

# FRANK FIELD REVIEW BRIEFING

In June 2010, Frank Field MP<sup>1</sup> was commissioned to lead an independent review of poverty and life chances, to examine the nature and extent of poverty in the UK and recommend the implementation of measures by Government to reduce child poverty, and increase life chances for the most disadvantaged children.

The final report, *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, was published on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010. The report makes as many as 24 different recommendations to Government.

## OVERVIEW

In the Review, Frank Field looks at new ways of measuring poverty and of measuring how effective public spending is in helping to tackle its root causes. The main findings suggest that children's life chances are mainly influenced by their development in the first five years of life.

Where the Review differs from previous approaches to the subject is in presenting environmental factors in the child development as being more significant to their life chances than economic ones. Field states that family background, parental education, good parenting and adequate services at an early age matter more to children than money. According to the Review, the cognitive and behavioural gap between children from poorer backgrounds and the rest by age 5 tends to stay for the rest of their lives. He also states that the current Government policies of supporting parents financially through Tax Credit and other financial incentives is not meeting the expected targets.

Based on this premise, Frank Field argues that the best way to improve life chances is to implement a new child poverty strategy whose priority would be to invest in early years' provision in order to improve the abilities of the poorest children and reduce the gap with the others. He presents this initiative as more financially sustainable than the current approach, and also more cost-effective. According to Field, by narrowing the gap in outcomes between the poorer and richer children, the former would enhance their prospects of gaining better qualifications and subsequently better employment and income.

Following this argument, the Review presents two overarching recommendations:

1. The establishment the "Foundation Years" covering the period from the womb to five. The Foundation Years should become the first pillar of a new tripartite education system: the Foundation Years leading to school years leading to further, higher and continuing education.
2. The adoption of a set of Life Chances indicators to measure how successful we are as a country in making more equal life's outcomes for all children.

Derived from the two overarching proposals, the Review eventually makes up to 24 recommendations (summarised in Annex 1).

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## **THE FRANK FIELD REVIEW – CHAPTER BY CHAPTER**

### **Chapter 1- A Personal Commentary**

Frank Field opens the review with his by setting out his own perspective on some of the issues, based on his experience over the past four decades. He stresses how poverty is about more than money, and the importance of factors such as home learning, environment, and quality of child care in perpetuating inter-generational poverty. These factors are at the centre of the proposed Life Chances Indicators. The Indicators will measure the effectiveness of the Foundation Years and should become the driver of policy.

### **Chapter 2- Poverty and Life Chances**

This chapter illustrates the poor outcomes experienced by children from low income families and presents the social and economic case for tackling child poverty and improving life chances. It argues that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on life chances in order to ensure that today's poor children do not grow up to be poor themselves, having to raise their own children in poverty.

Children from low income families, families with low socioeconomic status or low educational attainment are at higher risk of a range of poor outcomes when compared to their more affluent peers. They are more likely to suffer infant mortality; more likely to have pre school conduct and behavioural problems; more likely to experience bullying and take part in risky behaviours as teenagers; less likely to do well at school; less likely to stay on at school after 16; and more likely to grow up to be poor themselves, continuing the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

The consequences of poverty such as increased ill health, unemployment and criminal activity are expensive for the state. The public service cost of child poverty has been estimated to be somewhere between £10 and £20 billion a year.

The Review criticises the current approach to tackling child poverty by monitoring short term outcomes and focussing on income transfers. Frank Field presents data indicating that the gaps in outcomes and achievement between poorer children and their peers when they start school remain throughout childhood and beyond. Therefore, he proposes a long-term and broader approach which aims at improving the life chances of poor children.

### **Chapter 3- The Influences on Children's Life Chances**

This chapter sets out evidence on the most important drivers of children's life chances, starting in pregnancy and the early years. It makes the case for investment in the early years, in particular to support parents in their parenting role, to reduce inequalities in outcomes. As children develop, Government also needs to continue to invest in the most disadvantaged older children.

Frank Field presents a range of data in this chapter which supports a number of strong associations between environmental factors such as positive parenting, a good home learning environment and parents' own education in transforming children's life chances. The Review states that these factors are more important to outcomes than class background and parental income. It also emphasises the influence of pregnancy and the first five years of life shape children's life chances. Field states that "what parents do is more important than who those parents are".

## **Chapter 4- Building Foundation Years Services**

This chapter looks at what central and local government, voluntary sector and community bodies can do to ensure that disadvantaged children get the best start in life, and to minimise the chances of them being poor in adulthood.

First, the Review analyses the current services and its effectiveness. It highlights how children in Sure Start areas show better behaviour and greater independence and puts down its success to improved parenting and home learning environments. It also commends the Family Intervention Services, which can save money by preventing the need for more intensive help. It concludes that pre-school provision helps reduce the gap in children from some social groups and that it should be treated as being as important as primary or secondary education.

