



TACKLING CHILD POVERTY IN LONDON

How London can respond to the national Child Poverty Strategy

A briefing from the Centre for London, 4in10 and the Trust for London

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ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

Centre for London, London's independent think tank, and Trust for London, one of the city's largest philanthropic funders, are working in partnership to convene voices from across London's civil society, public and private sectors to discuss the biggest issues facing London and the wider UK today.

In December, Centre for London and Trust for London brought together London's local and regional government to discuss London's response to the new national Child Poverty Strategy and abolition of the two-child benefit limit. This briefing brings together insights from this discussion, and would not have been possible without the expertise of:

- Our partner 4in10, London's Child Poverty Network
- Our expert speaker Joanna Unthank from the North East Combined Authority, and input from Kirsten Watters from Camden Council
- The participants in our workshop from the Greater London Authority (GLA), London Councils, the Local Government Association, and from the London boroughs of Camden, Lambeth, Hackney, Havering, Merton, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest.

The briefing covers:

- **Context and recent developments** – these include the national strategy *Our Children, Our Future* (December 2025), the abolition of the Universal Credit two-child limit, and proposed local government funding reforms.
- **What needs to be true for success** – the key conditions for London's local authorities and the GLA to effectively tackle child poverty.
- **Opportunities for collaboration** – areas where working across boroughs or sectors could amplify impact.
- **Case studies** – examples of innovative initiatives in Camden and the North East that offer lessons for London.
- **Conclusions and recommendations** – a synthesis of the insights presented in the paper to generate recommendations in order to enhance London's local and regional responses to child poverty.

This briefing reflects a range of perspectives shared at the workshop and in follow-up research. It does not represent the official view of any individual organization. Centre for London as an independent charitable think tank, retains editorial control over conclusions and recommendations, and any errors are the author's responsibility.

About the author

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Rob has worked across several government departments, including HM Treasury. Prior to working in government, Rob worked for charities tackling social injustice across London. Rob holds a BA Hons from the University of Oxford where he was a Craythorne Scholar, and an MSc in Inequalities and Social Science from the London School of Economics.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child poverty in London remains unacceptably high. In every London borough except one, at least **one in five children live in poverty** after housing costs, and in some boroughs the rate approaches half of all children.¹ For example, Tower Hamlets has 47% of children living in poverty (after housing costs) – the highest in London – whereas Richmond upon Thames has 15%, the lowest.² In total, more than 700,000 children in London live in poverty as of 2025.³

Housing costs are the overwhelming driver of child poverty in London. Before housing costs, London's child poverty rate is lower than the national average. After housing costs, the rate doubles (or worse) in 21 out of 33 boroughs. Even in the borough with the smallest housing cost impact, the poverty rate rises by over 60 percent once housing costs are taken into account.

London local authorities and civil society organisations are doing innovative work to support families in poverty. At the same time, initiatives led by the Greater London Authority have created significant impact, notably the citywide universal free school meals offer for all primary pupils introduced in 2023. However, **co-ordinated pan-London activity on child poverty has been limited**.

Against this backdrop, recent **national policy changes will influence how successful London will be** in tackling child poverty over the coming years.

The UK Government's new strategy (*Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty*, published 5 December 2025) sets a 10-year mission to reduce child poverty across the country.⁴ It focuses on three pillars of action: boosting family incomes, driving down the cost of essentials, and strengthening local support.

The strategy includes **several measures which will have a positive impact** on children in poverty in London, including supporting families in temporary accommodation and reducing the cost of childcare. In particular, the **abolition of the two-child benefit limit** will make a big difference to larger families – but is not a silver bullet, with the overall impact mediated by the benefit cap.

There are also **gaps in the government's approach** that will limit progress. The strategy does not set specific numerical targets and **does not clearly articulate the role of local or regional government**, though many levers sit at the local or regional level. The ongoing freeze to Local Housing Allowance and retention of the overall benefit cap will significantly **limit the effectiveness of the benefit system** in protecting London families from poverty. Also, longer-term, **changes to local government funding** following the Fair Funding Review will limit many London boroughs with high levels of child poverty's capacity to respond to local need.

In this context, London's local and regional government, as well as voluntary and community sector organisations, **are committed to tackling child poverty but face tough questions on how to best support the thousands of families in poverty across the capital**.

¹ Trust for London. (2024). *Child poverty by London borough*. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>

² Ibid.

³ London Assembly Economy Committee. (2024). *Child poverty and free school meals*. file:///C:/Users/Admin25/Downloads/Child%20Poverty%20and%20FSM_0.pdf

⁴ Cabinet Office & Department for Work & Pensions. (2025). *Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty*. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/693a9df9cfacd5e888491de0/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>

In a workshop held on 8th December 2025, shortly after the publication of the national strategy, Centre for London in partnership with Trust for London and 4in10 convened representatives from across London's local and regional government to explore the following questions:

- **What will need to be true for our efforts on child poverty to succeed in this changing environment?**
- **Which challenges can we address better by working together across boroughs or sectors?**

Participants agreed that London boroughs – alongside the Greater London Authority and other public and third sector partners – will need to create an enabling environment that supports effective action on child poverty, identifying five conditions for success. Specifically, to reduce child poverty in London, boroughs should:

- Focus efforts and ensure accountability by developing **local child poverty plans co-designed with families**, supported by locally relevant and comparable indicators and set meaningful success measures
- Make reducing child poverty **a priority across the entire local authority**, not just one department, with visible commitment from the top and a culture that treats child poverty as everyone's business
- **Protect sufficient resources for key services** such as early years, direct welfare support and community outreach
- Shift from **crisis response to prevention and resilience building** and ensure **universal services reach and prioritise the most disadvantaged families**
- Maximise the impact of limited resources through **smarter use of data, "test and learn" approaches** and sharing and applying **evidence on what works**

Greater co-ordination, plus regional and sub-regional collaboration will accelerate progress and enhance the support offer for families. To do so, boroughs should work with the Greater London Authority, civil society partners, and other pan-London bodies such as London Councils to:

- **Boost take-up of entitlements and local offers** (for example the **Healthy Start** and **Holiday Activities and Food** programmes) through **pan-London campaigns** delivered with trusted schools, health services, faith groups and VCS partners.
- Ensure support follows families across borough boundaries through **data-sharing protocols** and a **London-wide service directory**.
- Pool **commissioning and funding** for specialist advice, parent employment support and shared research and evaluation to improve impact and value for money, building on promising cross-borough initiatives like the recently announced Family Financial Resilience Partnership.
- Speak with one voice through **joint advocacy to national government on local government finance, the Local Housing Allowance, the Benefit Cap**, childcare funding and social housing
- Work in partnership to engage with **utilities companies and employers** on measures to support families like social tariffs, the London Living Wage, and flexible employment

