

Child Poverty: London

Backbench Business – in Westminster Hall at 2:57 pm on 22nd February 2018

(/whall/?d=2018-02-22).



Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

2:57 pm, 22nd February 2018

I beg to move,

That this House

has considered child poverty in London.

I thank the [Backbench Business Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backbench_Business_Committee) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backbench_Business_Committee) for granting this debate on such an incredibly important issue.

“We will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.”

That was the promise made outside No. 10 following the appointment of [Mrs May](/mp/?p=10426) (</mp/?p=10426>) as [Prime Minister](#) (</glossary/?gl=264>) in [July 2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2016) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2016). Less than five months later, the Government's Child Poverty Unit was axed.

Last month, I received the incredibly saddening news from the End Child Poverty coalition that a staggering 32% of the children in my [constituency](/glossary/?gl=169) (</glossary/?gl=169>) of [Mitcham and Morden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) are living in poverty. They are 8,598 of the 700,000 children across our capital who are living below the poverty line, defined as the minimum acceptable standard of living. Those children, through no fault of their own or of their family, do not have a warm winter coat, cannot afford to go on some school trips, and are denied the basic ability to have friends over for tea.

Today's debate gives me the opportunity to tell hon. Members about the reality behind the child poverty statistics. I am worried that the Government do not take the plight of child poverty seriously enough. One in 10 London families has relied on a food bank. Some 88,410 London children are living in temporary accommodation, which is often poor quality and far from their schools and friends, without a place they can call home. A childhood in poverty often leads to an adulthood in poverty and a shorter, less fruitful life. Work is no longer the best route out of poverty, given that the [majority](/glossary/?gl=37) (</glossary/?gl=37>) of children in poverty grow up in a working household.

It is time for Parliament to understand just what causes poverty, and the tangible actions that the Government have the power to enact to make [UK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>) child poverty a thing of the past.

[[Sir Henry Bellingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Henry_Bellingham) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Henry_Bellingham) in the Chair]

Across the capital, London's children are more likely to grow up in poverty than their contemporaries elsewhere in the UK. [Child Poverty Action Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Poverty_Action_Group) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Poverty_Action_Group) and others have shown that there are as many poor children in London as in all of Scotland and Wales. In some constituencies in London more than half of children are growing up in poverty. Consider that for a moment—there are places in this country where people are more likely than not to be born into and grow up in poverty. To put such a postcode lottery into context, compare that with the most affluent constituencies where only one in 10 children grow up in poverty.

In fact, of the 25 constituencies with the highest levels of poverty, nine are in our capital: [Bethnal Green and Bow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethnal_Green_and_Bow) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethnal_Green_and_Bow), [Poplar and Limehouse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_and_Limehouse) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_and_Limehouse), Edmonton, [Westminster North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North), East Ham, Holborn and St Pancras, [Hackney South and Shoreditch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackney_South_and_Shoreditch) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackney_South_and_Shoreditch), Tottenham, and [West Ham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Ham) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Ham). Some of the biggest increases in child poverty have been in those areas already facing the greatest deprivation. Twenty-eight per cent. of children living in poverty in London are materially deprived, meaning that on the grounds of cost they lack basic items such as warm clothes. This is not a developing country and this is not 19th-century Britain, and yet this country's children are suffering more than ever before.

To add insult to injury, London is a hub of wealth and affluence. [Trust for London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_for_London) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_for_London) has shown that the poorest 50% of Londoners own only 5% of the wealth, while the wealthiest 10% own half of the capital's wealth. Being born into a wealthy city will not protect someone from poverty.

Furthermore, while the Government continue to blame the prevalence of poverty on the workless, consider the fact that two thirds of children in poverty live in a working household. The toxic combination of rising inflation, falling real wages, frozen benefits and the astronomical cost of childcare means that work is no longer a guaranteed route out of poverty.

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Helen Hayes

Labour, Dulwich and West Norwood

I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does she agree with me that the role that the increase in the number of children living in the private rented sector has on child poverty is an important consideration? One in four children grow up in the private rented sector, more than a quarter of those homes do not meet the decent homes standard and almost half of those families have a tenancy of six months or less. Does she agree that the Government need to make reform of the private rented sector and delivery of genuinely affordable housing the cornerstone of their approach to child poverty?

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I know how much work she does on housing, but many Members present, in particular on the Labour Benches, spend most of their advice surgeries talking to families threatened with homelessness —people who live in the private sector and simply cannot afford the rents.

