a **“Youth Mental Health Ambassador”** in the form of A&E Doctor Alex George. He will help shape policy on improving support for young people in schools, colleges and universities. [Read more](#)

The [All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood](#) recently held an open meeting to encourage campaigning on child mental health issues.

[Details here.](#)

Our Call for a Senior Cabinet Minister for Children

A new graphic, aimed at the wider public, was produced to promote our call for a Senior Cabinet Minister for children. We had found that repeated references to the current junior post as “The Minister for Children” caused confusion, with people not appreciating the difference between what we have now and what we are calling for.

Our Children NEED a CHAMPION at the HEART of Government

Amazingly our government does not have a **Cabinet Minister for Children**.

We NEED a **HEART** for our children in government, we NEED a **Cabinet Minister for Children & Families!**

Please share this widely, sign our petition and send this image direct to your MP.



Prime Minister

Cabinet
20 MPs & 1 Baroness
The Decision Makers

Department
23 Ministerial Departments
Example: Department for Education

Junior Minister
Junior Ministers are within the Departments
Example: Minister for School Standards

Parliamentary Under Secretary
Parliamentary Under Secretaries are within the Departments
The Children and Families MP resides at this lowest level

The Cabinet is where the powerful sit. They make the decisions that change our country. They are the MPs who can make significant differences to our lives.

We NEED a HEART, a Champion.
We NEED a Cabinet Minister for Children.

The Champion for Children is at the bottom rung of the politically powerful. Our children are seen as the least important.

Do they deserve to be forgotten about?

The CHILDREN FIRST Alliance
Allies in the best interest of the child

Children in Care Homes

A [Dept for Education report](#) on the education of children in care homes found that more than half were in special education and that they are 20% more likely to be in special education than all children nationally. They are also:

- less likely to attend a good or outstanding place of education
- much more likely to have an education, health and care (EHC) plan or be receiving special educational needs (SEN) support
- 18 times more likely to be attending a pupil referral unit

The Education Committee announced [an inquiry](#) to examine:

- academic outcomes and progression of children living in care homes
- how educational and long-term outcomes can be improved
- the disproportionately high rates of criminalisation of young people in care homes
- what further support is needed for children in care homes with special educational needs
- the quality of care, support and safeguarding
- the impact of the pandemic on the sector

[Read the report](#)

[More on the Inquiry](#)

A Summer of Play

[FirstPlayUK](#), a group of educational specialists and child psychologists, wrote to the Secretary of State for Education to call for “A Summer of Play” with children’s social and emotional wellbeing being given priority over academic catch-up.

[Read the full letter.](#)

[The Association of Play Industries](#) (API) endorsed the plea and began a campaign ([read more here](#)) And not a moment too soon, as a report from the longitudinal “**Born in Bradford**” study told us that the pandemic had made an already bad situation a lot worse, with far too many children not leaving their homes at all. Before lockdown all children were leaving the house to go to school, and would benefit from some physical exercise both in class and during breaks from lessons. During lockdown a surprising number were confined to the space between four walls, and their garden if they had one.

[Read more](#) or [See the data](#)