TACKLING CHILD POVERTY IN LONDON

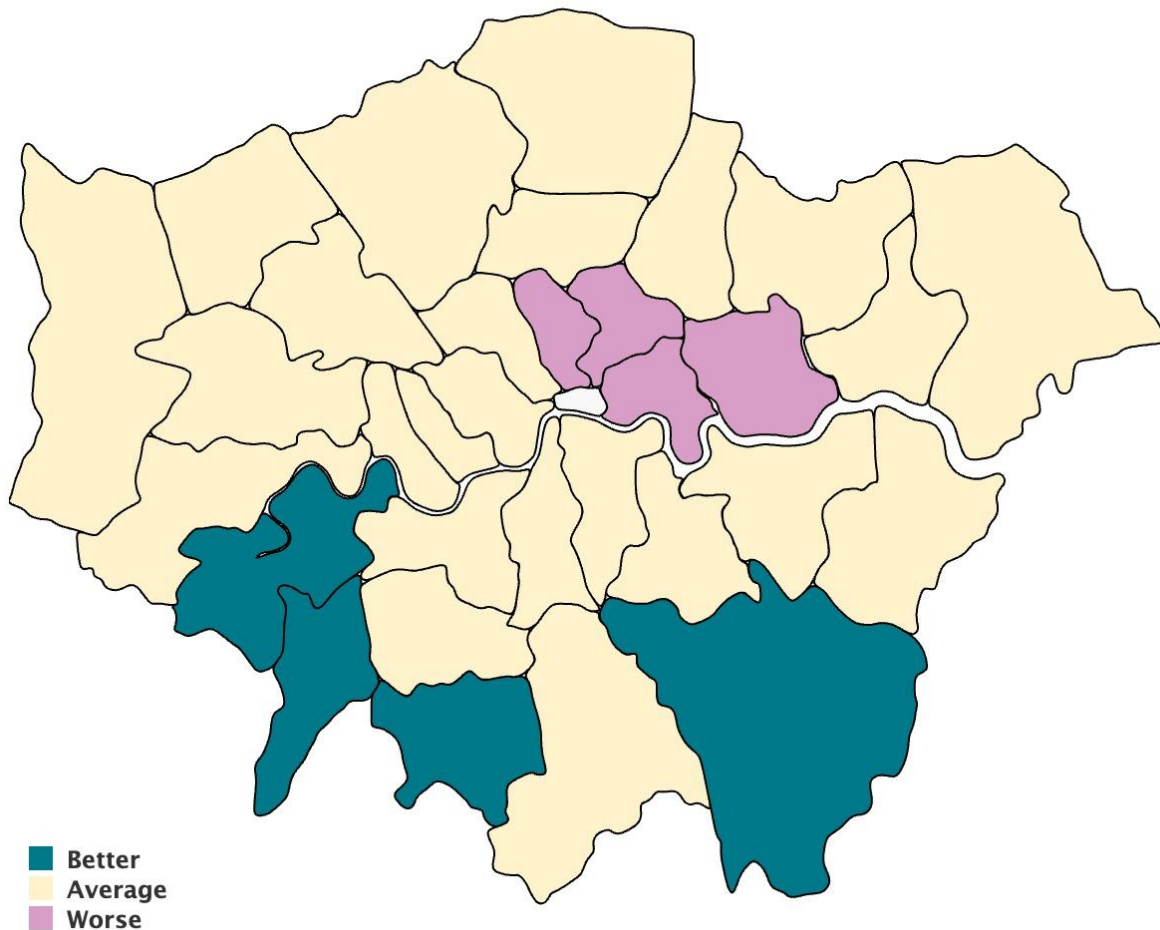
Background and context

Child poverty remains high in London today

In every London borough – except Richmond – more than 20% of children live in poverty. But rates vary significantly between boroughs. Almost half of children (47%) in Tower Hamlets are in poverty, compared to 22% in Bromley.⁵

Child poverty rate (AHC) (2023/24)

Data source: Local indicators of child poverty, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University for End Child Poverty; Children in low income families: local area statistics, DWP



Source: Trust for London. (2024). Child poverty by London borough.

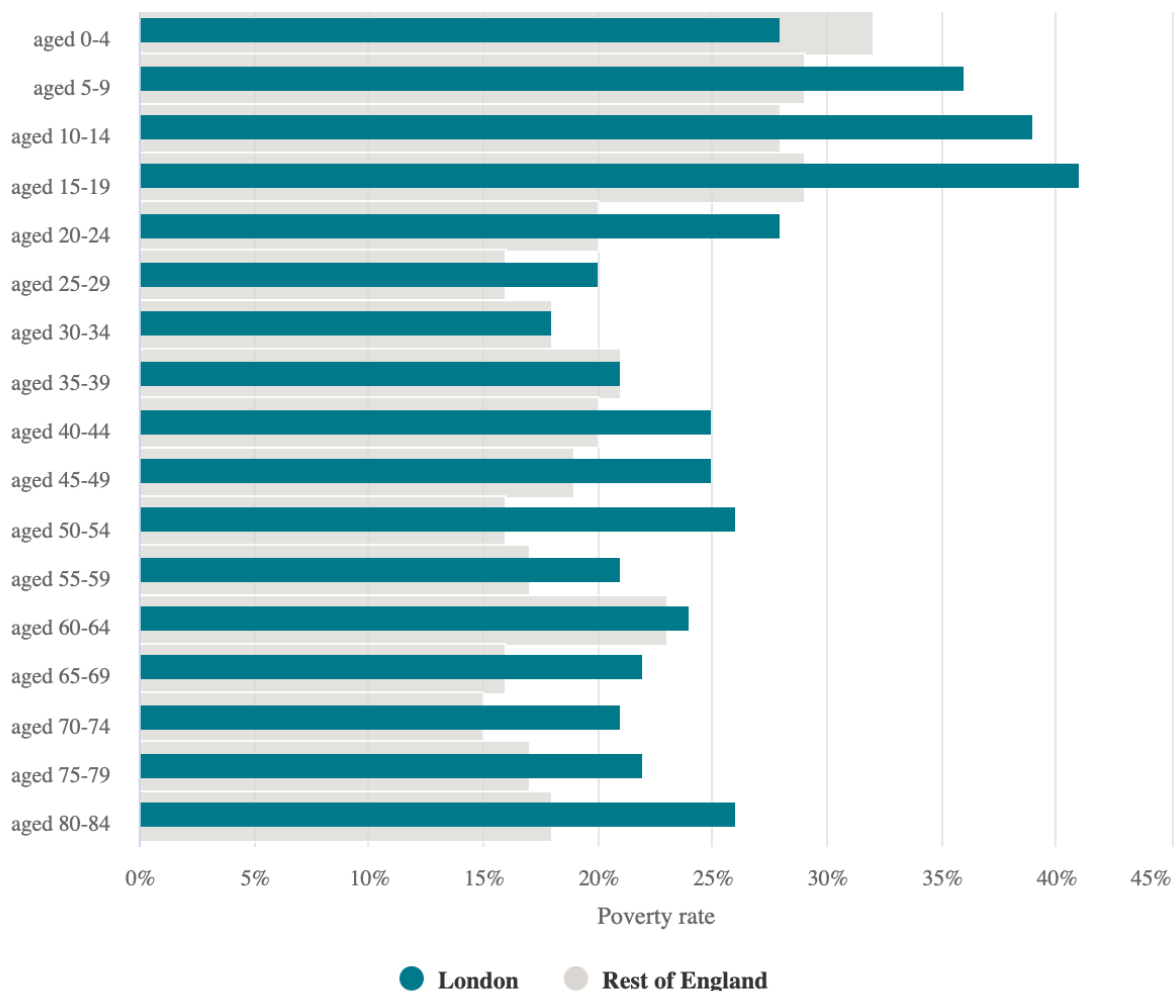
⁵ Trust for London. (2024). *Child poverty by London borough*. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>