I want Members to hear children's stories rather than just statistics, because ultimately we are talking about human beings rather than percentages, so I will read an extract from a heartbreaking letter I received from Mrs Sheridan, headteacher at [Malmesbury Primary School](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malmesbury_Primary_School) in my [constituency](#) ([/glossary/?gl=169](#)), outlining her experience of child poverty:

“A child had lost his reading book. We encouraged him to have a good look at home, including asking him to look under his bed. He replied ‘I haven’t got a bed to look under’...We see children who eat their lunch very quickly, whilst ‘protecting’ their plate with an arm as they eat...We see children who take extra bread and pasta from the salad bar daily to fill themselves up...We see children attending school in a uniform that is clearly outgrown...We had a family of five, the father who was in work, who lived in a van in a car park for a number of weeks...Parents have asked to use the school phone as they have lengthy delays in payment of [Universal Credit](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Credit), and have no money for phone credit to chase up their claim...We believe that we have a significant number of children who are so used to feeling hungry and cold that they do not recognise these feelings anymore.”

What message does the [Minister](#) ([/glossary/?gl=35](#)) have for Mrs Sheridan and, indeed, for those children, who are experiencing such deplorable examples of child poverty on a daily basis?

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Stephen Timms

Labour, East Ham

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this subject and for the case that she is making. She has mentioned universal credit. Does she agree with me that the roll-out of universal credit to a number of the constituencies that she listed earlier will make some of those families' problems significantly worse over the next few months?

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I thank my right hon. Friend for his [intervention](#) (/glossary/?gl=39) and for all his work on poverty and helping poor families in London, in particular in his [constituency](#) (/glossary/?gl=169). I completely agree that the delay in universal credit, the difficulties in claiming and the lack of face-to-face contact to be able to resolve some of the problems will have dire impacts on people.

Those examples I gave from Mrs Sheridan's letter are just some of the examples of child poverty from just one school in just one constituency in our capital, across which four in 10 children now live in poverty—an astonishing figure that is expected to rise. London, however, is a divided city and significant affluence and poverty exist side by side, sometimes on the same street.

Take the [London Borough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Borough) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Borough) of Merton, where my constituency neighbours the more wealthy constituency of Wimbledon. When we compare child poverty in our borough, it proves to be a sombre metaphor for the story of rich and poor across our capital. There are almost triple the number of children in poverty in my constituency than in Wimbledon and, to be clear, that is not because my constituents are less deserving or work less hard. At local ward level, Cricket Green ward in [Mitcham and Morden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) has a staggering 38% of children in poverty, while less than a five-minute drive away, in the same borough, Wimbledon's Hillside ward has only 5.5% of children in poverty. Furthermore, Mrs Sheridan, the Malmesbury headteacher, noted a distressing observation she had made: children from her school are significantly smaller physically than their peers in Wimbledon schools.

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Bambos Charalambous

Labour, Enfield, Southgate

Does my hon. Friend agree with me that, as Save the Children found out, in almost half the families living in poverty the youngest child is under the age of five? Is it not therefore crucial that the Government target help on low-income families in the early years?

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I ask the [Minister](#) (</glossary/?gl=35>) what the Government will do to ensure equality of opportunity for all children in our capital, so that the letters of their postcode will not be the determining factor in their lives, dictating how long they live and their quality of life. Almost half of families in poverty are those whose youngest child is under the age of five, the point my hon. Friend just made, so what will the Government do to provide support for low-income families in the early years? How will we ever plug the gap that the absence of [Sure Start](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) centres has left?

For the 8,598 children living in poverty in my [constituency](#) (</glossary/?gl=169>), the consequences will be lifelong: children who start behind stay behind, harming their prospects throughout life, and harming us all as a society. At birth, they are more likely to have a low birth weight. By primary school, half of all disadvantaged children begin without reaching a good level of early development, compared with the national average of only one third of children. By [GCSE](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCSE>), in terms of the numbers achieving at least five A* to C grades, there is a gap of 28% between children receiving free school meals and their more affluent peers.

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Rupa Huq

Labour, Ealing Central and Acton

My hon. Friend is making a powerful and compelling speech. Her [constituency](#) (</glossary/?gl=169>) is not dissimilar to mine. When we think of child poverty, we think of Dickensian cobbled streets and of it as some sort of inner-city malady, but we both represent suburban seats. In Ealing Central and Acton 7,179 children live in poverty, which is not a dissimilar figure to the

one she quoted. We also hear about Victorian diseases such as tuberculosis making a comeback. Those places were built to fulfil the suburban dream to get away from the inner city, but the horrible scourge of child poverty is coming to our suburbs. Does she agree with me?

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. There are great similarities. Suburban London is not the suburban London that many of us think exists.

