



Frontline initiatives to tackle worsening outcomes in childhood

Key Issues

A report published in October 2018 by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health entitled “Child Health in 2030 in England: comparisons with other wealthy countries” highlights predicted worsening outcomes in childhood. This briefing provides a broad overview of this report plus examples showcasing some of the excellent work underway by APSE member authorities in helping to address some of the causal factors.

This Briefing has links to APSE’s Briefing 18/26 from July 2018 entitled “Childhood Obesity: a plan for action - Chapter 2” and 18/35 from October 2018 entitled “Childhood Obesity – Trailblazer programme”.

Introduction

A recent report published in October 2018 by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) entitled “Child Health in 2030 in England: comparisons with other wealthy countries” projected the following for children living in England, in 2030:

- Infant mortality: Rates will be 80% higher than the EU15
- Obesity: Almost one third of England’s most deprived boys will be obese (an increase of 18%);
- Mental Health: although there is insufficient data to estimate trends for diagnosed mental health disorders, reported problems have increased five-fold over the last 20 years, and are set to increase by a further 63% in 2030 if existing trends continue

Further, in 2017, the Institute of Fiscal Studies forecasted that a staggering 37% of children will be in relative poverty (households where the income is less than 60% of the UK median) by 2022 (5.2 million), representing the highest percentage since modern records began in 1961.¹

¹Hood A. & Waters T., 2017. *Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2017–18 to 2021–22* [pdf] Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at < <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10028>>

Since childhood poverty is likely to further exacerbate the worsening outcomes projected by the RCPCH, Dr Dougal Hargreaves, co-author of the report warns:

“Our report highlights how serious the state of children’s health in England will be by 2030 if alarming current trends continue in areas such as infant mortality, childhood obesity, and mental health problems. If expected increases in childhood poverty aren’t addressed, then the actual outcomes in 2030 could be significantly worse than we report.”

In what follows, we showcase innovative ways in which APSE member authorities are responding to the worsening trends in childhood poverty and three of those worsening trends identified in the RCPCH’s report: Infant mortality, childhood obesity and child mental health.

Tackling childhood poverty

To address the impacts of childhood poverty in Dundee, Tayside Contracts have worked with the Scottish Charity Dundee Bairns since 2016 to distribute over 67,000 meals to children from low-income families during school holidays.

The Food and Fun programme was developed by the former Chief Executive of Dundee City Council – David Dorward, as a means of addressing the link between malnourishment during school holidays and educational attainment levels experienced by children from low income families eligible for free school meals during school term time.

Dorward was inspired to start a holiday meal programme initially for the 28% of children living in poverty in Dundee (the second highest level in Scotland). Through his relationship with Tayside Contracts in his previous role, David Dorward knew that Tay Cuisine could provide the service he was looking for through its 365 day service delivery. Funding was secured from Radio Tay Cash for Kids, the Northwood Trust, and Dundee City Council to run the programme from 2016, initially providing packed lunches including a piece of fruit and water at a cost price of £2/head.

The scheme was extended to provide a further project called the ‘Bairns Tea Club’ (a homework club), where children aged between 9 and 11 could have a hot teatime meal and take part in sports and leisure activities provided by Leisure & Culture Dundee. Since November 2017, Tay Cuisine has provided approx 10,000 meals for the Bairns Tea Club alone.

Due to the success of the project in Dundee, Angus Council have approached Tayside Contracts to roll out a similar project in their district.

How many children are living in poverty in the UK today?

A report published by the Social Metrics Commission in September 2018 entitled "A new measure of poverty for the UK" stated an estimated 4.5 million children are living in poverty in the UK today.

The UK Government scrapped the former measure of poverty, defining a household to be living in poverty if the household income is 60% below the median in 2015. This new measure, developed by the Social Metrics Commission, representing a wide range of government departments alongside think tanks from across the political spectrum, has been developed to fill that gap and to lance any continuing debate on the quality of the former measure, seeking to move public debate on to how we form a sufficient response to worsening trends in poverty measures.

Alongside household income, the new measure takes in to account the impact of inescapable costs that reduce spending power such as housing and childcare costs and liquid assets that enhance resilience to some of the more devastating effects of poverty such as savings, stocks and shares.