Housing costs are the main driver of child poverty in London. Before housing costs, on average, London has lower rates of child poverty than the rest of England.

The child poverty rate doubles or more when housing costs are accounted for in 21 of the 33 boroughs. Even in the borough with the smallest gap before and after housing costs (Barking and Dagenham), housing costs increase the child poverty rate by 62%.⁶

Proportion of Londoners in poverty after housing costs by age band (2023/24)

Data source: Households Below Average Income, Department for Work and Pensions



Source: Trust for London (2025). Poverty before and after housing costs by age.

Many London local authorities and civil society organisations are doing innovative work to support families in poverty

Innovative and impactful approaches led by local authorities such as [Camden’s Raise Camden Child Poverty Taskforce](#), Greenwich’s recent rapid progress on [reducing use of temporary accommodation](#), and Barking & Dagenham’s [data-led approach to income maximisation](#) highlight the extent and variation of good practice in supporting families in poverty across the capital.

⁶ Trust for London. (2025) Child poverty by London borough. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>

London's VCSE sector is at the forefront of efforts to tackle child poverty in the city. It is particularly well placed to engage with families who feel unable to access statutory services, or who need additional support to do so, at least in the first instance. Many of these organisations not only provide immediate practical support and advice to alleviate the symptoms of poverty but also bring people with lived experience together to organise and campaign to address its root causes, often in partnership with local and regional authorities. Some examples include:

- The work of the 16 local **Home-Start** charities across London, which support over 6,000 families each year. Trained volunteers visit families in their homes for a couple of hours a week, offering non-judgemental emotional support, practical help and friendship at critical points in family life.
- Organisations like **The Magpie Project**, the **Cardinal Hume Centre** and the **Shoreditch Trust**, which support families living in temporary accommodation. These services combine practical assistance, such as housing and welfare advice, with mental health and wellbeing support, helping families to cope with the stress and insecurity associated with homelessness.
- Baby banks, such as those run by **Little Village** across London and locally by **Sebby's Corner** in Barnet, which provide families with babies and very young children with essential clothing, toys and equipment. In addition to meeting immediate needs, these organisations connect families into wider networks of advice and support to help improve their longer-term financial situation.
- Organisations supporting children and families at particular risk of poverty, including **Education & Skills Development Group (ESDEG)**, which supports disadvantaged migrant and minority communities in West London through education, training and skills development, and **KEEN London**, which runs free, accessible activities for children with additional needs and disabilities.

While pan-London activity does exist, it is partial and coordination is limited

Since the 2016 Welfare Reform and Work Act's removal of the Child Poverty Act's local duties and targets, **there is no statutory requirement for regional or local child poverty strategies**. Importantly, though the most recent Local Government Outcomes Framework does treat child poverty as a "contextual outcome" that central government will monitor, the current Government's strategy has not reintroduced this.⁷ As such, despite calls from the London Assembly and voluntary sector, there's no formal, citywide child poverty strategy for London.⁸

Nonetheless, City Hall programmes make a big difference for poorer families across the capital. Notably, the Greater London Authority has offered citywide universal free school meals offer for all primary pupils since 2023, and the recently launched London Opportunity Mission, which includes an emphasis on reducing inequalities for children and young people with a particular emphasis on early years. Since the publication of the Child Poverty strategy, the Mayor has announced the Family Financial Resilience Partnership. Set within a wider income maximisation programme, this new scheme brings together 12 boroughs and advice-based civil society organisations to help low-income families access unclaimed financial support.⁹ This is the first step towards a more comprehensive pan-London approach.

⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025). *Local Government Outcomes Framework: Call for feedback*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-outcomes-framework-call-for-feedback>

⁸ London Assembly Economy Committee (2024). *Child Poverty and Free School Meals*. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/strategy-needed-help-capitals-700000-children-growing-poverty>

⁹ Greater London Authority. (2026) Family Financial Resilience Partnership webpage. <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/financial-hardship/family-financial-resilience-partnership>

Partially as a result of the lack of a regional strategic function, there is no mechanism that routinely aligns borough strategies, resources or capabilities across housing, childcare and income maximisation, although some partnerships exist, such as the tri-borough arrangements in children's services between Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith & Fulham.¹⁰

In practice, London's large voluntary sector helps fill coordination gaps. 4in10, London's Child Poverty Network, convenes a citywide network of over 450 organisations to share practice, build capacity and campaign – but the absence of a pan London statutory approach limits how this work can interface with shared public goals and pooled investment.

Recent national policy changes will influence how successful London will be in tackling child poverty over the coming years

The Government's recently published 10-year national child poverty strategy and abolition of the two-child benefit coincides with substantial reforms to local government funding via the Fair Funding Formula 2.0 – all of which have significant implications for London's response to child poverty.

The national child poverty strategy (*Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty*) includes several measures which will have a positive effect for London. London's high housing costs, high levels of temporary accommodation use, and higher childcare and school day costs combine to place unique pressures on London's large numbers of single parent and low paid working families – and the new strategy brings together several measures which should address these.

On temporary accommodation, a previously announced £950 million Local Authority Housing Fund should help **expand councils' stock of good-quality temporary accommodation** and Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots aim to **cut over-six-week B&B stays**. These have since been accompanied by new measures in the Government's national homelessness strategy, which pledges to introduce new duties for **public services to collaborate to prevent homelessness**, as well as making a specific pledge to eliminate the use of B&Bs beyond the statutory six-week limit.