By the end of their lives, boys from poorer backgrounds have a life expectancy that is an astonishing 9.2 years shorter than that of their wealthier counterparts. Take my borough, Merton, where Wimbledon constituents have a life expectancy almost three years longer than those in [Mitcham and Morden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden), despite a mere letter change in their postcode. The Government, I know, are extremely fiscally responsible so, if that is not enough to inspire the [Minister](#) (</glossary/?gl=35>) to action, perhaps it is worth them considering that child poverty costs the [UK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>) economy a staggering £29 billion per year in services and wasted potential.

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Dan Jarvis

Labour, Barnsley Central

My hon. Friend is making a typically powerful speech and has done us a great service in highlighting such an important issue. She is absolutely right to highlight the economic cost of child poverty, but I think that collectively we agree it is also a moral issue. Does she agree with me that what gets measured gets done? Does she also agree that if we are serious about reducing unacceptably high levels of child poverty in our country, we need a target for reduction? Any Government of whatever political colour that is not prepared to commit to such a target will struggle to be taken seriously on the issue of child poverty.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I commend him for all the work that he does on child poverty. We might not all like targets, but they work.

The fundamental factor explaining London's disproportionately high child poverty rates is the soaring cost and extreme shortage of housing. Across our capital there is a homelessness crisis, with 54,660 households in temporary accommodation, a figure that makes up 69% of the national total. Some 2,730 of those households are in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation, including 500 households with children who have been in B&Bs in London for longer than the six-week legal limit.

In my [constituency](#) (*/glossary/?gl=169*) I discovered a converted warehouse in the heart of one of south London's busiest industrial estates. Connect House temporarily houses up to 86 homeless families with a car park as a playground and rooms so small that families sleep horizontally to all fit in a bed. Families have been placed there from across London, causing children to fall ill, miss school, and even to be found wandering lost around a working industrial estate at night. That is Dickensian, a disaster waiting to happen, and the reality of 21st century child poverty in London today.

The private rented sector—back to the earlier point made by my hon. Friend [Helen Hayes](#) (*/mp/?p=25310*)—is where children in poverty are most likely to live, with child poverty in private rents tripling in the past decade alone. That is unsurprising considering that the lowest quartile rents in London are more than 150% higher than elsewhere in England. That means the average tenant in the capital spends a staggering half of their salary on rent. At my most recent advice surgery on Friday I met John, a married man in his 50s who spends 74% of his monthly income to fund the roof over his head: a one-bedroom flat that he shares with his wife and 11-year-old son. Can the [Minister](#) (*/glossary/?gl=35*) tell me how someone like John will ever be able to save to afford his own home, or how work provides John with a route out of poverty?

So what can be done about housing? Since 1939 the delivery of more than 200,000 homes a year in England has happened only in years when there have been major public sector house-building programmes, and the last time that the Government target of 300,000 homes were built in one year in England was in 1969, when councils and housing associations were also building new homes. We urgently need to grant local authorities the right to build and the right to buy so that housing can be let to families on low incomes at social housing rents.

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Edward Davey

Liberal Democrat Spokesperson (Home Affairs)

The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech. Her point on housing is extremely well made. Does she share my concern that some of the regeneration of estates in London is reducing the amount of social housing and that the opportunity to improve and increase social housing is simply not being taken in estate after estate across London?

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I have a slightly different and perhaps more controversial view of redevelopments. I congratulate councils that try to deal with problems in difficult circumstances and come up with solutions that would not always be their first choice. In life, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, the way to make friends is to do nothing. Sometimes doing something makes you more enemies. I congratulate all the councils of whatever persuasion that are trying to do their best in really difficult circumstances.

A mechanism should be introduced so that any public sector site up for disposal has to be considered for the construction of social or mixed housing, including a substantial proportion that is social. Currently, public bodies tend to sell sites to raise money, not to provide homes. They often hide behind the requirement to obtain best value. For me and many Members here today, best value is the provision of homes for homeless or overcrowded families. How about building on the 19,334 hectares of unbuilt greenbelt land within a 10-minute walk of a London train station? It is not traditional greenbelt land. At no environmental cost, it is enough space for almost 1 million new homes in our capital.

It is not only extortionate housing costs that London faces, but living costs higher than anywhere else in England. In fact, nearly 40% of Londoners have an income below the amount needed to achieve a basic decent standard of living, with children the most likely to live below minimum income standards.

