

## Briefing from the National Children's Bureau

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### Introduction

In 2010, the Child Poverty Act committed the Government to measure and act on the number of children in low income households, because money matters to children's lives and children's outcomes. Clause 4 of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015 will place a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to lay before Parliament an **annual life chances report**. The Bill will repeal most of the Child Poverty Act 2010, including statutory targets and duties on national and local government to set out strategies to tackle child poverty.

**The proposed life chances report will therefore be vital in holding government to account on the actions it is taking to promote social mobility, fight child poverty and ensure children born into disadvantage have better life chances.**

Clause 4 outlines two of the measures that Government proposes to include in its life chances strategy, namely educational attainment at age 16 (including in relation to children's level of disadvantage) and worklessness. The Government of the day will have discretion over the other measures it wishes to include in the report. Government plan set out their intentions in more detail in a **life chances strategy**. At the time of introduction of the Bill to the House of Lords, there was no clear timetable for the publication of this strategy.

**NCB believes that the proposals, contained in clause 4 of the Bill, are a completely inadequate replacement for the repealed parts of the Child Poverty Act and are calling for the following:**

- **A measure of low income to be a required part of the annual life chances report**
- **A measure of children's early development to be a required part of the annual life chances report**
- **Indicators of health inequalities in early childhood to be considered for inclusion in the annual life chances report.**

**NCB's report, Poor Beginnings<sup>i</sup> found that the health and development of under-5-year-olds varied dramatically across the country, and children in deprived areas were more likely to fare the worst. It is therefore vital that any attempt by Government to monitor and take action on improving children's life chances has a focus on the health and development of young children.**

### **Keeping low income as measure of child poverty and life chances**

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is part of the End Child Poverty coalition, which comprises over 100 UK organisations and exists to hold the Government, and all main political parties, to account for their commitment to eradicate child poverty in the UK. By changing the way they measure and respond to child poverty, and excluding any reporting of the number of children in low income working families, the Government is ignoring the millions of children growing up in poverty.<sup>ii</sup> **NCB supports the End Child Poverty coalition's calls for the Government to keep measuring whether families have enough money.**

### **Reporting on children's early development as a measure of life chances**

NCB believes that indicators of children's early health and development should be a required part of the proposed annual report to Parliament on life chances and should be a key part of the government's life chances strategy.

### **The early years are key to improving life chances**

What happens in the first years of a child's life can have a profound impact on their future development, opportunities and outcomes right through to adulthood. A child's physical, social, and cognitive development strongly influences how ready they are to start school and their educational attainment, as well as their health and employment prospects as an adult.<sup>iii</sup> This development begins before birth when the health of a baby is affected by the health of their mother and is influenced by the socio economic-status of their parents.<sup>iv</sup> Cognitive development in the early years is also linked to the socio-economic status of a child's parents, with implications for a child's readiness to thrive at school. In 2013/14 only 45 per cent of Reception class pupils eligible for free school meals (a proxy indicator of poverty and deprivation) reached a good level of development, compared to 64% of those not entitled to free school meals.<sup>vii</sup>

### **Current proposals will not consider outcomes for children before the age of 16**

The Government's current proposals will not include any measure of outcomes in the early years. This flies in the face of Government's stated commitment to give every child the best start in life. Furthermore, the most effective work to tackle inequalities happens in the early years, but a child who is two years of age now, for example, will not be taking their GCSEs until 2028. So, it will be almost impossible for Government to demonstrate significant progress on its chosen required measure of attainment at aged 16 before the end of this Parliament.

### **There is a simple solution**

This omission should be addressed by requiring the inclusion of a measure of children reaching a good level of development by the end of reception, comparing the most deprived children with the rest of their peers.

Data on children's development is available via the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYSP). This measures personal, social and emotional development; physical

development; and communication and language as well as learning goals in mathematics and literacy.

In March 2014, the government announced that the EYFSP would be made non-statutory in September 2016, following the introduction of a Baseline Assessment at the start of reception class<sup>vii</sup>. NCB and others in the early year's sector are calling on Government to reconsider this; the baseline assessment is more focussed on maths and literacy and its suitability as a national measure for comparing different groups of children is unclear.

**NCB is calling on the Government to use the life chances report to report on children reaching a good level of development in early childhood.**

**Questions for the Minister:**

Can the minister confirm that reducing inequalities in the early years will form a key part of the forthcoming life chances strategy?

How does government intend to reflect the impact of its work to give children the best start in life in the annual life chances report?

What conversations has his Department had with colleagues in the Department for Education and the Department of Health on options for measuring inequalities in young children's development?

**Considering health inequalities in the life chances strategy**

NCB believes that work to tackle health inequalities in early childhood should form a key part of Government's proposed life chances strategy.