The strategy also built on previous commitments on childcare, extending **help with upfront childcare costs** in Universal Credit, including for parents returning from parental leave, and enabling support with care costs for all children in larger families receiving UC. Additionally, the strategy will extend access to Healthy Start vouchers for **early years food and nutrition support** for certain families with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Other measures include strengthening Child Maintenance Service collection to **support single parent households**, widening the Warm Home Discount to **reduce energy costs**, and Economic Inactivity Trailblazers linking **childcare support with employment support** for economically inactive households. One of the eight initial new Young Futures Hubs which will co-locate youth, wellbeing and careers support in areas with high levels of youth violence and antisocial behaviour will be in Tower Hamlets, the borough with the highest rate of child poverty in London.

¹⁰ GOV.UK (2016). *Tri-borough demonstrates outstanding leadership and social work*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tri-borough-demonstrates-outstanding-leadership-and-social-work>

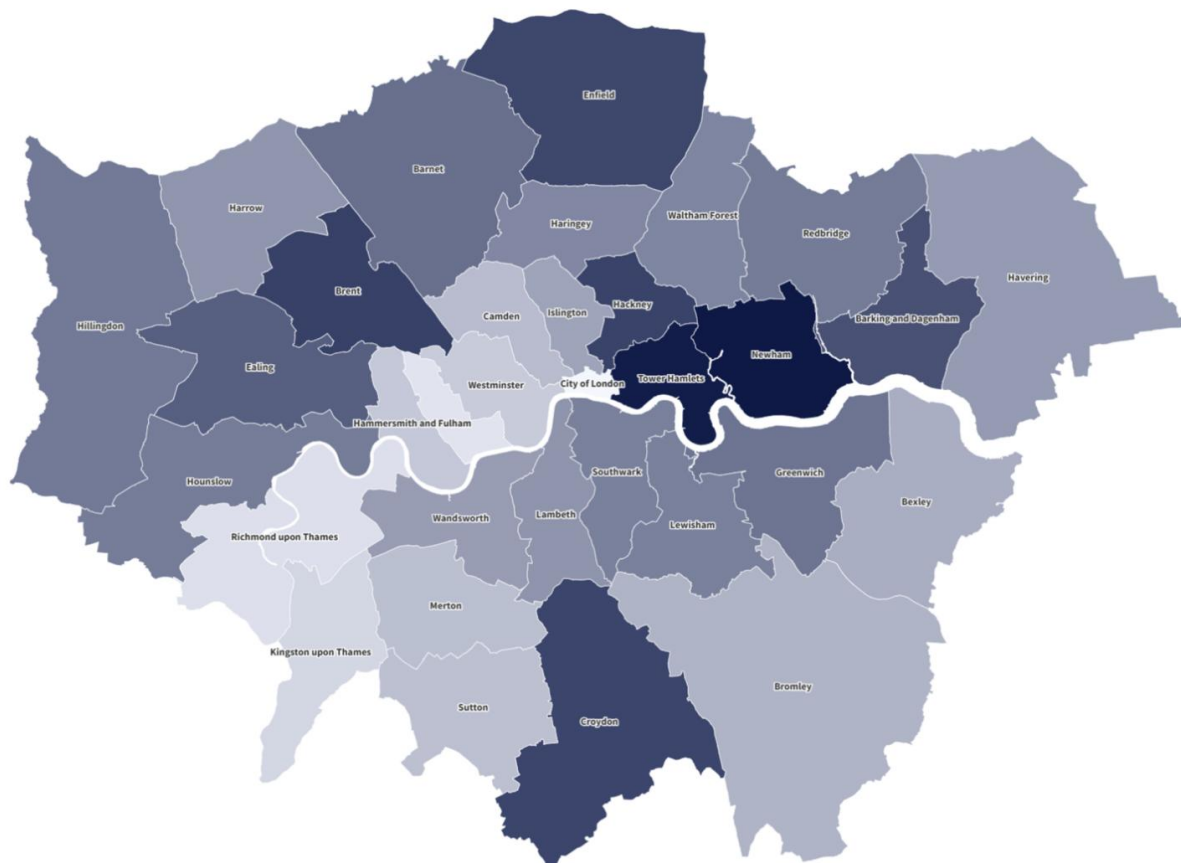
The abolition of the two-child benefit limit will make a particularly big difference in London – but it’s not a silver bullet.

At the Autumn Budget 2025, shortly prior to the publication of the national strategy, the Government announced **the abolition of the two-child benefit limit**, a policy that, since 2017, has capped the child element of Universal Credit (and equivalent support in Tax Credits) to the first two children in a family, with no extra funds for more.

Currently, **72,640 London households are affected** by the two-child limit, the highest number of any region in England and 17% of the national total. This equates to **93,120 children**. The number of households affected varies significantly by borough. The highest number of households is in Newham with 4,580 households affected, the lowest in Kensington and Chelsea with 420.