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Joan Ryan

Labour, Enfield North

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on all the work that she has done on poverty and housing in London and nationally. Does she agree that the distinction between social and affordable housing is crucial to addressing the problem of housing for those living in poverty? In the previous Budget there was no mention whatever of social housing. Affordable housing in London is very often not affordable. The Government need to grasp the distinction that they either do not understand or deliberately do not want to address.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I am sure that as politicians we often live by our word, and I am extremely offended by the way we now use the word “affordable”. In housing terms, “affordable” means 80% of market rent. I suspect many of us here today could not manage to pay an affordable rent, let alone somebody on a low or median income in the capital. I would be grateful to find a way to ban the word “affordable” in this context.

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Edward Davey

Liberal Democrat Spokesperson (Home Affairs)

Again, the hon. Lady makes a powerful point, along with her right hon. Friend [Joan Ryan](#) (/mp/?p=10523). My wife is a social housing lawyer and she has a presentation on the meaning of “affordable” in Government policy and law. She has found 11 different definitions of affordability, so not only is it confusing—“affordable” often does not mean affordable—but it is completely absurd and we need to get back to the issue of social housing that the hon. Lady raised.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I wish to say this tactfully because I like the right hon. Gentleman a great deal. The problem and the definition of affordability at 80% market value goes back to the 2010 coalition Government. I do not wish to be mean; I simply wish to put that on the record.

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Joan Ryan

Labour, Enfield North

I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again. I do not think it is a question of being mean. It is a question of holding to account, and there simply is not enough holding to account of either the previous coalition Government and their [Cabinet](#) (/glossary/?gl=108) Members or the current Government. If there was more holding to account, we would not be facing the dire circumstances in which many thousands of children are paying the price for those two Governments not being accountable and not addressing the issues that matter.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

I thank my right hon. Friend for her [intervention \(/glossary/?gl=39\)](#).

Across the capital, wages have not kept up with the cost of living and in most parts of London a full-time minimum wage job barely covers the rent. While the cost of living continues to soar, state support for low-income families continues to fall in real terms. The extraordinary cost of living has left one in 10 London families—I could barely believe that figure—to rely on a food bank, with three-day emergency food supplies provided to 169,896 people in London since [April 2016](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/April_2016).

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Matthew Pennycook

Shadow Minister (Exiting the European Union)

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. She mentions families; does she agree that there is a particular problem for single-parent families? According to the charity Gingerbread, 47% of them live in relative poverty. That is the household type that has been hit hardest by welfare reform. It needs a particular kind of support, such as with childcare.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

It is as if my hon. Friend anticipates what I am going to say. I thank him for his [intervention \(/glossary/?gl=39\)](#) and apologise for speaking for so long; I did not anticipate that so many would want to take part in the debate. I shall try to truncate my remarks as I do not want to take away the opportunity for others to speak.

For many children in poverty, a free school lunch may be the only healthy cooked meal of the day. The [Department for Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_Education) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_Education) found that it can lead to positive improvements in attainment and social cohesion, and can also act as a passport to other support such as help with school clothing, trips or extracurricular activities. It is stunning therefore that the Children's Society estimates that about a million children living in poverty will miss out on free school meals under the Government's latest proposals to introduce an earnings threshold for eligibility under universal credit. As many of us know, the roll-out of universal credit has countless problems, but completing its roll-out under existing legislation, under which all claimants are eligible for free school meals, would cost approximately £500 million—a fraction of the £29 billion cost of child poverty.

As for childcare costs, a close friend of mine recently had a baby and now, to go to work, she pays £1,000 a month in childcare for her very young child. That is like paying an additional rent every month, just to get access to childcare. She is not alone. Gingerbread reports that some single parents will spend more than half their income on childcare costs so that they can go to work. No wonder 51% of single-parent families in London live in relative poverty. The day-to-day reality means that one in 10 working single parents has had to rely on payday lenders, doorstep lenders and foodbanks. It is that group that makes up half of households in temporary accommodation, whose work in zero-hours contracts has increased tenfold over the past decade, and which is set to lose around 15% of its net income by 2021-22 as a result of this Government's tax and benefit reforms. How will those reforms ever enable those families to escape poverty?

What about families in London who have a child with a disability? The annual cost of bringing up a disabled child is three times more than that of bringing up a non-disabled child. That results in a staggering 60% of children and young people with learning disabilities and mental ill health living in poverty. In fact, according to a survey in 2012, 17% of families with disabled children go without food; 21% go without heating; 26% go without specialist equipment or adaptations; and 86% go without leisure activity. Does the [Minister](#) (</glossary/?gl=35>) agree with me that a child with a disability should be no more predisposed to childhood poverty than any other child?

I will end my remarks there to allow others to take part in the discussion. I have many suggestions for solutions that I hope will come up during the debate.