Addressing infant mortality

The projections from the October 2018 report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health referenced earlier in this briefing found that key risk factors for infant mortality rate were higher than other comparable countries as it had higher proportion of young mothers, higher proportions of smoking during pregnancy and a low rate of breastfeeding. All these risk factors were found to be contributing to deaths in babies under a year old. The rise in infant mortality is concentrated in the poorest families, where death rates are already twice as high as among the affluent.

Swansea Council, in collaboration Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University (ABMU) Health Board developed the JIG-SO Project as a service to provide advice and assistance for young and vulnerable families from 15 weeks into pregnancy and up to the child turning three. JIG-SO provides a team of midwives, nursery nurses, early language development workers and parenting workers to support young mothers and in 2017 supported 400 families, of whom 277 had been identified by midwives as being in need

To combat the issue of child mortality, JIG-SO provide smoking cessation advice and assistance, and has provided data to show the positive impact, with 61% of women who had engaged with their service giving up smoking (as compared with 5% reported by ABMU).

Whilst 80% of women in the UK start to breastfeed their babies from birth, only around 30% of babies are exclusively breastfed by 6-8 weeks. Research carried out by the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative shows that breastfed babies in lower socio-economic groups have better health outcomes than babies from higher socio-economic groups that are infant formula fed. To support women to breast-feed, JIG-SO provide breastfeeding advice and support to

pregnant mums and again can provide data to show the positive impact of their work with 66% of new births that were breastfed at birth, as compared to the 62% reported by ABMU.

Addressing childhood obesity

Together with Active Gloucestershire, NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, and Cheltenham Racecourse, Gloucestershire County Council have sought to address childhood obesity by working with over 50 schools in the County to encourage participation in the Daily Mile, reaching approximately 10,000 children.

The Daily Mile is a school based physical activity initiative developed to address a perceived lack of fitness in primary school children through the introduction of 15 minutes of activity (run, jog or walk) outside every day. It aims to improve childhood fitness, address the levels of childhood obesity, increase concentration levels during lessons and can help reduce feelings of anxiety or stress. Further, confidence and self-esteem are improved and enhanced, as it's a social activity and can help to build relationships and reduce isolation.

Active Gloucestershire marketed the initiative as a virtual tour around Europe, tracking pupil participation online so that every mile they ran counted towards the school's progress. Those schools with under 1,500 pupils were given a 3,300 mile circuit covering Spain, France, Italy and central Europe, whilst the larger schools had to complete a 7,100 mile course which also took in Croatia, Greece and Denmark.

Improving childhood mental health and tackling childhood obesity

Bristol City Council has 200 schools in the area involved in a public health grant funded scheme known as the Mayor's Award for Excellence as a Health Improving School.

The scheme encourages schools to achieve 28 standards covering best practice in, for example, the following areas:

- Food and nutrition;
- Workplace wellbeing;
- Mental and emotional wellbeing;
- Physical activity and more.

One such school - Bannerman Road Community Academy was only the second school in Bristol to achieve the Mental Health and Wellbeing Badge in April 2018. Areas of best practice included:

- Strong leadership in place for mental health and wellbeing
- Proactive and robust systems in place to prevent bullying
- Pupil voice is sought, listened to and acted upon
- Involvement of parents in the work to improve mental health and wellbeing
- Development of a mental health and wellbeing school policy

- Ensuring staff have the appropriate training and CPD available to them
- Robust systems in place to identify and monitor vulnerable pupils and ensure appropriate support is put in place at the earliest opportunity
- A supportive climate in school for pupils, 100% of pupils know who they can go to for help
- Ensuring staff feel supported in their roles and valued

APSE COMMENT

Whilst no one public body or local authority service is responsible for ensuring better outcomes in childhood across the country, these three case studies highlight what a difference frontline local authority service leads can make, working in as diverse areas as leisure and education catering.

The absence of an official measure of UK poverty is a concern and new findings by the Social Metrics Commission warrant greater public attention to the prevention and reduction of poverty, especially amongst children.

APSE would urge national politicians to take up this cause and to secure greater public understanding of the depth and scope of poverty within the UK. Equally, local politicians to understand and address poverty within their local area, developing cross-service approaches such as those highlighted in this briefing to mitigate and reduce the devastating impacts of growing up in poverty.

The report prepared by the RCOCH is a wake-up call to all involved in maintaining better outcomes for children that as a nation, we need to invest further today if we are to keep outcomes for children growing up in the UK from continued decline and in line with global counterparts.