As a result, the Review recommends that the package of support from conception to age five should be formalised as the Foundation Years, and a Cabinet Minister should be appointed (working across the Education and Health Departments) to take responsibility for this approach. The vision for The Foundation Years is underpinned by the following principles:

1. Should be **universal** (with Sure Start Children's Centres providing support for all parents, and a gateway for those needing more help).
2. they should provide **help for those who need it most**, with increased funding for families in most need, targeted home visiting, and services in deprived areas brought up to the standard of those in more affluent areas;
3. although **professionally led**, they should **involve the community**, improving the capacity of parents to help each other, and ensuring voluntary groups have the chance to run services;
4. and they should be **evidence-based**, with **accountable** services that make a difference and a good understanding of whether they are reaching the children who need them most.

This chapter also offers a description of what the Foundation Years Service might look like from a parent's point of view and presents cases from real examples in the UK and abroad that illustrate the principles above.

## **Chapter 5- A New Framework for Measuring Poverty and Life Chances**

This chapter sets out a new framework for measuring poverty and life chances, including a recommendation for a set of Life Chances Indicators and new measures of public service quality and severe child poverty. These measures are intended to complement the Government's existing indicators.

Field argues that the current child poverty measures have incentivised a policy response focussed largely on income transfers, which has stalled in recent years and is financially unsustainable. He proposes a more effective approach by using a set of measures that will focus on improving children's life chances, and ultimately break intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage. The Review identifies a small set of key factors in the early years which are predictive of children's future outcomes: child factors (cognitive development); parent factors (positive parenting); and environmental factors (quality of childcare). It proposes a number of indicators with which to measure these factors, which will together form the new Life Chances Indicators. The chapter then presents examples of these indicators and how they would be measured, making them comparable at local and national level. His proposal for the full set of Life Chances indicators is annexed to the Review.

If the new indicators show improvements for each new cohort of children from low income families, then it can be expected that their future outcomes in adulthood will also be better. Short term progress on the Life Chances Indicators would be aligned with long term progress on tackling the effects of child poverty, which would improve the incentives for policy makers to invest in long term solutions.

## **Chapter 6- Overview of the Consultation Process and Summary of Formal Submissions**

This chapter provides an overview of the consultation process that the Review undertook and a summary of the predominant themes that were put forward through formal consultation responses. Frank Field and the Review team met with a wide range of stakeholders who fed into the Review, and 210 formal written submissions were made to the Review. Key points are:

- parenting (especially quality of parent-child relationships and parental engagement) and the home learning environment were the aspects of early childhood most often cited as having the greatest influences on positive outcomes and good life chances
- increased early years support that helps parents to understand child development and offers a broad range of parenting advice is crucial
- there is a need for a more holistic 'family approach' to both the design and delivery of services and the measurement of child poverty
- early years services for children and parents must be more effectively integrated and coordinated
- schools must do more to engage with parents to encourage them to support learning at home
- measures of child poverty could be enhanced by supplementing income measures with a range of carefully selected parent, child and environmental indicators
- income is an important determinant of outcomes for children, especially due to its interrelationships with other key determinants of outcomes
- parental employment is a key route out of poverty
- quality and stability of housing is important. Overcrowding can contribute significantly to negative outcomes for children.

## **CONCLUSIONS / IMPACT ON SANDWELL**

The review is going to have significant repercussions for local authorities, children centres and overall Early Years provision. It is now undeniable that the child poverty targets set by the Child Poverty Act 2010 are largely unattainable if the previous approach and indicators are maintained. However, there have been strong responses from a variety of prestigious agencies criticising what they perceive as a diminution of the importance of income poverty (see Reactions to the Review on the next page).

While Frank Field is not suggesting openly that he proposes to cut child benefit, he clearly believes that investing more in the foundation years is a more effective solution both short and long term. What is not clear is how he proposes to tackle environmental factors such as poor housing, job opportunities, community cohesion, access to services, etc.

Since the publication of the Review, the Government has launched a consultation to re-examine its child poverty Strategy based mainly on its findings. Sandwell is preparing a local response co-ordinated by the Anti-Poverty Manager, Rosie Edwards, and the Joint Commissioning Manager, Mark Gibbs.

## **REACTIONS TO THE REVIEW**

### **NUMBER 10**

In a letter published on the day of the Review, the Prime Minister and Deputy PM welcomed the focus on early ('foundation') years and stated that the concept of poverty needs to be broadened and lengthened, with income being only one of a range of factors. They agreed that the problem of poverty – and particularly child poverty – has to be situated in a framework based on life chances, and welcomed the recommendation for a new set of Life Chances Indicators, and said that the Coalition Government is keen to stimulate a national debate about the nature of poverty in the UK today and the Government's role in tackling it.