Households affected by the Two Child Limit benefit cap by borough, April 2025

20  4,580



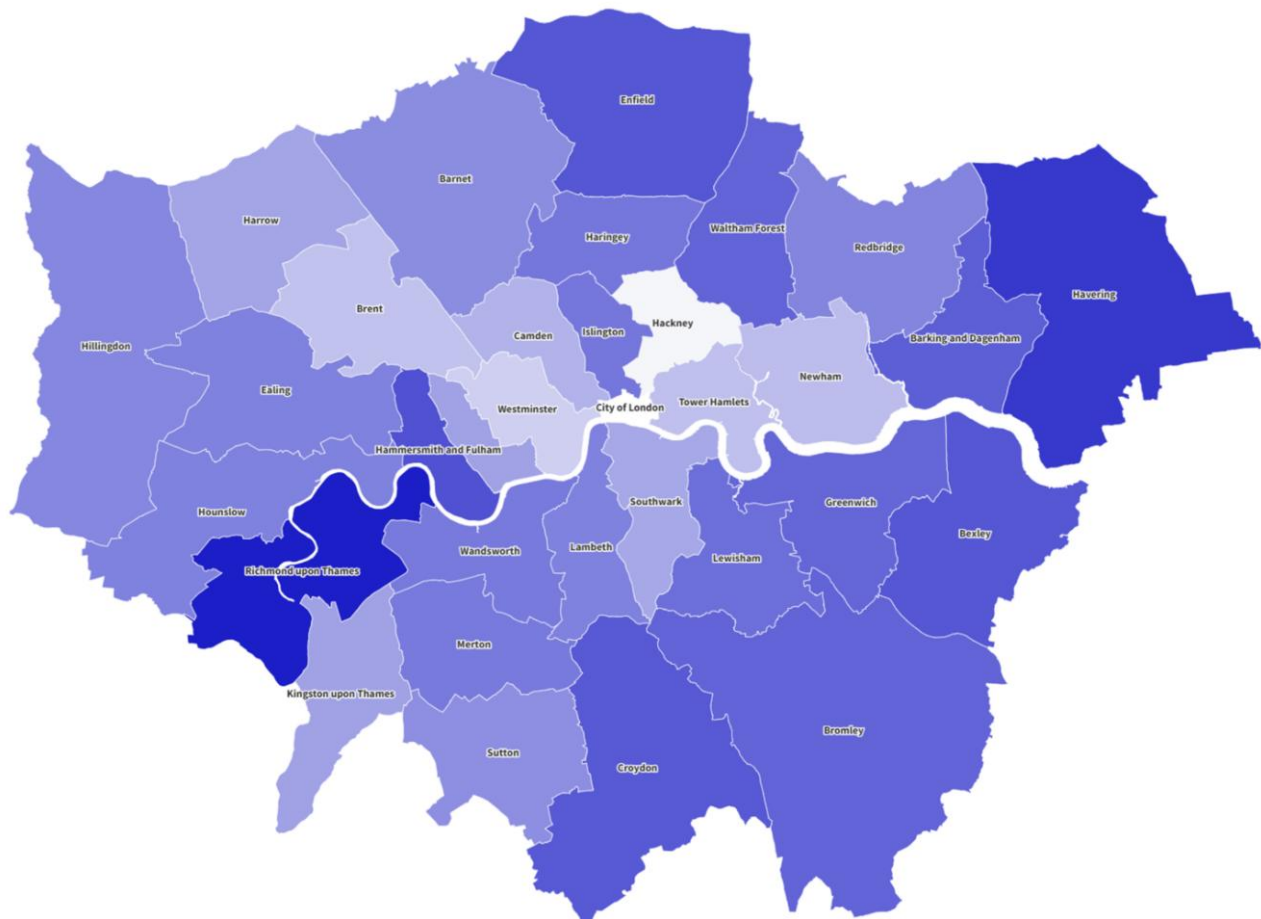
Source: Centre for London analysis, Department for Work and Pensions, [Data Tables: Universal Credit claimants statistics on the two child limit policy, April 2025](#).

The overall impact of the abolition of the two-child limit on child poverty in London will be reduced by the benefit cap, which remains in place. Of the 72,640 London households currently affected by the two-child limit, 5,810 are benefit capped, about 7,620 children – around 8%. This is in line with the national average - but varies significantly by borough. 12% of two-child limit households in Richmond Upon Thames are capped, compared to only 4% in Hackney.

As a result, the maximum number of London households who could benefit from the abolition of the two-child limit is 65,950 – but additional benefits for families will bring some of these up to the benefit cap, reducing the impact.¹¹

Percentage of Two Child Limit households affected by the benefit cap by borough, April 2025

4%  12%



Source: Centre for London analysis, Department for Work and Pensions, [Data Tables: Universal Credit claimants statistics on the two child limit policy, April 2025](#),

There are also gaps in the government’s approach – particularly on housing costs - that will limit progress on child poverty in London. While the national strategy highlights steps the Government is taking to expand the supply of housing – which should have long-run effects on affordability – and welcome prioritisation of temporary accommodation which affects 49,260 families with children in London, the Government’s decision to continue to freeze Local Housing Allowance has significant implications for the 300,000 London children in private rented housing living in poverty, almost half of the total.^{12,13}

¹¹ Centre for London analysis. Department for Work and Pensions. (2025). *Data Tables: Universal Credit claimants statistics on the two child limit policy*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-claimants-statistics-on-the-two-child-limit-policy-april-2025>

¹² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, (2025) *Live Tables on Homelessness*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

¹³ Trust for London. (2026) *Child poverty and type of housing*. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-and-housing-tenure/>

Longer term, changes to local government funding through the Fair Funding Formula will increase the resources available to some boroughs with high levels of child poverty. This will increase their capacity to respond to local need - but some boroughs with high levels of child poverty are not receiving a boost. Recently confirmed changes to the local government finance settlement through the Fair Funding Formula – due to take effect from 2026/27 – will significantly redistribute local government funding in England.

The final settlement is much more positive than [initial proposals](#) published in mid-2025 which saw many boroughs with the highest rates of child poverty face significant reductions in funding. Under the confirmed settlement, with a refined formula that takes account of the impact of housing costs, many London boroughs with high rates of child poverty will see overall resources increase significantly. For example, Tower Hamlets, where almost half of children live in poverty, is forecast to see its resources increase by a third by 2028/29. However, the reforms will also see some boroughs with higher rates of child poverty in inner London such as Islington, Camden and Southwark – where more than 40% of children live in poverty after housing costs – receive little to no additional resource.¹⁴

Borough	Child Poverty Rate (AHC) 2023/24	Change in Core Spending Power - 2025-26 to 2028-29
Tower Hamlets	48%	33%
Islington	44%	1%
Hackney	43%	14%
Newham	43%	36%
Camden	42%	1%
Southwark	41%	3%
Haringey	40%	14%
Barking & Dagenham	39%	33%
Lambeth	39%	3%
Lewisham	39%	7%
Brent	37%	27%
Greenwich	37%	7%
Ealing	36%	27%
Waltham Forest	36%	15%
Westminster	36%	-4%
Croydon	35%	28%
Enfield	35%	46%
Hounslow	35%	37%
Redbridge	34%	30%
Barnet	33%	22%
Hammersmith & Fulham	33%	-5%
Hillingdon	33%	36%
Wandsworth	33%	-5%

¹⁴ CfL analysis. (2026) *Core Spending Power table: provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2029* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-spending-power-table-provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-2026-to-2029>: Trust for London. (2025). *Child poverty by London borough*. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>

Harrow	32%	23%
Merton	31%	6%
Bexley	30%	12%
Havering	29%	26%
Kensington & Chelsea	29%	-5%
Sutton	29%	8%
Bromley	28%	6%
Kingston upon Thames	27%	15%
Richmond upon Thames	26%	0%

Source: Centre for London analysis of [Core Spending Power table: provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2029](#); Trust for London, [Child poverty by London borough](#).

Against this backdrop, how can London respond?

London's local government and its voluntary and community sector organisations are **committed to tackling child poverty** but face **tough questions**: *What will need to be true for our strategies to succeed in this changing environment? And which challenges can we address better by working together across boroughs or sectors?*

In a workshop held on 8th December 2025, shortly after the publication of the national strategy, Centre for London in partnership with Trust for London and 4in10 convened representatives from across London's local and regional government to:

- **Interpret** what the national strategy and abolition of the two-child benefit limit means for London, in the context of Fair Funding Review 2.0 and other changes to the local government operating environment.
- **Showcase** and explore innovative local and regional approaches to tackling child poverty.
- **Generate** ideas and momentum for London boroughs work to tackle child poverty.
- **Identify** pan or sub-regional collaboration opportunities, as well as conditions to enable success.