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Julia Lopez

Conservative, Hornchurch and Upminster
3:23 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I am grateful to [Siobhain McDonagh](#) (</mp/?p=10381>) for requesting the debate, which is something I supported.

Too often, London is portrayed within the national context as a rich and robust powerhouse, which gobbles infrastructure funds and brashly demands priority in debates on the north-south divide. As those of us representing London seats know, however, deprivation is threaded through every quarter of our city, and has been for centuries. None the less, the capital now moves at such lightning pace that its local authorities must at times meet gargantuan challenges in serving their populations, using budgets calculated on outdated demographic assumptions. That can make the challenge of addressing child poverty extremely tricky.

The reward for all its economic successes is that London is one of only three regions in the [UK](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>) where tax receipts outstrip public spending. That means that every Londoner gives £3,070 more in taxes than they receive in Government spend. For those of us representing outer London boroughs, I suspect that effect on public spending figures may be even more pronounced. It has long been assumed that inner-London boroughs have the highest need. I believe we now desperately need to reassess those outdated assumptions and catch up with the growing pressures on outer-London boroughs such as Havering.

Havering is one of London's lowest-funded boroughs, yet it has the oldest population in the capital as well as the fastest growing number of children of any borough for the past three years in a row. During a six-year period from 2010 to 2015, some 4,536 children settled in the borough, leading to a huge demand for children's social care and services for those with disabilities and special educational needs. I am grateful to the [Under-Secretary of State](#) (</glossary/?gl=23>) for Housing, Communities and Local Government,

my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) ([Rishi Sunak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rishi_Sunak) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rishi_Sunak)), for the additional £2.1 million provided to the borough in the new funding settlement, but we now need a wholesale review of funding in London to keep up with the changing demographics. I shall be contributing to the Government's consultation in that regard.

Population change also strains housing supply, which is causing rents to leap in Havering. The link between child poverty and workless households is well established, and the Government's fantastic record on driving down unemployment should be recognised as the huge achievement that it is for the impact on individuals' lives. For some families, however, a regular wage may not be sufficient to cope with rapidly rising housing costs. I have visited some of the temporary accommodation available in Havering for families and, while staff and council do a fantastic job in working with children who stay there, it is no substitute for safe, warm and high-quality homes.

Havering is champing at the bit to undertake an ambitious estate regeneration plan so that it can provide local families with the greater range of affordable—if I may use that word—housing options that they need. If we are serious about urgently tackling the housing crisis and child poverty, we need to unleash those councils that have sensible, financially sound plans to lead redevelopment themselves, not least as they can tolerate lower returns than private developers. I was glad to see the Budget lift the housing revenue account cap in high-demand areas to aid housing delivery plans, and I welcome additional support for those who are homeless or struggling with private rents.

Education has always provided a crucial ladder when it comes to poverty alleviation, and I am lucky to represent an area with some of the best primary schools in England, including in some of the country's poorest wards. Local schools have done a fantastic job of offering children a window into some of the opportunities our city can offer them by building partnerships with universities, businesses and museums, engaging in such things as the Brilliant Club scholars programme and pushing hard on numeracy and literacy. Next week I shall be supporting the World Book Day 2018 literacy and development drive to encourage families to read with their children.

We must not let that progress slip in the transition to secondary school. The requirement to fill in a form for a child to be given a secondary place can unfairly disadvantage pupils on free school meals, as parents are often late or poorly informed, or they fail to complete the form at all. Consequently, too many pupils who have free school meals—especially white British boys—end up without a place and are served the left-over allocations. That can concentrate children in failing schools and entrench social problems. We should instead look at how best to remove the necessity of a form for pupils on free school meals, perhaps by local authorities automatically awarding them their local school unless a parent wants to exercise a preference.

In the past 20 years there has been an intense focus on how to enhance academic performance in inner-city areas, particularly among black and minority ethnic students, which has produced tremendous results. We now need to refresh the approach by looking with the same urgency at the new neglected groups. Perhaps a new [Teach First](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teach_First) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teach_First) should deal with white working-class areas that are falling behind, or there could be a major drive to improve the quality of pre-school provision by skilling up the nursery workforce, or the creation of dedicated core schools for excluded children. With the number of secondary permanent exclusions climbing for the fourth consecutive year, too many students are being taught in pupil referral units. Core schools would provide an alternative key stage 4 curriculum, with English, maths and science alongside two further technical qualifications. Close working with social services teams could give excluded children safety and stability and flag up problems in the home that can drive child poverty.

Finally, I have focused on the funding needs of outer-London boroughs, but I would caution against seeing child poverty alleviation as something that can be solved by Government money alone.

