

London
Child
Poverty
Alliance



Manifesto for a child poverty free London

March 2022

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Child poverty rates in London are among the highest in the country and many families are now facing severe hardship in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. Despite the rhetoric of 'levelling up' which often paints a picture of London's streets being paved with gold, for many in our city the reality is very different. Nine out of the ten council areas in England with the highest child poverty rates are in London.¹ The very highest rate is to be found in Tower Hamlets where a staggering 56% of children live in poverty.² And even in the outer boroughs where the average rates of child poverty are lower there are pockets of high deprivation.

It is a matter of urgency that those seeking election to their local council this May prioritise tackling child poverty in their communities. While decisions taken by national government may have the greatest impact on families' incomes there remains much that can be done at local level to mitigate their effects. The consequences of not doing so, are to deny hundreds of thousands of children their basic human rights to a safe and warm home and healthy food. It also limits their opportunities and has an impact for the rest of their lives.

This is why we are asking all those hoping to be elected or re-elected as councillors in May 2022 to publicly commit to working towards a child poverty free London.



1. End Child Poverty Coalition (2021) Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2019/20
2. Ibid.

Putting the pledge into practice

Across London there are examples of good practice where local councils have taken innovative action to tackle child poverty in a concerted and systematic way.

Some examples include:

- Setting up a poverty commission to listen to the experiences of those who are facing financial hardship.
- Publishing a child poverty strategy, to set out a clear roadmap to eliminating child poverty within the borough and provide accountability for making progress.
- Implementing (voluntarily) the socio-economic duty set out in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, so that decisions and policies taken by the council are routinely looked at through the lens of socio-economic inequality.
- Committing to becoming a London Living Wage Borough by becoming an accredited London Living Wage employer and providing support and incentives for businesses and other local employers to do the same.

We urge councillors signing up to this pledge to explore these options and think about how they can be adapted and used in their own areas to ensure meaningful steps are taken to address child poverty. Members of the London Child Poverty Alliance stand ready to support you to do this.

Taking action for a child poverty free London

To make the commitment to a child poverty free London a reality we believe action is required in four key areas.



Action on Income

The past few years have been very difficult for families living on low incomes. Going into the pandemic levels of child poverty were already very high. Then, when families were faced with sharp increases in their day-to-day expenses as a result of the pandemic; needing to buy resources to support home-learning, keeping the heating on all day and providing extra food for children who would usually get a hot lunch at school, they were pushed into deeper poverty. Due to the benefit cap, which disproportionately affects families in London, many did not receive the £20 Universal Credit increase or changes to Local Housing Allowance, that were intended to help with these additional costs.

Now, as we emerge from the pandemic, families face a new hit to their incomes in the form of the cost-of-living crisis and need help like never before. 34% of Londoners have struggled to pay their household bills in the last six months, with 13% struggling to make ends meet, going without essentials or relying on credit.³ It is essential that local government plays its part to relieve the extreme pressure on the budgets of low-income families with children. To do this we urge the following actions:

- **Review Council Tax Reduction/Support schemes to minimise the amount of tax paid by household with children in poverty.** Reduce minimum payments for low-income and vulnerable residents in your Council Tax Reduction scheme to zero (or a minimum of 10% in the first instance) and end bailiff use against those in arrears.
- **Review Local Welfare Assistance schemes to ensure that the funds available are adequate to meet the need in your borough.** Schemes should be targeted to those in most need, not come with very limiting conditions, and where possible be made available in the form of cash grants rather than loans or vouchers.
- **Actively promote awareness and uptake of Council Tax Support/Reduction and Local Welfare Assistance schemes among vulnerable or protected groups,** including those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those whose first language is not English and households in which someone is disabled.



3. Greater London Authority (February 2022) The rising cost of living and its effects on Londoners

Action on Housing

By June 2021, over 86,000 children were homeless and living in temporary accommodation in London.⁴ Many more live in the private rented sector in over-crowded and unsuitable homes. Between 2011/12 and 2019/20 social rent housing delivery in London declined from 11,374 to just 632.⁵ Between 2016 and 2021 London saw a 30% increase in households on local authority waiting lists and now nearly 300,000 are waiting for social homes.⁶ The rate of overcrowding and lack of adequate space is highest in London⁷, and would have become even worse during the pandemic, where restrictions required households to isolate in their homes. There are about 243,880 households with children that claim benefits in London. These households risk facing so-called “No-DSS” discrimination should they need homes in the private renting sector. Black, Asian or those of other minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be disproportionately affected.



4. MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, Detailed local authority level tables: July to September 2021, Table TA1

5. Sagoe, C., Weekes, T. & Stratton, E. (2020) A Capital in Crisis. Retrieved from: https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/5JGJ3GtbWHZg9Z6W1uV4J/c0da473e27f2cdecdf1d417412a1e5B3/A_Capital_in_Crisis.pdf

6. London Data Store (2021) Households on Local Authority Waiting List, Borough. Retrieved from: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/households-local-authority-waiting-list-borough>

7. House of Commons Library, “Overcrowded housing (England),” June 15, 2021. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01013/SN01013.pdf>

It is not possible to create a child poverty free London without addressing the housing crisis facing families in the city. The next leaders of local government must work with partners in the Greater London Authority and central government to tackle exorbitantly high rents, urgently deliver new homes at social rent across London, and improve the standards and conditions of temporary accommodation in London. They can do this by taking the following actions:

- **Build more social housing. We are asking local authorities to make sure properties are built with a commitment to social rents.** They should develop a social rent delivery policy in their local plans that is informed by a substantive assessment of social housing as well as a robust Equality Impact Assessment. Residential developments under section 106 must ensure that the vast majority, if not all, should be allocated to social rent and not just affordable rent.
- **Ban No-DSS discrimination. We are asking local authorities to pass motions banning blanket bans against people who can afford the rent but are discriminated against for receiving benefits.** Where relevant, they should amend their licensing policies so that councils can enforce against this discrimination.
- **Ensure that temporary accommodation is suitable, safe and of good quality.** We are asking that local authorities commit to minimum standards and develop a coordinated framework for maintaining and managing temporary accommodation. Families should be supported throughout their placement in temporary accommodation and be supported in making complaints when relevant. Local authorities must ensure that housing departments and social services never end or threaten to end accommodation through a homelessness or child in need duty without a clear plan for how a child will be accommodated.



Action on Childcare

Polling carried out in September 2021 among a representative sample of Londoners found that childcare costs were felt to be the biggest driver of poverty in the city.⁸ This reflects the fact that total childcare costs in inner London are 30% higher than elsewhere in the country.⁹

These high costs and the failure of central government to uprate the childcare element of Universal Credit means that for many families across the city, especially lone parents, it is no longer possible to make work pay, even on a part-time basis. For families with children who are disabled or have special educational needs, the barriers are even higher, due to a lack of affordable, high-quality provision that meets their children's needs.

The situation is also very difficult for childcare providers. Government funding for the childcare that families are entitled to is inadequate, and rising energy prices, inflation and increased employment costs are making it harder and harder to balance the books and provide this essential service. Local councils have supported the childcare sector through the pandemic and must continue to support providers and ensure families have access to high quality, affordable, accessible childcare that allows them to work. Actions to take include:

- **Consider how local early years funding could be used more creatively and complemented from additional sources, to increase provision for children who would disproportionately benefit from it,** including children whose families are experiencing financial hardship, children with SEND and children in need.
- **Where gaps are identified in the supply of affordable, high-quality childcare in the local area consider providing financial support to address them,** for example in the form of start-up grants to providers to establish new settings and/or increase the number places available.
- **Establish schemes to provide social security claimants with interest-free loans or payments to cover the up-front costs of childcare provision, such as deposits.**



8. <https://4in10.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/flying-against-gravity.pdf>

9. CPAG, (2021), <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/cost-child-london-help-childcare-fees-%E2%80%98woefully-inadequate%E2%80%99>

Action on Hunger

As a direct consequence of high levels of child poverty, hundreds of thousands of children in our city are denied their right to adequate food and regularly experience hunger. Before the pandemic 400,000 children in London were living in households with low food security.¹⁰ In London, 32% of families are registered for Free School Meals, which is higher than the UK average of 29%.¹¹

UK wide figures show that some groups are particularly at risk of food insecurity; people identifying as Black or Black British were significantly overrepresented in those that need to use Trussell Trust food banks (9% vs. 3% of the UK population)¹² and half of families with the immigration status 'no recourse to public funds' in the UK say they have had at least one day when their children went without a hot meal because they could not afford it.¹³



10. Survey of Londoners: Headline findings' Mayor of London, 2019

11. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/demand-for-free-school-meals-rises-sharply-as-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-families-bites/>

12. The Trussell Trust (2020) Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network

13. The Unity Project (2019) Access Denied: The cost of the 'no recourse to public funds' policy

No child in London should go hungry and working to end the need for food banks must be priority for every London councillor. We urge you to:

- **Actively support a local food poverty alliance, with resources and a clear, refreshed food poverty action plan that focuses on building more resilient local food systems.** This should include providing tailored support to specific groups known to be at particular risk of food insecurity including Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and those with no recourse to public funds.
- **Promote a cash-first approach to tackling food poverty,** prioritising Local Welfare Assistance and Council Tax Reduction schemes as ways to maximise household incomes for families living in poverty.
- **Ensure a good start in life and support for children and families through:**
 - supporting breastfeeding through the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative;
 - setting a target to increase Healthy Start uptake; and
 - supporting free school meals and holiday provision with food for all potentially eligible families; working to ensure that these are healthy and sustainably sourced



This manifesto is supported by a coalition of charities, working as part of the London Child Poverty Alliance (LCPA) and committed to tackling child poverty in London. The LCPA brings together collective knowledge, expertise and experience to develop and champion the practical solutions needed to tackle child poverty in London.

For more information, please visit: www.childpovertylondon.org

The logo for 4in10, featuring the number '4' in blue, 'in' in yellow, and '10' in blue.The logo for The Children's Society, with the text 'The Children's Society' in a black serif font.The logo for My Fair London, with 'My' in black, 'Fair' in green with a horizontal line through it, and 'London' in black.