The following sections synthesises the key discussion points from the workshop. We also include three case studies – Raise Camden, Changing Realities, and the North East Combined Authority Child Poverty Action Plan – to profile the potential of evidence-led and innovative local, regional and national programmes aimed at supporting families in poverty.

WHAT WILL NEED TO BE TRUE FOR LONDON TO SUCCEED IN TACKLING CHILD POVERTY?

To reduce the number of children in London living in poverty, London boroughs – alongside the GLA and wider public and VCSE partners – will need to create an enabling environment that supports interventions that make a material difference to family incomes and outcomes. Some of the critical conditions for success that surfaced in discussion at the workshop were:

Local child poverty plans co-designed with families to focus efforts and enable accountability

Most London boroughs do not have a dedicated child poverty strategy. Given the absence of local targets or success measures beyond headline child poverty statistics in the new national strategy, councils can focus their efforts and enable local accountability by developing **local child poverty action plans** with meaningful and locally relevant output goals and success measures. For example, boroughs might set goals to reduce the percentage of children in low-income households over a 5-year period (outcome), or to increase the uptake of certain benefits (output).

To build capacity for this more strategic approach, regional bodies (e.g. London Councils and/or the GLA) could consider agreeing on common indicators to track across London. Additionally, participants stressed that strategies should be **evidence-based** and **incorporate the perspectives of families as well as children and young people**.

Case Study: Changing Realities and centring lived experience of family poverty in policy and practice

[Changing Realities](#) is a participatory research project that works with over 200 parents and carers living on low incomes to document everyday lives and advocate for policy change.

A partnership of parents and carers, academics at the University of Glasgow and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and the Child Poverty Action Group, the project evolved from work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic to enable parents and carers to share their experiences. It combines online diaries, discussion groups and creative methods such as zine-making and writing workshops to build a rich and active evidence base of families' experiences of poverty and the cost of living.

The project's approach reduces barriers to participation and considers parents and carers as experts by experience. Participants shape agendas, co-produce recommendations and engage directly with policymakers through submissions and public events. This has included written evidence to Parliament on how low-income households use cash to budget and maintain control over spending, offering practical insights for service design and regulation, as well as contributing to the development of the national Child Poverty Strategy.

The project has also contributed to national strategy debates through a [co-produced agenda for change](#) with IPPR and the Resolution Foundation, including guidance on how policymakers and practitioners should engage with families with lived experience of living on low incomes.

Changing Realities presents a practical and impactful model for how London's decision-makers could work with families to develop regional and local strategies and interventions. It also provides an ongoing real-time evidence stream to guide activities and decision-making.

Reducing child poverty must be a priority across the entire local authority, not just in one department, with visible commitment from the top and a culture that treats child poverty as ‘everyone’s problem’.

Many participants from boroughs noted the importance of getting all parts of the organisation – from housing to public health to economic development – aligned around child poverty objectives. This requires **political and executive leadership** that signals everyone has a role to play. Ideally, a single senior figurehead or champion would visibly lead the agenda, backed by a dedicated team to drive implementation.

There was agreement that **cross-party consensus** can make a real difference, particularly on issues outside of local government control. Participants suggested that joint advocacy by London’s leaders, regardless of political affiliation, could send a powerful message to national policymakers on issues like welfare benefits which are outside the remit of local government.

Local efforts must be backed by adequate resources – which will require creativity in a tight fiscal climate.

Changes to local government funding allocations following the Fair Funding Review 2.0, while benefitting some London councils, will limit the spending power of several boroughs with high rates of child poverty. Participants agreed that these changes, against an ongoing backdrop of severe financial pressures, means boroughs must **advocate strongly for funding while also making the most of existing funds**.

Participants agreed that London boroughs **should seek to speak with one voice on funding issues**. Several highlighted the positive impact of London Councils’ work on this issue to lobby against funding cuts and for flexibility in how resources are spent to ensure responsiveness to local need and that local authorities have the capacity to support local families.

In this context, participants noted that **frontline services remain stretched**; staff fatigue after years of budget pressures and rising service demand is real. As such, boroughs will need to **prioritise and protect budgets for key services areas** like early years, direct welfare support (e.g. cash transfers), and community outreach that directly alleviate child poverty.

Innovative funding approaches were suggested: for instance, **partnering with large businesses or anchor employers to sponsor poverty-related initiatives**. Additionally, identifying ways to make **smarter use of existing funds** could improve value for money e.g. pooling budgets across departments for joint outcomes, or using underspends and one-off grants strategically.

Moving from crisis response to prevention and resilience-building, and doing so in a coordinated way, is key to success.

Participants stressed the importance of **co-ordinated support for families**, citing **households leaving temporary accommodation** and **young carers and families impacted by domestic abuse** as examples of where co-ordinated and ongoing support is particularly important for low-income families.

For example, participants explored whether boroughs could establish **joint protocols** to ensure families continue to receive social care, early years support, or school places seamlessly after moving on from temporary accommodation, especially if families are relocated. Participants also touched on the importance of co-ordinated support for families who access specialised services regionally (e.g., a charity in one borough serving clients from many).

Partnership working is key, and councils should work hand-in-hand with the voluntary and community sector and other local statutory and non-statutory partners.

Participants repeatedly stressed that local government **cannot succeed alone**. Voluntary organisations, charities, and community groups often have the trust of residents and can reach families that councils struggle to engage.

Strengthening **local VCSE partnerships** was seen as crucial – e.g. co-designing services with community groups, contracting charities to deliver outreach in hard-to-reach areas, and ensuring funding for advice services. Faith groups can also be valuable partners in reaching families and sharing information. As one participant noted, **faith organisations can help disseminate support opportunities and reduce mistrust** with communities that might not respond to council communications.

Participants also highlighted the importance of working with **health services** – for example, integrating efforts through family hubs, health visitors, and GP surgeries. There is an opportunity under the “Strengthening local support” pillar of the national strategy to better align health and social support at local level. In London, boroughs should continue engaging their Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and NHS trusts to keep child poverty on the health agenda, though participants noted that the current health services reorganisation could disrupt existing partnership working.

Using data smartly and sharing learning will help boroughs target and tailor support to children and families and adopt what works.

Participants highlighted that **good data** – both quantitative and qualitative – is essential to understand needs and track progress. To support families in poverty, up-to-date data on indicators like household incomes, benefit uptake, and service usage, are invaluable tools for boroughs and partners. Participants highlighted the potential for collaboration with academic institutions for analysis.

