

# A City for all Londoners: London Child Poverty Alliance consultation response

December 2016

## Introduction

**The London Child Poverty Alliance (LCPA)** is an alliance of organisations committed to tackling child poverty in London.

Our members include:

4in10; Barnardo's; Child Poverty Action Group; Children's Rights Alliance for England; Community Links; Family and Childcare Trust; Generation Rent; Gingerbread; Law Centres Network; London Early Years Foundation; London Voluntary Service Council; NUT; Oxfam; Peabody; Pecan Trust; Partnership for Young London; Renters Rights London; SERTUC; Shelter; Sustain/London Food Link The Children's Society; Timewise Foundation; Toynbee Hall; Trussell Trust; Trust for London; Women's Resource Centre; Working Families; Z2K.

We bring together our collective knowledge, expertise and experience to develop and champion the practical solutions needed to tackle child poverty in London.

We campaign and influence to ensure that London child poverty issues are understood and addressed by policymakers and the wider community.

We are delighted to see the Mayor's explicit aim in *A City for All Londoners* to 'address the underlying economic and social injustice that drives inequality and unfairness, and leaves too many Londoners struggling to get by' (p71). We completely agree that there is no excuse for child poverty in a city as prosperous as London.

We are also encouraged by the Mayor's commitment to break down policy siloes, as this recognises the interdependence between all themes and tackling child poverty.

We believe that the Mayor's vision should focus on addressing the root causes of child poverty in London, which include high housing costs, a lack of affordable childcare, underemployment and low pay. We would also like to see a focus on mitigating the impact of poverty on children, which can damage their education, health, wellbeing and life chances more generally.

In this consultation response, we have offered our recommendations for how the Mayor might address some of these themes to improve the lives of children living in poverty in the capital today.

If you have any questions about any aspect of this response, please contact Laura Payne, Programme Manager at 4in10 on [Laura.payne@childrenengland.org.uk](mailto:Laura.payne@childrenengland.org.uk) or Alice Woudhuysen, London Campaign Manager at Child Poverty Action Group on [awoudhuysen@cpag.org.uk](mailto:awoudhuysen@cpag.org.uk)

## Part 1 Accommodating Growth

We welcome the Mayor's commitment to a strategic approach to the planning and development of the social and physical infrastructure the city will need in the future. We are also happy to see an emphasis placed on quality early years, childcare and school places.

The cost and availability of high quality childcare causes problems for too many Londoners. We are pleased that the strategy recognises that a lack of affordable, high quality childcare can act as a barrier to work for parents, particularly mothers, who are more likely to consider their childcare responsibilities before taking a new job<sup>1</sup>. The strategy also shows commitment to addressing the supply and costs of childcare. We particularly welcome the commitment to embed childcare and early education provision within city planning. This will help to make sure that the number of childcare spaces grows as the population grows, and can help to tackle affordability if low or no rent childcare premises are included within planning requirements.

We know that London families are less likely to take up their free entitlements to childcare and early education. Addressing this is one piece of the puzzle to making childcare more affordable and accessible for Londoners, and so we welcome the commitment to work to increase take up. We look forward to seeing further detail on both of these commitments and would be pleased to offer further support on this.

However, the issues with childcare are wide ranging and further action will be needed to make sure that it does not act as a barrier to work for parents or a barrier to achievement for children. Some of these issues are:

- **Cost** A nursery place in London is around a third more expensive than England average, and prices are rising faster than the rest of the country<sup>2</sup>. The cost of childcare for a disabled child can also be more than £20 per hour – more than four times the national average cost<sup>3</sup>.
- **Gaps in supply** Half of London's boroughs do not have enough free early education places which could mean children missing out on vital early learning<sup>4</sup>. There also are also significant shortages of after-school clubs, provision for disabled children, and provision for parents with atypical work patterns.
- **Low uptake of free entitlement** Uptake of free early education for two, three and four year olds is below average in London<sup>5</sup> and in some London local authorities, significant proportions of children are receiving their free early education in provision that has been judged to 'require improvement' or be inadequate. The 15 'free' hours are also incompatible with full-time work and commuting.
- **Lack of childcare to support atypical working patterns** Informal childcare from friends and family is often used to support atypical or irregular working hours, but London families are far less likely to use informal childcare compared to the UK average. Childminders can often offer greater flexibility of hours, but numbers are on the decrease in London<sup>6</sup>.
- **Information** There has been, and will be further, substantial changes to provision, and parents will need information to help them make the best of what's on offer, but some local authorities no longer have a Family Information Service, instead relying on generic phone lines and websites

