

**BUILD BACK**  
**CHILDHOOD**

# **Build Back Childhood**

## The case for investment



# This report is supported by:



# About

Working with children and young people, organisations and coalitions from across the children's sector have united to set out how the Chancellor can **Build Back Childhood** at this autumn's Spending Review. Together we represent over 700 members.

The call for this much-needed investment is supported by leading children's charities including NSPCC, Barnardo's, Action for Children, The Children's Society and major coalitions including the Fair Education Alliance, the Disabled Children's Partnership, the 1001 Days movement, the End Child Poverty campaign and the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition.

Build Back Childhood is the next stage of the Children At The Heart campaign, coordinated by the National Children's Bureau, calling for adequate funding for children and families.

As the Government pledges to unite and level up the whole of the country, and build back better and build back fairer, this is our vision for how the Government can ensure that babies, children and young people are not forgotten. This is our chance to #BuildBackChildhood.

Get involved at: [ncb.org.uk/buildbackchildhood](https://ncb.org.uk/buildbackchildhood)

Coordinated by



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# The 2021 Spending Review

As we recover, we face a choice: do we create a more level playing field in our society? Or do we simply return to what was there before? It's this government's mission to unite and level up across the whole of the UK, to build back better and to build back fairer."

- Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Health

Before the pandemic, a child's health, wellbeing and life chances were powerfully shaped by the circumstances of their birth. The pandemic has painfully exposed these inequalities, with disadvantaged children falling even further behind their peers in education, and those who were already vulnerable being put at even greater risk<sup>1</sup>.

The Spending Review is a turning point. Instead of going back to how things were, this is our chance to look to the future – a future where every child feels safe, secure and supported. This is our chance to Build Back Childhood.

Today's challenges demand a strategic approach to the needs of babies, children and young people from conception to age 25. Creating lasting change must mean sustained improvement in core budgets to ensure existing duties can be met and children's rights upheld. Our children need a Spending Review that:

- Levels up living standards for families;
- Explicitly invests in prevention and early intervention;
- Takes a rounded approach to children's recovery;
- Gives every child the best start in life.

The clock is ticking and, as each day passes without a decisive response, the longer-term risks to children and the cost to the public purse rise.



## PRIORITIES FOR THE SPENDING REVIEW

# Levelling up living standards and dealing with the cost of living crisis



Children should grow up in an environment with no limits to their potential... The idea that every child, in every part of the country, should have a fair chance. It is not only the most important thing we can do to unleash the UK's potential, but is at the heart of creating a fair and just society."

- *Conservative Party Manifesto, 2019*

The ultimate test for the Levelling Up strategy is not just whether it can spread opportunities fairly throughout the country, but whether it can tackle the underlying issues that persistently deny every child fair access to these opportunities. In spite of this aim, the pandemic magnified existing inequalities in Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, for children in low income families, and for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The rising cost of living, coupled with the cut to Universal Credit, means *Levelling Up* risks becoming a hollow phrase.

Poverty is the enemy of opportunity. Children growing up in deprivation are already far behind wealthier peers before they have started school and even further behind when they leave<sup>2,3</sup>. Growing up poor means being more likely to have a range of physical and mental health problems<sup>4</sup>, be excluded from school<sup>5</sup>, and be taken into care<sup>6</sup>. As well as the human cost, this inequality costs the Treasury billions through greater additional spending on public services<sup>7</sup>.

Rising insecurity, debt, homelessness and hunger is not the context for families in

which Levelling Up can succeed. Life is full of events that we cannot plan for, such as job loss, bereavement, or unexpected

caring responsibilities. We all need the security and stability of a strong social security system.

### **Recommendations:**

- Reinststate the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and level up legacy benefits by £20 a week – reducing child poverty by 350,000.
- End the benefit cap and two child limit – this would pull nearly 300,000 children out of poverty.



## PRIORITIES FOR THE SPENDING REVIEW

# Invest in prevention and early intervention



Prevention must be a central principle in delivering a sustainable NHS and levelling up. This means fixing the underlying causes of ill-health that are contributing to health spending increases and worsening outcomes. Improving the health of communities is vital to resilience against future health threats."

**- *Build Back Better, Our Plan for Health and Social Care,*  
HM Government Command paper, 2021**

Public services are caught in a cycle of increasing demand and late intervention. Whether in mental health services<sup>8</sup>, the SEND system<sup>9</sup> or children's social care<sup>10</sup>, spending is becoming ever more concentrated on the most complex and expensive interventions<sup>11</sup>. This means less resource for preventive work and fewer early intervention services, leading to further escalation of needs and increased cost. In 2016, the Early Intervention Foundation estimated the costs of late intervention for children added up to at least £17 billion a year across England and Wales (£18.5 billion in today's prices)<sup>12</sup>.

We risk every penny of the new NHS and social care levy being swallowed up by increased demand unless this is resolved.

There is growing evidence that community-based models of support can prevent more expensive interventions later and prevent the escalation of situations to the point where children experience serious harm. Early support hubs offer easy-to-access, drop-in support for young people aged 11–25 with emerging or low-level mental health problems. They help to reduce pressure on NHS services and improve young people's emotional wellbeing<sup>13</sup> by providing a community

space for young people where they can access flexible support.