During the session, participants discussed as particularly interested the **“targeted universalism”** approach being undertaken by the Camden Raise Taskforce, which aims to ensure universal services are designed to include the most disadvantaged, and the **whole-family, intersectional approach** in the North East Combined Authority Child Poverty Action Plan, which targets interventions to groups most at risk. Responding to these models, participants endorsed ‘test and learn’ approaches where new schemes are piloted and evaluated to identify opportunities for scale.

Case Study: Raise Camden Taskforce – a healthy equity approach to tackling child poverty

Raise Camden is a strategic programme launched by Camden Council in 2025 to reduce child poverty and inequalities in health outcomes amongst children in the borough.

Co-chaired by the Leader of the Council and Professor Sir Michael Marmot, a renowned expert in public health and inequalities, the programme is underpinned by the UCL Institute of Health Equity's [child health equity data audit](#) in the borough. This identified deep inequalities in health outcomes amongst children in the borough, with significant material deprivation and overcrowding in low-income families, and set out a number of recommendations which have informed Raise Camden's priorities.

Operationally, the Taskforce brings together partners from local government, health, academia, and civil society to design and then pilot interventions to support families, with a particular focus on targeted approaches that support families at greatest risk directly, while also increasing engagement with universal services – a “targeted universalism” approach. An example is the Family Hubs Pregnancy Grant, a one-year pilot offering a £500 unconditional cash transfer to low-income expectant parents, paired with a proactive “warm” introduction to support through Family Hubs. Another is the ‘Marmot Estates’ project, a two-year resident-led programme on two housing estates to improve health and wellbeing through design, safety, and access to play and green space.

In terms of best practice, the Raise model does three important things. Firstly, it is grounded in clear political leadership from the top of the council as well as a shared evidence base that aligns partners around clear priorities and measurable outcomes - in this case, the child health equity audit. Second, the model seeks to redesign access so that support reaches families before crisis, for example through secure data matching that identifies eligible pregnant residents and contacts them directly. Thirdly, it adopts a ‘test and learn’ approach that builds scalable understanding of what works at a local level, partnering with external evaluators and publishing decisions and rationales to enable other areas to apply learning.

WHERE MIGHT CROSS BOROUGH OR CROSS SECTOR COLLABORATION HAVE THE MOST IMPACT ON CHILD POVERTY IN LONDON?

Given constrained resources and common challenges, the workshop identified several areas where London boroughs and partners can achieve more by working together. Some of the most promising collaboration opportunities identified include:

Joint efforts to increase take-up of entitlements and services

Every year, millions of pounds of support for low-income families go unclaimed.¹⁵ Participants discussed the potential added-value of **pan-London campaigns to boost awareness and uptake of benefits and support schemes** – rather than each borough running separate campaigns. The new Family Financial Resilience programme is an ideal opportunity to implement such joint initiatives. In particular, participants cited **NHS Healthy Start vouchers** (for fruit, vegetables, milk, etc.) for young children and pregnant women as an example of a major scheme where many eligible families are not enrolled and where coordinated promotion could increase uptake. Similar joint efforts could be applied to other entitlements like the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF), or local welfare assistance.

In addition, participants discussed the potential benefits of **London-wide messaging under a common brand** to let families know what help is available that is tailored to local areas and through multiple channels: digital (websites, social media) and traditional outreach (posters, leaflets, community events). They noted that pooling resources could fund more professional and far-reaching campaigns and reduce duplication (e.g. of translated materials or culturally tailored messaging for different communities).

Sharing data and systems to assist mobile or hidden families

The lives and needs of families experiencing poverty in London don't neatly fall into borough boundaries, so neither should support for them – and more joined-up support offers will mean fewer families don't receive the support they are entitled to.

Cross-borough collaboration was cited as essential to addressing situations where a family lives in one borough but accesses services in another. Participants particularly highlighted the challenges facing **families in temporary accommodation** who are placed outside of their home borough. Boroughs often lack visibility of who is living in temporary accommodation in their area if those families were placed by another authority. Participants discussed how a **pan-London data-sharing protocol or platform for households in temporary accommodation** could enable Borough A to ensure Borough B is informed when it places a family there, so Borough B's services (schools, health, etc.) can proactively engage them. Participants acknowledged data-sharing isn't easy (legal and IT hurdles), but starting with specific use cases like temporary accommodation or safeguarding would be worthwhile.

Noting the Government's newly proposed 'Duty to Collaborate', which will require public bodies such as schools and GP surgeries to work together to prevent homelessness, discussion also highlighted **school networks as a potential collaboration route**.¹⁶

¹⁵ Policy in Practice (2024). *Missing out 2024: £23 billion of support is unclaimed each year*. https://policyinpractice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Report_23bn-unclaimed-optimized-2.pdf

¹⁶ GOV.UK (2025). *National plan to halve long-term rough sleeping and prevent homelessness*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-plan-to-halve-rough-sleeping-and-prevent-homelessness>

Many schools (especially faith schools or secondaries) take pupils from multiple boroughs. Boroughs could partner on initiatives delivered via schools – like, joint workshops for parents on debt advice or a multi-borough school holiday programme. Participants also discussed the potential benefits of **shared service directories**: rather than each borough maintaining its own directory website, councils could combine efforts to into a **London-wide service directory**, making it easier for families (and support workers) to access services regardless of borough.

Pooling funding and commissioning together

Pooling resources for certain programmes could achieve economies of scale and greater impact. Currently, collaboration in funding many service areas working with families in poverty is limited (e.g. grant funding for homelessness prevention and relief).

However, there are precedents in other domains for cross-borough funding and commissioning arrangements e.g. London borough consortia for commissioning foster care placements. Participants highlighted opportunities across **specialist advice services, employment support projects for parents, and research and evaluation** as areas which could benefit from joint resourcing and commissioning.

For example, participants discussed whether multiple neighbouring boroughs could jointly fund a **debt advice outreach team** that works across their areas, or how a pan-London **research and evaluation programme** on poverty interventions could significantly increase the quality and availability of evidence on interventions while avoiding duplication of multiple boroughs undertaking doing small and comparatively costly studies.

Another suggestion was using external funding streams collaboratively. For example, some boroughs are receiving grants through the **Community Renewal Fund** or the Household Support Fund and its successor, the **Crisis and Resilience** fund. If these were aligned, boroughs might run a common scheme, with one suggestion being to combine **Holiday Activities and Food** funding across boroughs to run regional holiday programmes.

Joint bids for funding could also be powerful, where boroughs could partner on proposals to secure philanthropic or central government funding for new joint initiatives or pilots. London's existing **sub-regional partnerships** could be vehicles for such pooled initiatives, building on their existing joint work commissioning and delivering employment and skills services at the sub-regional level.