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<sup>1</sup> 64% of mothers, compared with 36% of fathers, 'strongly agree' that they would consider their childcare responsibilities before taking a new job, according to a survey conducted by Working Families for the *Modern Family Index 2016*

<sup>2</sup> Family and Childcare Trust and 4in10, *Invest in Childcare, Invest in London*, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Working Families, *Off Balance*, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Family and Childcare Trust

<sup>5</sup> Family and Childcare Trust and 4in10, *Invest in Childcare, Invest in London*, 2016

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- **Quality** in London is generally above the national average, but there is a tail end of low quality provision. These providers are more likely to have vacancies, so addressing quality could have the effect of increasing supply.

To address these issues, the Mayor should:

- **Help to ensure there is enough childcare to meet families' need by:**
  - Supporting local authorities to fulfil their duties under the Childcare Act 2006. This should include drives to increase supply of certain types of childcare, including for children with disabilities, across London where supply is not meeting demand.
  - Supporting providers by:
    - Considering a small grant scheme for childminders to cover items such as training, registration fees, insurance and equipment.
    - Providing start-up grants to increase supply in areas that have been identified as having a lack of places.
    - Looking for opportunities to use public buildings to provide childcare, helping to reduce costs. This could include using school buildings more effectively out of school hours, on-site crèches for employees within the Greater London Authority (GLA) family, or using GLA owned land, for example, former police stations, for childcare.
    - In order to make childcare cheaper through economics of scale, encouraging mergers between childcare providers and the sharing of back-office costs and other business collaboration between providers.
- **Provide information for families:**
  - Undertake a pan-London or targeted information campaign about early education and help with childcare costs. This should include supporting local authorities in their role providing information to parents, as well as considering other ways to provide information, such as peer-to-peer.
  - Create a pan-London childcare brokerage service that helps parents to find suitable childcare. This service should monitor areas where demand outstrips supply.

## Part 2 Housing

The Mayor notes that 'only eight per cent of Londoners are satisfied with housing in London' and 'A shortage of truly affordable homes is acting as a drag on the attractiveness of our city as a place to live and work' (p73).

The lack of genuinely affordable homes in London is a key driver of child poverty and has a sizable part to play in the stigma and shame that child poverty places on children; and the insecurity they may have to face. With this in mind, we believe that new developments (either to rent or to buy), as well as existing housing stock, must be planned for use in a way that supports and enhances family life.

The vast majority of children in poverty are in rented housing (more than 530,000): half with a registered social landlord and half with a private landlord. The number of children in poverty in private rented housing has more than doubled in 10 years<sup>7</sup>. This is of great concern when you consider that London's rents have risen 11% since 2012, while pay rose just 1%<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Trust for London and npf, *London's Poverty Profile*, 2015

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sian-berry/london-housing\\_b\\_9090016.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sian-berry/london-housing_b_9090016.html)

Currently nearly 50,000 homeless families are living in limbo in temporary accommodation and the most common reason that homeless households in London lost their last home is the end of an assured shorthold tenancy<sup>9</sup>. We are pleased that the Mayor has expressed his desire to take a leadership role in this area and is working with the London boroughs to identify ways in which a pan-London approach to homelessness might be more effective. We also welcome the Mayor's recognition that children are growing up in overcrowded conditions and encourage the Mayor to set a target for reducing overcrowding during his first term in office.

