

# HEALTHY FAMILIES: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLE OF THE SUPERMARKET

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## Media Launch

The report and press release were published on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020; two/three months later than had been envisaged due to the December 2019 snap General Election. With attention in 2020 surrounding a putative Government re-shuffle plus escalating and ongoing publicity for other unforeseen events it was important to 'guesstimate' a release date that would afford the work a chance of being read.

**It was decided to release in the window *after* the first wave of re-shuffle commentary had abated.**

## The Press Release

'**Healthy Families: The Present and Future Role of the Supermarket**' to some extent evoked (as evinced by the title) the first report published by the APPG on A Fit and Healthy Childhood in 2014.

'**Healthy Patterns for Healthy Families: Removing the Hurdles to a Healthy Family**' was the APPG's first assessment of ways in which to address the child obesity epidemic; placing the family at the centre of solutions to the problem. The 2020 report returned to child obesity and the central role of the family but since 2014, the Government had published Stages One and Two of a Child Obesity Strategy; the sugar tax was operative and the spotlight was directed at the food and drink industry; specifically, the role of retail outlets. The report examined the supermarket within this context and the press release was designed to:

- Re-awaken widespread interest in child obesity within a family context; given that Brexit/ General Election/ unforeseen health issues /adverse weather conditions etc made news space crowded
- Provide a succinct overview of the report and major recommendations signposting a positive future direction for supermarkets **as well** as not shirking any 'downsides'
- Provide quotation 'hooks' as a 'way in' to the report; the phrase '*pantomime villain*' struck a uniform chord as did the recommendation that unhealthy and tempting items should be positioned beyond the eye level and reach of a child.

## National Media Coverage

Prominence in a national outlet can set the tone for secondary/specialist coverage and in this case, the report was featured by:

- [Politics Home: 'Steve McCabe MP: Supermarkets can show leadership .....](#) This detailed article in a 'Westminster insider' publication was the first to appear on 20<sup>th</sup> February and acted as a launch pad in that it was a faithful, full rendition of the main aspects of the press release and gave prominence to APPG Chair, Steve McCabe
- [Mail Online: 'MPs urge supermarket 'pantomime villains to remove unhealthy sweets and snacks from children's eye level.'](#) This detailed article (20<sup>th</sup> February) concentrated on the role of Steve McCabe accompanied by an authoritative photograph; also the 'pantomime villain' quotation and 'eye level' theme. These three features were to be staples of coverage elsewhere
- [The Daily Mail: 'Supermarkets are the panto villain of child obesity crisis.'](#) Published on 21<sup>st</sup> February, this was a half-page lead; profiling Steve McCabe's role and providing an accurate and positive summary of the report. A 'counter view' was supplied by Christopher Snowden, Head of Lifestyle Economics at The Institute of Economic Affairs but this in no way detracted from the serious attention given to the report in the body of the article
- [The Times: 'Put sweets out of child's reach, stores are told.'](#) Published on 21<sup>st</sup> February, this concise summary used the McCabe 'pantomime villain' quotation in full and furthered the reach of the report by referring to the 2018 May Government sugar tax (widely marked up as a success). The article concluded with a reference to the present Prime Minister's negative comments made during the General Election period about sugar tax, obesity and exercise.
- [The Daily Telegraph: 'Keep junk food out of children's sight,' say MPs.'](#) Published on 21<sup>st</sup> February this nugget covered the uniform three themes; included a call for supermarkets to take a positive lead, name-checking Asda, Sainsbury and Tesco; punted the idea of discounts on healthy alternative products and giving healthy food 'child appeal' via labelling.
- [The Sun: 'Top shelf sweets to beat flab.'](#) Published on 21<sup>st</sup> February, the page two item contained a link to the paper's editorial comment in which McVities were commended for reducing sugar content in biscuits. The piece encompassed the three main strands, plus our criticism of 'By One Get One Free' (BOGOF) and recommendation that shops should initiate 'tours in store' for children, accompanied by nutrition experts.

- [BBC Radio South East](#): This ‘talk’ piece contained interviews with Steve McCabe MP; Lead Author, Helen Clark; Working Group Member, Kristy Howells and Tam Fry from the National Obesity Forum

## Specialist Publications

Significant specialist coverage included:

- [Nursery World: ‘Supermarkets should play a leading role in solving obesity crisis.’](#) The headline for this thorough piece summarised the *aim* of the report and captioned an inclusion in a publication very much of interest to a target audience: the family
- [Talking Retail – News: ‘Supermarkets must make changes to tackle obesity crisis, MPs say.’](#) This detailed article was directed to our target industry audience
- [Fresh Talk Daily: ‘MPs call on supermarkets to place junk food out of reach of children.’](#) The publication is produced by the ‘Fresh Produce Consortium’ and addressed a target audience
- [About Manchester: ‘Supermarkets told to up their game to tackle UK’s obesity crisis.’](#) A further summary of the report was directed to a key metropolitan area.

## ‘Other’

The published articles in The Daily Mail, and The Daily Telegraph sparked part or whole inclusion in other online sites, ‘trimmed’ or ‘adjusted’ for various audiences.

Of these, the ones that have emerged to date (there will probably be more) are:

- **Conservative Home**
- **Great Britain News Platform**
- **Hellofaread**
- **News Locker**
- **Business Fast: UK Business and Finance News**
- **The Tea Party**

## What Next?

It is hoped that APPG and Working Group members in particular will use outlets to which they have access to further publicise this report. The excellent initial publicity has placed us firmly in the driving seat of the child obesity

debate; this is particularly important as the fate of the Child Obesity Strategy now hangs in the balance.

We have now created a platform for further parliamentary activity and an opportunity to influence the practical direction of policy within and without the confines of Westminster; thence to industry, professional and community/family settings.

### **Update – 18 March 2020**

**A Westminster Hall Debate** was led by APPG Chair Steve McCabe on **‘The role of supermarkets in tackling childhood obesity’** following on from our report. What is notable in particular, is the Minister’s repeated calls to us to respond to the Government’s Consultation Response; also the kind and favourable comments that he made about this Report and the other work of the APPG.

Following the debate, Politics Home commissioned Steve McCabe to write an article about it.

[Listen to the debate here](#)

[Read the Politics Home article here](#)