

News links from December

Happy New Year!

Here's hoping you all get absolutely everything you want from 2021!

Can this be the year when we really get some politics in the best interests of the child? So many things take precedence in the political bubble. Time to look forward and plan for a healthier and happier population always seems in short supply and never more so than in 2020 with Brexit and the virus. Both will still be with us in 2021 but Brexit is mostly done and maybe, just maybe, we can see the end of the beginning with the virus.

Before the virus all the indicators for child health and wellbeing were alarming and it's now clear they have got even worse.

The Alliance would like to thank all the politicians and campaigners who have striven to keep these issues on the agenda and to encourage you all to redouble your efforts in 2021 to prevent the next generation from becoming the least healthy adult population in living memory.

Online Harms Bill

In mid December the Government published its full response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, setting out how a proposed legal duty of care on online companies will work in practice.

Sites, apps and other services which host user-generated content or allow people to talk to others online will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and suicide content.

Tech platforms will need to do far more to protect children from being exposed to harmful content or activity such as grooming, bullying and pornography.

[The Internet Watch Foundation](#) welcomed the news, with Chief Executive Susie Hargreaves saying: *"The safety and welfare of children must always come first. On this there can be no compromise. . . Firms must do all they can to keep users, particularly children, safe and to stop any illegal content from spreading on their platforms but the legislation must support them in doing that"*.

Ofcom has been confirmed as the regulator with the power to impose fines of up to £18 million or 10% of annual global turnover, whichever is higher. It will have the power to block non-compliant services from being accessed in the UK.

[Read more](#)

Children's Rights

In a report released ahead of Human Rights Day on 10 December, 90 children's charities from across England warned that a number of critical children's rights issues must be urgently addressed by the UK Government to prevent worsening impacts on the most vulnerable children.

The report revealed that children's rights have regressed in many areas since the UN's last examination in 2016. It also highlighted that the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic has not prioritised children's rights and their voices in vital policy and legislative decisions.

Although there has been some progress, the report concludes that children's rights remain worryingly low on the political agenda in England. Scotland is soon to directly incorporate the CRC into domestic law, but the UK Government has refused to do so.

[More details here](#)

[Download the full report](#)

Gender Stereotypes

A report from the [Fawcett Society](#) sets out how gender expectations significantly limit our children, leading to lower self-esteem in girls and poorer reading skills in boys. Stereotypes are at the root of girls' problems with body image and eating disorders, higher male suicide rates and violence against women and girls.

[Read the Report](#)

Childhood Obesity

Good news came at the end of December, as the Government announced that promotions on food and drinks high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) in medium and large retailers will be restricted from April 2022.

Helen Clark, Lead Author for the [All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood](#), commented: “*APPG reports since 2014 have been calling for this restriction, so all involved in the APPG have special cause to celebrate and 2021 is going to be a very busy year as we renew our campaigning attack on childhood obesity!*”

Earlier in the month **Mary Glindon MP**, Chair of the [APPG on Obesity](#), called on the Government to address the underlying cause of obesity: inequality. She wrote about the [Food Foundation's](#) finding that the poorest 10% of UK households would need to spend 74% of their income to meet the [Eatwell Guide](#) costs, and said: “*Reducing inequalities is, therefore, fundamental to how we should address obesity.*”

Mental Health

More children with mental health needs were getting the right support at the right time prior to the pandemic, with local agencies learning from past failures, a study published on 9 December found. The joint report from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and others, looked at how partners in 6 local authority areas were working together to help children with mental ill health.

The report found that restructures of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), along with a concerted effort by agencies to work together, had broadened the help available for a range of mental health needs. This has also led to more timely identification, referrals and support.

However, there are many areas where there is still much to be done and given the impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health, and increased pressure on services, building on the improvements the report found is vital.

[More details here](#)

[Download the report](#)

[Access the House of Commons Library Reading List for Children's Mental Health](#)

Eating Disorders

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health reports that in some parts of Great Britain doctors have seen a three or four-fold increase in eating disorder cases compared to last year.

Specialists say the pandemic is a major reason behind the rise, with around 40 of them working in England, Scotland and Wales saying they had seen a rise in referrals. Parents were advised to look out for signs.

[Read more](#)

Poverty

The [Child Poverty Action Group](#), in an update to its August report, provided more information on how families with children have been managing, based on additional online survey responses received since August. In brief:

- no change to the earlier finding that 75% of families have found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to manage financially, but more (almost 9 out of 10 respondents, up from 8) have experienced a significant deterioration in their living standards
- more have lost employment, many for the first time. and are struggling to live on Universal Credit
- nearly 6 in 10 families are struggling to cover the cost of basic essentials (food, utilities, rent, travel or child-related costs).
- around half have a new or worse debt problem
- a high and rising proportion of low-income families have also experienced a mental or physical health problem – 56% from 48% earlier
- within the responses there were a worrying number of references about the effects on the wellbeing of children
- an increasing proportion of families are becoming reliant on the social security system, exposing problems with the current system

[Read the full report](#)

[Read about calls for scrapping the benefit cap](#)

[Constituency data for child poverty](#)