The LCPA believes that the Mayor should:

- Ensure that there is an increase in supply for housing that is fit for families, not just one or two bedroom flats.
- Define affordability with reference to income levels, not market rates, so that there are offers that are genuinely affordable for low-income families, whether they are renting or buying.
- Promote the London Rental Standard and use his influence to ensure that private landlords provide better standards of accommodation and more secure tenures.
- Introduce a target of at least 30% of London's new homes to be social housing, in order to provide stable and affordable homes for London families.
- Deliver the London Living Rent scheme, and within the development of the scheme work with relevant housing organisations in London to set a rate that is genuinely affordable.
- Promote greater transparency and accountability in planning and housing development by requiring developers who under-deliver on their affordable housing targets to publish their full viability assessments.
- Address concerns that there are build-to-rent developments that will not be subject to the supplementary planning guidance, which expects a minimum 35% of homes on other sites to be affordable.
- Clarify what support the GLA can offer for individual Local Authority Private Rented Sector Licensing scheme (acknowledging that the Mayor's election manifesto promised a London-wide scheme, which has subsequently been refused by the Secretary of State).

## Part 3 Economy

It is clear that high levels of economic prosperity in the capital do not automatically mean that that growth is shared among Londoners, or that it translates into reductions in poverty for families. In fact, between 2010 and 2014 London experienced the highest prosperity growth of all Local Enterprise Partnership areas, but the inclusivity of that growth grew the least of all areas<sup>10</sup>. Recent figures published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the

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<sup>9</sup> Trust for London and npf, *London's Poverty Profile*, 2015

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/inclusive-growth-monitor>

New Policy Institute have revealed that 57% of people living in poverty in London are in work<sup>11</sup>.

London's poor growth inclusivity has both economic and social implications. If wages and social security for London's lower paid workers are frozen or diminishing in real terms, while the cost of living continues to rise, many administrators, cleaners, housekeepers, events staff, construction workers, childcare workers, teaching assistants, and countless other workers may find that they and their families are unable to continue living in inner London.

These workers are crucial for London's current and future economic success, enabling financial, business and other lucrative sectors to operate and expand, but poor inclusive growth in the capital threatens their ability to remain in inner city boroughs.

Business lobby group London First has expressed concern that the shortage of affordable housing in London is threatening the capital's competitiveness, with a survey of their members finding that 75 per cent of responding employers were concerned about the future impact that rising housing costs will have on their ability to recruit and retain staff<sup>12</sup>.

The British Chambers of Commerce recently published poll results demonstrating that some businesses struggle to retain talented staff due to the availability and cost of childcare faced by their employees<sup>13</sup>.

We welcome the Mayor's call for London's economy to work for everyone in terms of all Londoners having an opportunity to benefit equally from its success.

We believe this vision could be taken forward by the following:

- The establishment of a 'Skills for London' Taskforce that wasn't mentioned in this document, but was a commitment in the Mayor's election manifesto. We believe that it is very important to develop a citywide, strategic approach to skills, identifying gaps in provision, focusing on the wider utilisation of skills and ensuring that currently disparate programmes and funding streams, across the public, private and voluntary sectors, work in concert. We are keen to work with the Deputy Mayor for Regeneration, Planning and Skills and his team, to ensure that the London voluntary, community and social enterprise sector are involved at the start of the establishment in developing your strategic approach.
- We support the Mayor's call on employers to tackle inequalities in the workplace, such as paying the London Living Wage and conducting a gender pay audit, where he states that he is going to work with experts from business and civil society to think about the most effective measures that businesses can take. We hope this would start with tackling gender pay gaps and a move to flexible hiring by default within the GLA groups and family, including when commissioning or contracting others. Members of the LCPA are willing and able, through forums such as LVSC's Employment and Skills Network, to be part of those discussions, which will form the proposals that are submitted to his Economic Fairness Team. When developing ideas for the business compact, we would ask that it considers commitments from employers around flexibility and family friendly working, and childcare too.
- Promote financial inclusion, through partnership with the financial sector, including social enterprises and credit unions, with the goal of ensuring that every adult can

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2016>

<sup>12</sup> <http://londonfirst.co.uk/housing-shortage-will-stifle-londons-growth-say-business/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/bcc-time-for-action-on-high-cost-of-childcare.html>

access financial services in affordable ways that meet their needs, and that all young Londoners leave education with numeracy skills and an understanding of finance.