City-wide advocacy and influencing

A recurring theme was the need for **joint advocacy to national government** on policy areas with major impacts on child poverty that sit beyond the powers of London's government. Specifically, **Local Housing Allowance rates, the Benefit Cap and social housing grant funding.**

In addition, participants also cited **childcare funding reforms and extension of free childcare** as issues where measures in the Government's national strategy are positive, but where London can make the case to go further. They highlighted how **cross-sector alliances** can amplify messages, working with charities and businesses to strengthen the case for national policy change (e.g. employer advocacy for additional childcare support).

Participants also noted that **joint advocacy needn't be limited to national government.** Collaboration and joint advocacy could seek to influence utilities companies and employers to support struggling families (for instance, negotiating with utility companies as a bloc to improve access to social tariffs for London families, or encouraging major employers to offer the London Living Wage and flexible working hours for parents).

Coordinated support for the most vulnerable families

The workshop also highlighted opportunities for co-ordination and more joined-up and **preventative support offers between neighbouring boroughs**, particularly in the many London neighbourhoods which span multiple boroughs (e.g. Finsbury Park, which spans three boroughs). This might take the form of cross-borough case conferences , or shared emergency funds accessible by any borough for a family in urgent need.

The **rollout of Best Start Family Hubs**, which will enable families to access multiple services in one place and offer an opportunity for collaboration. As the government rolls out family hubs nationally, twelve London boroughs are coordinating the advice support delivered through these hubs as part of the Family Financial Resilience Partnership. This is to ensure families accessing support in local hubs in different boroughs are connected to the right support, even if the service is in another borough. This programme could be rolled out across all London boroughs to ensure the benefits of this are felt across the capital.

Case Study: North East Combined Authority Child Poverty Action Plan – a pan-regional approach to tackling child poverty

In 2025, The North East Combined Authority (NECA) adopted a five-year Child Poverty Action Plan to reduce poverty and improve outcomes for babies, children and young people across a region of around two million residents, backed by £28.6 million of investment to kick-start delivery.

The Action Plan was developed by the NECA's dedicated Child Poverty Reduction Unit, established in 2024 to convene partners, including through a Mayor's Child Poverty Summit in November 2024, co-produce the action plan, and align wider investment and policy levers. The plan was then co-developed through engagement sessions with parents, carers, young people and organisations across the seven local authority areas, and sets a vision for the North East as a place where every child can thrive regardless of background or location.

The plan organises activity under three priorities. First, supporting families 'here and now' through income maximisation and immediate support with daily essentials. Second, the activities aiming to support longer-term outcomes for children and young people by investing in early years support and youth services. Third, the plan takes steps to address longer-term structural challenges to make work pay and create an infrastructure of opportunity.

Specific interventions under the plan include a health in pregnancy grant for expectant parents on low incomes, expansion of baby boxes for first-time families on Universal Credit, year-round low and no-cost youth activities, pre-apprenticeship support, free public transport for care leavers up to age 25, and a £1 fare cap for under-21s. The plan also introduces the Mayor's Childcare Grant pilot and a £50 million programme to help 13,500 residents with health and disability barriers to find and stay in work

In terms of best practice, the NECA approach brings together clear political leadership by the Mayor to align activity across the seven boroughs with a whole-family approach grounded in an evidence-led suite of interventions that addresses both urgent need and longer-term and structural drivers of child poverty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

London can make faster, fairer progress on child poverty if its local and regional government, in partnership with the voluntary sector, act together on prevention, income and costs, and on system coordination. To do so, drawing on the findings of this paper, we recommend that London's leaders:

- 1) **Make child poverty a whole council priority supported by local plans with measurable outcomes**
 - a. Adopt a Cabinet level **child poverty plan** in each borough, led by a senior champion, codesigned with families, setting locally relevant and benchmarkable output goals and measures of success.
 - b. Agree a **common indicator set** across London to track progress quarterly, blending administrative and survey data and including equity breakdowns.
- 2) **Shift decisively from crisis to prevention and resilience**
 - a. Embed '**targeted universalism**' to ensure universal services reach and benefit the most disadvantaged families.
 - b. Use the rollout of Best Start Family Hubs as an integration opportunity, aligning local welfare assistance, early years support and advice services so **families can access multiple supports in one place** and across localities and borough boundaries.
 - c. Create **cross-borough protocols** to ensure continuity of support for families leaving temporary accommodation or moving across boundaries, including school places, health visiting, debt and housing advice.
- 3) **Deliver pan-London take-up campaigns for entitlements and local offers**
 - a. Undertake a **joint take-up drive** for Healthy Start and free childcare for families receiving additional support entitlements, with borough tailored messaging via schools, faith groups and health settings.
 - b. Extend this approach to the Holiday Activities and Food programme, local welfare assistance and targeted income maximisation offers, pooling assets (e.g. translated and tailored materials) and capacity across boroughs.
- 4) **Pool suitable commissioning opportunities and evaluation to scale "what works"**
 - a. Explore options for cross-borough commissioning of services such as **specialist advice** and **parent employment support** to reduce duplication and increase reach, building on lessons from the Family Financial Resilience Partnership.
 - b. Scope a pan-London **test-and-learn evidence programme** with academic partners to evaluate local interventions and mainstream what works.
- 5) **Co-ordinate advocacy to national government and engage with businesses to unlock changes to welfare and reduce household costs**
 - a. Speak with one voice to national government on **unfreezing Local Housing Allowance** and mitigating the **Benefit Cap** interaction with the two-child limit abolition.

- b. Work with utilities and major employers to widen access to **social tariffs**, expand **London Living Wage** coverage, and increase **employment flexibility** for parents of young children.
- 6) **Strengthen and fund VCS partnerships**
 - a. Codesign services with trusted VCSE organisations, fund advice and outreach in hard-to-reach communities and use faith networks to build confidence and reduce stigma, utilising networks such as 4in10's to engage widely and share learning.
- 7) **Sustain and expand city level policies that support low-income families**
 - a. Maintain and maximise uptake of London's **universal primary free school meals** offer, focusing on nutrition, inclusion and school level implementation support, and reinvesting any savings generated by the planned national rollout of FSM into widening access to FSM in secondary and further education.
 - b. Align activities under the **London Housing and Opportunity Missions** with borough and other public service (e.g. health) strategies so that early years, housing and health investments cumulatively reduce child poverty risk.
- 8) **Target income boosts where the strategy's reforms will have most effect**
 - a. Use data to proactively support families formerly affected by the **two-child limit** to maximise benefit uptake and mitigate Benefit Cap constraints.