

The role of local government in promoting positive wellbeing for children

Purpose of report

To provide background information for the discussion on the role of local government in promoting positive wellbeing for children with Enver Solomon, Policy Director of The Children's Society.

Summary

Enver Solomon, Policy Director of The Children's Society will attend the meeting on the 21 May.

Recommendation

This report is to inform the discussion around positive wellbeing for children.

Action

LGA officers to proceed as directed.

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Background

1. Since 2005 The Children's Society has developed a unique research programme, which has measured and analysed children's self-reported wellbeing. Through conducting focus groups and asking wellbeing questions to over 30,000 8 to 16 year olds across the UK, we now understand the level of wellbeing and its drivers within all key aspects of children's lives, including family life, school life and experience in their local area.
2. The programme has developed methods that robustly capture children's self-reported wellbeing. The measurement tools developed so far include a set of statements that capture a child's overall life satisfaction, the *Good Childhood Index*, which measures wellbeing within ten domains that children have told us are key to their lives, and a local area index capturing wellbeing in a locality.
3. The evidence held in the datasets is extensive. At a national level we know that;
 - 3.1. At any time 9%, or 500,000, children aged 8 to 15 in the UK have low subjective wellbeing.
 - 3.2. Personality and socio-demographic factors explain some, but not the majority, of variations in children's wellbeing.
 - 3.3. External factors such as life events, family relationships and amount of choice and autonomy have a significant impact on wellbeing.
4. Focusing on local area wellbeing we know that;
 - 4.1. 1 in 7 children are unhappy with this aspect of their lives, and there is a significant association between a child's unhappiness in their local area and their overall life satisfaction.
 - 4.2. 1 in 4 children do not feel safe when they are out at night in their local area, and 1 in 3 feel there is nothing to do in their local area.
 - 4.3. Satisfaction with local facilities declines significantly from 7.1 (out of 10) at age 10 to 11, to 5.5 at age 14 to 15.

What can local decision-makers do to promote positive wellbeing for children?

5. All decisions that impact on a child's life will to some extent impact on that child's wellbeing. This includes decisions made at a local level, including decisions take by local authorities on policy and service delivery. Our evidence clearly highlights six priorities that decision-makers in local authorities can focus on to promote positive wellbeing for children in their area. These were set out in our policy report *Promoting positive wellbeing for children* (copies of which will be provided at the meeting), and are that children need to have;
 - 5.1. enough of the items and experiences that matter to them;
 - 5.2. positive relationships with family and friends;
 - 5.3. opportunities to take part in positive activities to thrive;
 - 5.4. a safe and suitable home environment and local area;
 - 5.5. a positive view of themselves and an identity that is respected; and
 - 5.6. the conditions to learn and develop.

What this could look like in practice

6. A fundamental step for promoting positive wellbeing for children is to understand the level of wellbeing, and its drivers, for children in a specific setting. This will mean conducting a wellbeing survey tailored to the information needs of decision-makers. Approaches could include a census-style survey in a locality, a survey of a specific group such as children in care, or targeted survey work on a particular issue such as children's views on local safety.
7. The Children's Society has developed a wide range of survey questions and tools. Surveys can be administered either online or through paper questionnaires and the specific indexes or questions can be selected from the extensive set developed through the programme. The data gathered can be benchmarked against national levels. We are also currently working with the Office for National Statistics to ensure that national surveys will gather data that provide comparable benchmarks and trends to locally gathered data.
8. Once the local evidence has been gathered the next step is to use the evidence to review current policies and services. The locally gathered data can be used to supplement the six priorities outlined above. Children's wellbeing will vary by area, therefore policy changes and service re-design to promote wellbeing will

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also need to vary. However, as an example, a key driver of children's wellbeing is being involved and having choice in decisions that affect them. Co-producing services designed for children, with children, will help promote the wellbeing affected by that service.

Conclusion and next steps

9. The movement to measure and understand wellbeing has gathered pace in recent years, at a local, national and international level. The tools are available for local authorities to measure children's self-reported wellbeing in their area. This data can be used to support the re-design policy and services to promote positive wellbeing for children. The six priorities for positive wellbeing can be used as an outcomes framework to assess progress. Promoting positive wellbeing will help all children experience a good childhood and receive the best possible start in life.