- Promote the uplift of London weighting, which over years has fallen behind the growing gap in living costs between inner and outer London and elsewhere.

## **Part 4 Environment, Transport and public space**

In aiming to achieve a healthy, resilient, fair and green city, there are a number of practical steps the Mayor could take:

- Continue to support both Oyster and contactless payment card methods and ensure fare structures remain equal.
- Introduce city-wide exclusion zones for new fast food outlets within 400 metres of a school as part of the London Plan.
- Introduce Cleaner Walking Routes to School Work with boroughs to develop healthy and safe routes for walking and cycling to school; establish clean air zones near London's schools.

## **Part 5 A City for all Londoners**

It is heartening to see a Mayor committed to improving quality of people's lives and having an impact on how we all live together. In this section we will cover food poverty and social integration, as many of the other interrelated issues surrounding poverty have been covered above.

### **Food poverty**

There is no single accepted definition of food poverty, nor is there a consensus that food poverty exists as something separate from poverty in general. What is clear, however, is that there are families in London who experience a food crisis – as evidenced by the large numbers turning to food banks – and that there are families experiencing chronic food insecurity, many of whom may be tipped into food crisis. These phenomena have many interlinked causes and cuts across a number of policy areas including economic development and health inequalities. A sudden illness, an unexpected bill, a change in benefit payments or the death of a parent or partner can tip a family into a food crisis. Low pay, inadequate welfare support or long-term illness, combined with high housing and travel costs, can condemn families to chronic hunger, poor nutrition and anxiety.

The Mayor's vision should include the need for every London borough to have a food poverty action plan, as well as a child poverty action plan. Food poverty plans bring together statutory and non-statutory partners to develop a coordinated and sustainable response to food poverty and its underlying drivers.

Two thirds of London boroughs do not currently have a food poverty action plan<sup>14</sup>. We welcome the GLA's funding for five boroughs to develop these plans in 2017 and hope that this will trigger further progress in other boroughs. These plans should identify and tackle the drivers of food poverty by fostering long-term sustainable responses and ensuring that London's growing population does not experience food insecurity.

We identify below five clear areas of action which the GLA and London boroughs should address within an action plan to tackle food poverty. These are:

- Increase the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers
- Promote breastfeeding to boost the health of infants and mothers
- Harness the value of children's centres to help families eat healthily
- Provide universal free school meals for primary school aged children
- Ensure all residents have physical access to good food

### **Social integration**

We also welcome the Mayor's commitment to creating an integrated London. Poor social integration is a problem of social structure and economic inequality and we must tackle the latter if we are to reduce child poverty levels across the capital. A report published in November 2016 by The Challenge<sup>15</sup> demonstrated how poverty reduces social integration. Poorer respondents to their survey of neighbourhood behaviours were less likely to leave a key with a neighbour of a different ethnicity. Poorer respondents were more likely to 'never' or 'rarely' feel a sense of neighbourhood belonging than richer respondents. The Challenge also notes that there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that social segregation impedes life chances, inhibits social mobility, prolongs periods of unemployment and restricts economic growth.

Addressing segregation in the early years is an effective way to do this as it supports parents and children to mix together. The Family and Childcare Trust's recent research for the GLA<sup>16</sup> found that there were significant patterns of attendance to early years setting by ethnicity, deprivation and SEND status. The GLA should work with local authorities to encourage social mixing in the early years, share best practice when this is being done and monitor attendance patterns.

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<sup>14</sup> London Food Link/ Sustain (November 2016) *Beyond the Food bank: London Food Poverty Profile 2016*

<sup>15</sup> <http://the-challenge.org/uploads/documents/TCN-Integration-City.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/social-mix-london-early-years-provision>