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Andrew Slaughter

Labour, Hammersmith

I respect the hon. Lady for turning up for the debate. We did not have any Conservative Members in the child refugee debate. Does she think at all that £27 billion taken out of social security since 2010 has had any effect on child poverty in London?

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Julia Lopez

Conservative, Hornchurch and Upminster

We have to look at outcomes as well as methods and spending. I certainly remember that under the [Labour Government](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government) there were some serious and entrenched poverty problems, because the benefits system was trapping people and there was not a belief that people could do more than they were given. I believe in people and that some of the Government's reforms have fundamentally changed a lot of people's lives for the better. Driving employment in households is an absolutely fantastic achievement. We have almost become accustomed to banking these incredible job figures, but they actually mean something to a lot of people. It is incredibly valuable for children to see working parents.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

Could the hon. Lady identify any word that I have said that suggests that work is not important? Work is important, but support and ability to earn enough to live are important, too.

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Julia Lopez

Conservative, Hornchurch and Upminster

I was not aware that I was attacking the hon. Lady, and I am sorry if that is how she felt.

I have been a councillor in [Tower Hamlets](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_Hamlets) and I observed meeting after meeting where councillors in that borough indulged in what I have to admit was an orgy of blame—not just Labour but other councillors, too—suggesting that every negative statistic that the borough racked up was down to [Tory](#). ([/glossary/?gl=135](#)) cuts,

despite overseeing a budget of more than £1 billion, being in receipt millions of unspent section 106 contributions and being able to access all manner of special funding pots due to its poverty ranking. Rarely did councillors expend the same energy in the nitty-gritty of whether the borough's programmes were effective and delivering results in alleviating poverty.

To give a small example, in my scrutiny of its youth services provision I found that Tower Hamlets was spending more than £1,000 on each young person with whom it came into contact at the extremely poorly attended youth services. That was equivalent to nearly £300 a head in the 13 to 16-year-old population, when Lambeth, Southwark and Greenwich, which are also Labour boroughs and have thriving services, were spending under £150. An attachment by adults to empty youth centres offering outdated programmes was cutting young people off from a much more modern approach to outreach that truly catered to young people's ambitions. This is what I mean by the need to focus on outcomes rather than methods; there was a real obsession in Tower Hamlets about methods rather than whether results were being delivered—signalling politics rather than delivery politics.

Similarly, a former child services officer advised me that the council had been spending tens of thousands of pounds annually on one troubled family in the borough. It was only when budgets were tightened that officers were forced to review whether those interventions had been working; they realised that the family would be better off if the mother had the confidence to leave an abusive partner. Through very intensive one-to-one work with her, she built up the courage to leave and to get back into the workplace, giving her children the stability to start school again. The council was saved huge amounts of money.

I say this because two of the three national constituencies where child poverty statistics are starkest sit in the borough of Tower Hamlets—one of the most incompetently run corners of our capital. We cannot simply throw a blanket of taxpayers' money over every problem. Resource is important—I am not denying that—but it must be accompanied by competent governance if it is truly to make a difference to driving down child poverty.

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Joan Ryan

Labour, Enfield North

3:32 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend [Siobhain McDonagh](#) (/mp/?p=10381) on securing this import debate and on her powerful analysis of the situation. Eight years ago, [David Cameron](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron) said the [Conservatives](#) (/glossary/?gl=85) would be

“the most family-friendly Government you’ve ever seen in this country”.

Less than two years ago, the current [Prime Minister](#) (/glossary/?gl=264) stood on the steps of [Downing Street](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downing_Street) and proclaimed that she would fight against “burning social injustices” and

“make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us.”

What we have heard so far today throws some stark reality on that. This debate is another reminder of how reality fails to match the Government's rhetoric.

My borough of Enfield, where I have lived for the past 20 years, and where my hon. Friend [Bambos Charalambous](#) (/mp/?p=25676) has lived all his life, is generally thought of as a leafy borough with a very solid foundation for employment, manufacturing, the service sector and logistics. It has always been said, and I have said many times, that it is a great place to live and bring up a family. However, Enfield is in the midst of a worsening child poverty crisis. Four in 10 of Enfield's children—almost 34,000—live below the poverty line. The borough is the 11th most impoverished area for children in the [UK](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>).

My [constituency](#) (/glossary/?gl=169) and neighbouring Edmonton are also two of the top 20 constituencies in the country with the fastest growing levels of child poverty, and Edmonton is in the top 10, as my hon. Friend the Member for [Mitcham and Morden](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) mentioned. As the End Child Poverty coalition has said, low-income families are struggling to put

“food on the table, heat their homes and clothe their children.”