### **UNICEF**

UNICEF also responded to the consultation on the day of publication. In a press release, the organisation welcomed the Review's recommendations of investing in the first 5 year's of a child's life. However, it heavily criticised the Review's undermining of income factors in child poverty.

Citing their own report on child poverty, *Children Left Behind*, UNICEF states that the most influential factor in the outcomes gap between children is socioeconomic disadvantage. The charity also strongly contests the Review's assertion that there is no money left to support poor children, warning that the cost to services and society in general would be higher if economic issues remain untackled.

### **CONSULTATION ON THE NEW CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY**

On the 21st of December, the Department of Education launched a 13-page consultation document to change the current child poverty strategy.

Partly based on the conclusions and recommendations of the Frank Field Review, the consultation switches its focus from Labour's anti-poverty measures, based on income, to the concept of "improving children's life chances" by treating disadvantage's "causes not symptoms".

Although the Government states that it will not amend the Child Poverty Act 2010, the proposals envisage changing the "static-based measures" of relative poverty, defined as the number of children in households where income is less than 60% of the average.

The government has four key income-based targets to meet by 2020, and faces judicial review of its strategy if it fails to show it is attempting to reach them.

There has been concern from the Child Poverty Action Group and the charity Family Action that the proposed measures do not address properly issues of material deprivation and social exclusion. Charities say that the funding for anti-child poverty schemes will fall by 10.9% next year, while other budgetary cuts will affect key building blocks such as employment, housing and financial support for low income families.

### **THE GRAHAM ALLEN REVIEW ON EARLY INTERVENTION**

Graham Allen MP published on 19 January this year an independent review into early intervention, *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*. The review was commissioned in July 2010 by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith and Children's Minister, Sarah Teather, and is one of the first pieces of work to be remitted to the Social Justice Cabinet Committee.

The review examines nineteen of the most effective early intervention programmes and recommends that they should be supported and expanded, with a new body created to promote effective practice. The interim findings also recommend the creation of 15 "local early intervention places" to spearhead the development of practices. These areas would be supported by a newly created Early Intervention Foundation.

Allen makes a total of 34 recommendations in the report, stating there is no need for new legislation or immediate additional public expenditure for them to be implemented.

# ANNEX 1- SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a brief description of the 24 recommendations from the report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances (pp 6-9).

## The Foundation Years

1. Give greater prominence to the earliest years in life and adopt the term “Foundation Years” for the period from pregnancy to age five.
2. Move funding gradually to early years and towards the most disadvantaged children. To start the Fairness Premium in pregnancy.
3. Not to increase benefits for children automatically, but transfer benefit increases into building the Foundation Years.
4. Target funding to support to parents and better parenting.
5. Develop a long term strategy to increase life chances by narrowing the gaps in outcomes between poorer and richer children.
6. Access to affordable childcare age two for the most disadvantaged children.
7. Extend the life chances approach by providing with high quality services for those who need them later in childhood.

## The Foundation Years Service Delivery

8. Children Centres to identify, reach and provide targeted help to the most disadvantaged families and this should be included in new Sure Start contracts.
9. Open the commissioning of Children Centres and its services to providers from all sectors.
10. Local authorities to make Children Centres the hub of their communities, offering universal services (e.g. birth registrations, benefit advice...) at the same time as targeting services to those who need them most.
11. Establish Poverty and Life Chances Commissions across authorities and regions.
12. Develop a graduate-led model for professional development in early years’ settings, mirroring the model for schools.
13. Join local data and intelligence to understand where the children who are most deprived are and how services impact upon them.
14. Ensure use of services which have a strong evidence base and robust evaluation.
15. Ofsted ratings for childcare and schools in disadvantaged areas compared with richer areas should become one of the DoE indicators.
16. Promote parenting and nurturing skills throughout society.
17. Appoint a Cabinet Minister for the Foundation Years.

## Continuing Foundation Years Progress in Narrowing Attainment Gaps

18. Schools to be responsible for reducing the attainment gap.
19. Publish and promote evidence of successful parental engagement.
20. Parenting and life skills to be part of the curriculum.

## **New Measures of Poverty and Life Chances**

21. New set of Life Chances indicators to run alongside the existing financial poverty measures, to drive policy and inform spending decisions. These indicators will measure national progress at a national level.
22. Create a set of local Life Chances indicators using existing local data. Health visitors check at age two to become mandatory.
23. Develop and publish annually a measure of access to quality services.
24. Develop a new measure of “severe poverty”.

## **LINKS**

[Frank Field Independent Review website](#)

[The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults, Full Report](#)

[Government Response](#)

[Unicef Response](#)

[Consultation on the Government’s Child Poverty Strategy](#)

[Graham Allen Independent Review – Early Intervention: The Next Steps](#)

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