Equally, Family hubs that offer a wider set of services for families are increasingly showing their worth<sup>14</sup>, while there is a growing body of evidence that early help can reduce demand in children's social care as well as keep families together<sup>15</sup>.

On top of making economic sense, there is also a strong moral case for early intervention. Government should

strive to support every child to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

We must accept early intervention as an important objective in its own right and as a fundamentally sound principle of investment. Otherwise we will continue to make major funding decisions on the basis of what has been easiest to measure, rather than what will make the biggest difference to children's lives and the economy over the longer-term.

### **Recommendations:**

- £103 million per year to support 500,000 young people through early support hubs.
- An expansion of the Family Hubs network so it can provide access points in local communities for families who need help.
- Doubling the Supporting Families Programme to £330m to provide early help to families facing multiple disadvantages.





## PRIORITIES FOR THE SPENDING REVIEW

# A rounded approach to children's recovery



We are going to transform the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including those with special educational needs and disabilities and in care, and ensure that those who have lost the most from the pandemic can recover and flourish"

**- Nadhim Zahawi, Secretary of State for Education, 2021**

During the pandemic, the Government rightly prioritised the preservation of life and health, which meant protecting older people and other vulnerable adults. But a high cost for these measures – including the closure of early years settings, schools and colleges to the vast majority of pupils - has been paid by our children. As the Prime Minister has rightly said of children: "they have sacrificed so much".

While the Government has invested in education recovery, more needs to be done. Many children will be returning to education having faced great adversity.

Over 10,000 children have been bereaved of a primary caregiver as a result of the pandemic<sup>16 17</sup>, and children experiencing mental health problems increased during the pandemic, from one in nine in 2017 to one in six in 2021<sup>18</sup>. Early years settings, schools and colleges must be well prepared to respond effectively to low-level mental health and wellbeing needs in their communities to prevent escalation of need and avoid further pressure on the health and care system.

However, schools cannot shoulder this burden alone. Many children rely on

services beyond the school. Pandemic restrictions meant many services were stopped or reduced; and many have been slow to return<sup>19</sup>. Local authorities must be funded to meet these legal duties to support children and families.

For children who have been affected by abuse, neglect and exploitation during the pandemic, the role of specialist services will also be vital in ensuring that these experiences don't become long-term harm that affects their lives in adulthood. This includes integrated therapeutic services

for children who have experienced sexual abuse and community based domestic abuse provision.

If children's needs are not understood in the round, they will not fully benefit from the Government's significant investment in education recovery and we will be simply storing up bigger problems for the future. Funding educational catch-up programmes without a wider investment in childhood will not deliver value for money or deliver the improvement in outcomes the Government seeks.

### **Recommendations:**

- An urgent comprehensive education 'catch-up' package in line with the recommendations made by Sir Kevan Collins. Including specific funding for:
  - The rapid expansion of Mental Health Support Teams so that all schools are covered by 2023.
  - Local areas to tackle the backlog of assessments and address the impact of missed therapies on education.
- Additional funding for local authorities that allows them:
  - To meet their existing duties to children and families in the wake of the pandemic
  - Invest in specialist services for babies, children and young people who have experienced abuse, neglect and exploitation.



## PRIORITIES FOR THE SPENDING REVIEW

# Giving every child the best start in life



The world in which we all want to live is one where every baby is nurtured to fulfil their potential, where good lifelong emotional wellbeing is the norm, where our society is productive and cooperative, and every one of our citizens has the chance to be the very best that they can be."

- Dame Andrea Leadsom MP, *The Best Start for Life*, 2021

The Government has set out a compelling "Best Start for Life" vision, and also recognises the crucial role played by the childcare and early education sector and a thriving civil society in the long-term success of the country. Now the Chancellor must provide the resources required to ensure that the Government's intentions become a reality for babies, young children and their families.

What happens during pregnancy and early childhood has a fundamental impact on a child's physical health, speech, language and communication, and emotional wellbeing. Investing in services that give

children the best start in life reduces demand on GPs, hospitals and social care<sup>20</sup>. It means children start school ready to learn and helps children stay safe, happy and healthy throughout their lifetime.

Delivering this vision means investing sufficient resources in local systems to enable all services to operate effectively, including maternity, health visiting, infant and perinatal mental health services, and high-quality childcare and early education.

But years of underinvestment, and then a devastating pandemic, has put all this

at risk. The number of health visitors has declined significantly<sup>21</sup> and 34% of early years settings in the most deprived areas

reported they were unlikely to still be operating in 2021<sup>22</sup>.

### **Recommendations:**

- A £500 million ringfenced uplift in the Public Health Grant over the next three years to train and recruit 3000 new health visitors. This will enable local authorities to create strong and innovative health visiting services.
- The launch of an independent review into childcare and early education funding and affordability, including whether current spending is sufficient to deliver the free entitlements.

# Notes

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## Get in touch

The National Children's Bureau

020 7843 6000 | [info@ncb.org.uk](mailto:info@ncb.org.uk)

London: 23 Mentmore Terrace, London, E8 3PN

Belfast: The NICVA Building, 61 Duncairn Gardens, BT15 2GB