**Early health outcomes can impact on later attainment and life chances**

**Early childhood obesity** increases the risk of a number of health complications that have the potential to have a significant negative impact on a child's development and wider outcomes. Not only are obese children more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease and diabetes in later life, but they are also more likely to face a number of issues during childhood, including asthma, emotional and behavioural problems (particularly in boys), sleeping problems, musculoskeletal problems and type 2 diabetes.<sup>viii</sup> **Tooth decay** often leads to pain and infection, such as gum disease or dental abscesses, which in turn can lead to difficulties with eating, speaking and sleeping. <sup>ix</sup> **Injuries** are associated with a range of health and psychosocial problems in both the short term and long term. These problems include post-traumatic stress, physical disability, cognitive or social impairment, and lower educational attainment and employment prospects.<sup>xi</sup>

**Disadvantaged children are at greater risk of poor health**

All three of the poor outcomes cited above are more common in children in low income families. <sup>xii</sup> <sup>xiii</sup> Obesity in four and five year-olds as they arrive at school, for example, is approximately twice as prevalent in the most deprived 10 per cent of the population as it is in the least deprived 10 per cent. <sup>xiv</sup> Poverty is known to be a risk factor in itself but is also associated with other factors and behaviours which

compound this. Infants and children from low income families are, for example, less likely to be breastfed, more likely to be born with a low birth weight, and more likely to be fed sugary food and drinks – factors identified as increasing the risk of obesity and tooth decay. <sup>xv xvi</sup>

NCB's *Poor Beginnings* report<sup>xvii</sup> looked at variations in health outcomes in the early years at a local authority level. It found that if all local authority areas had the same outcomes as the least deprived fifth of the country there would be:

- Nearly 10,000 fewer obese children in reception class
- Nearly 35,000 fewer five year-olds from tooth decay
- Over 5,000 fewer children under five admitted to hospital with an injury each year.

However a number of local authorities appear have better outcomes than might be expected, despite high levels of deprivation. The reasons for these variations needs to be further explored and serious attention paid to what might be done to ensure children born into difficult circumstances have the best possible chance of a healthy start in life.

**NCB is calling for the government to consider the impact of health inequalities in young children in their life chances strategy**

**Questions for the Minister:**

Will the life chances strategy align with the forthcoming child obesity strategy and set out action to address the high levels of obesity amongst more deprived children and the impact this has on their progression?

Will the life chances strategy look at what can be done locally, with the use of dedicated funding such as the Public Health Grant, to tackle poor health in young children from deprived areas?

What conversations has his Department had with the Department of Health and Public Health England about the contribution of good health in the early years to improved life chances?

**The National Children's Bureau (NCB)**

The National Children's Bureau is a leading research and development charity working to improve the lives of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. We work with children, for children to reduce the impact of inequalities, by influencing government policy, being the voice for 200,000 front-line professionals, and inspiring practical solutions on a range of social issues including health, education and youth justice, through our extensive research and evidence work. Every year we reach more than 100,000 children and young people through our membership scheme, links with voluntary, statutory and private organisations, and the 30 specialist partnership programmes that operate under our charitable status.

For more information visit [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

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<sup>i</sup> National Children's Bureau (2015) *Poor Beginnings: health inequalities among young children across England* London: NCB [www.ncb.org.uk/poorbeginnings](http://www.ncb.org.uk/poorbeginnings)

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- ii The government will still measure children in low income working households through the HBAI figures, but this will no longer be reported on to Parliament. We want it reported on so that Parliament is aware of the issue of child poverty and action is taken.
- iii The Marmot Review (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* London: The Marmot Review <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>
- iv The Marmot Review (2010)
- v Department for Education (2014) *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile attainment by pupil characteristics: 2013 to 2014* London: DfE <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eyfsp-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2013-to-2014>
- vi The Marmot Review (2010)
- vii Department for Education (2014) Reforming assessment and accountability for primary schools: government response to consultation on primary school assessment and accountability <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=conResults&consultationId=1920&external=no&menu=3>
- viii National Obesity Observatory, Health risks of childhood obesity [http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO\\_about\\_obesity/obesity\\_and\\_health/health\\_risk\\_child](http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity/obesity_and_health/health_risk_child) [last accessed 31 July 2015]
- ix Royal College of Surgeons (2015) – see footnote 16; NICE (2015) *Oral health: approaches for local authorities and their partners to improve the oral health of their communities* London: NICE <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph55>
- x Royal College of Surgeons of England Faculty of Dental Surgery (2015) *The State of Children’s Oral Health in England* London: Royal College of Surgeons of England <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/fds/policy/documents/fds-report-on-the-state-of-childrens-oral-health>
- xi Chief Medical Officer (2013) *Our Children Deserve Better: Prevention Pays* Department of Health: London <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-prevention-pays>
- xii Royal College of Surgeons (2015) – see footnote 16; NICE (2015) *Oral health: approaches for local authorities and their partners to improve the oral health of their communities* London: NICE <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph55>
- xiii National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2010) *Preventing unintentional injuries among the under-15s in the home* London: NICE <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph30>; Fauth R and Ellis A (2010) *Reducing unintentional injuries in childhood: a research review* London: National Children’s Bureau [http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/432942/childhood\\_unintentional\\_injuries\\_review.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/432942/childhood_unintentional_injuries_review.pdf)
- xiv The Fabian society (2015) *A Recipe for Inequality* London: Fabian Society <https://www.fabians.org.uk/publications/a-recipe-for-inequality/>
- xv Wolfe I and all (2014) *Why children die: death in infants, children and young people in the UK Part A* London: National Children’s Bureau/Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health <http://ncb.org.uk/whychildrendie>
- xvi The Fabian Society (2015) *A Recipe for Inequality*
- xvii National Children’s Bureau (2015) *Poor Beginnings: health inequalities among young children across England* London: NCB [www.ncb.org.uk/poorbeginnings](http://www.ncb.org.uk/poorbeginnings)