We should feel anger and shame that that is the situation. Last year, Enfield had the fourth highest rate of food bank usage in London. Is it any wonder that this is happening when wages are flatlining, with one in three jobs in Enfield being paid less than the living wage? I ask hon. Members to look at yesterday’s edition of the [Enfield Independent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_Independent) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_Independent), our local paper, which says that eviction rates are the highest in the capital. Levels of homelessness acceptances in Enfield have risen more than 80% in the past two years.

My hon. Friend referred to my constituency surgery, which I do every Friday afternoon from 3 o’clock. Anyone who turns up will be seen, even if they have not made an appointment, because people are desperate. A huge percentage of the problems relate to housing. Many hard-pressed local families are trying—and often failing—to cope with soaring rents and a lack of affordable and social housing. But under this Government, house building has fallen to its lowest peacetime rate since the 1920s. The number of affordable homes in Enfield increased by just over 300 in the three years to 2016. For most families, what is called affordable is not affordable, as we have already discussed. On top of all of this, most benefits for working families have been frozen, which has cut families’ real incomes. There is a serious shortage of genuinely affordable childcare.

I am proud that the last [Labour Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government) introduced [Sure Start](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start), the transformative early years programme giving young children the best start in life. When Labour left office in [May 2010](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_2010) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_2010), there were 24 Sure Start centres in Enfield. Now there are just five. Government cuts to these vital education services are a scandal and our most disadvantaged children are paying the price. As Save the Children has said, the consequences of a lack of quality early years education for children living in poverty are lifelong and

“it harms not only their quality of life, but their ability to learn and develop at a crucial stage in their lives.”

The lack of Government action to address these issues is in stark contrast to the leadership shown by [Sadiq Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadiq_Khan) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadiq_Khan), the Labour [Mayor of London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London), who is championing the London living wage to support low income families.

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Kit Malthouse

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

We all did.

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Joan Ryan

Labour, Enfield North

The [Minister \(/glossary/?g=35\)](/glossary/?g=35) may make an [intervention \(/glossary/?g=39\)](/glossary/?g=39) if he wishes.

The Mayor (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mayor) is investing £15 million to buy homes for homeless Londoners and recently he launched the capital's largest living rent scheme, to offer more Londoners a genuinely affordable home. He is supporting early years hubs, delivering on his promise to improve access to high-quality, affordable early years education for the most disadvantaged families in the capital. However, the child poverty crisis is a national issue that demands a co-ordinated, national response from the Government.

I urge Ministers to restore targets to end child poverty. The Government must support local authorities as they attempt to address the worst effects of child poverty in their areas, instead of gutting their budgets. Enfield Council (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_Council) alone has had its central Government funding slashed by £161 million since 2010, with another £35 million in cuts due by next year. The Government need to fix their broken housing policy and help to make sure that all families in Enfield, particularly those on low incomes, have the chance to live in a safe, secure and genuinely affordable home. Universal credit still needs to be fixed to ensure that it does not drive even more families into debt, arrears and eviction, and the Government need to take steps immediately to provide more good-quality childcare and early years education.

Child Poverty Action Group (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Poverty_Action_Group) rightly says that poverty

*“damages childhoods;
it damages life chances;
and it damages us all in society.”*

I am proud that the last Labour Government (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government) lifted 1 million children out of poverty. They addressed this issue and, to a large extent, they succeeded. It is time that, rather than making the situation worse, this Government got their act together for these children or moved over and let someone else do it.

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Karen Buck

Labour, Westminster North

3:40 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate my hon. Friend Siobhain McDonagh (</mp/?p=10381>) on introducing the debate so powerfully.

There is more than enough challenge to go around without us having to worry too much about the pressures between inner London and the suburbs, which we have already heard enough about. There are real and growing challenges in suburban London, but child poverty remains acute in inner London, and it is worsening. If London has something of a reputational challenge as a wealthy city, I assure hon. Members that the City of Westminster (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Westminster) has an acute reputational challenge. The borough, which contains Mayfair and Knightsbridge, is one of the poorest in the country. It has the sixth highest level of child poverty in the country after housing costs are taken into account, and my constituency (</glossary/?gl=169>) has the 15th highest; well over half the children in wards such as Church Street (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Street) live in poverty.

As Londoners, we must rise to that challenge and recognise that people in other parts of the country struggle to understand that a city with such extraordinary wealth—a city that contains the City of London (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_London) and the iconic tourist attractions that are so familiar to everyone—is also the region with the highest poverty. It has more children in poverty than Scotland and Wales combined. As Members of Parliament (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Members_of_Parliament), we have to try to explain that and help people understand it. We must ensure that the specific drivers of poverty in London are understood, and that we get our fair share of resources.

Let me add to the comments by my right hon. Friend Joan Ryan (</mp/?p=10523>). Poverty is not an act of God, but is brought about by a failure by the Government and by market forces to ensure that incomes are sufficiently high to lift children out of poverty, that housing is available at a reasonable cost, and that there are adequate services to support intervention (</glossary/?gl=39>) for low-income families and children. I, too, am extremely proud that a Labour Government (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government), although they were not perfect—no Government are—were able, though a

mixture of the tax credit system, benefit changes and service delivery, to lift 1 million children out of poverty. That has gone into reverse: according to households below average income statistics, an extra 400,000 children have fallen into poverty since 2010. That was an absolutely foreseeable and deliberate consequence of Government policies, including the freezing and cutting of benefits, the two-child policy, benefit caps and the rents policy, which I shall come on to.

I am also proud of the children's centres—500 have closed as a result of Government cuts to early intervention and local government funding—and national childcare strategy that a Labour Government set up. Under the previous Labour Mayor, Ken Livingstone, there was a London childcare affordability programme, which did so much to make childcare accessible to lower-income working families. So many of those measures have gone into reverse in the past few years.

As all [Opposition](#) (*/glossary/?gl=29*) Members have generally stressed, housing costs lie at the heart of poverty in the capital. It is housing costs that eat so much of people's income, and it is housing costs that are driving a crisis of homelessness and housing insecurity. The interface between low-paid work, particularly when that work is insecure, the freeze and in some cases cuts in social security—particularly housing support—and high housing costs is a particular stress point.

Two important reports were published today, including another very important one by [Citizens Advice](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens_Advice), which found that one in 10 adults in this country has an income that varies from month to month. Someone who lives on a variable income, particularly when that income is low, but has high fixed costs—particularly high housing costs—is likely to find themselves in difficulty. That in turn feeds the epidemic of evictions, which we have heard are happening particularly in outer London, and high debt. That feeds the crisis of mental ill health—anxiety and depression—which is a real challenge for families who are struggling to get by on low incomes and in so many cases see their homes at risk. The pressures of housing and poverty are literally making people sick in their tens, if not hundreds, of thousands. That often drives people to seek advice and help, which are less available than they have been for a great many years.

It has already been said that the most vulnerable and most acutely disadvantaged families in the capital are those who are either in the homelessness system or at risk of homelessness. After many years of decline, the number of families in homelessness accommodation has risen significantly. Some 45,000 children in the capital now live in temporary accommodation, up from 28,000 when the [Conservatives](#) (*/glossary/?gl=85*) came into government in 2010. Those families often live in deeply substandard accommodation—unfortunately, temporary accommodation offers some of the worst conditions any of us have seen—yet they pay excessive rents. As a deliberate consequence of Government policy, those families also find themselves subject to rent restrictions and a benefits cap, even though no family that is accepted as homeless has any say whatsoever in the accommodation they receive, or the price they pay for it.

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Joan Ryan

Labour, Enfield North

I wonder whether my hon. Friend has the same experience in her surgeries as I have in mine. Constituents come to see me who pay extortionate rents in the private sector for disgraceful property that is below habitable standards—it is damp, perhaps does not have hot water or heating, or has an out-of-date boiler—yet when I complain and try to get enforcement, they get what is called a revenge eviction and find themselves out on the streets. They have to go into temporary accommodation, they might be moved out of London, and their children might have to change schools. They continually suffer massive disruption to their lives.

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Karen Buck

Labour, Westminster North

I totally agree. The Government will have to rise to the challenge of revenge evictions. That is well overdue. As was said, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for [Mitcham and Morden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden), that challenge is in part down to the fact that the face of poverty in London is increasingly in the private rented sector. We have seen a shift of low-income households from social rented accommodation into private rented accommodation, where rents are higher, insecurity is a constant problem and, because people on low incomes have so little choice in accommodation, people find themselves in the worst conditions.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

My hon. Friend is making her erudite, detailed knowledge obvious to everyone. Does she know that the [Trust for London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_for_London) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_for_London) identified that the average family in poverty 10 years ago lived in inner London on welfare benefits in social housing, and today the average family in poverty in London live in outer London, are in work, and live in the private rented sector?

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Karen Buck

Labour, Westminster North

That is absolutely right. That paints a picture of change, which, as a deliberate policy, has been into the private rented sector. The private rented sector is shifting further out, to outer London, and as has been said, the changing face of poverty is a working face: the number of families in poverty in work has risen sharply in the last decade. We all recognise that work is integral to getting out of poverty and to people's sense of purpose and wellbeing in life, but work is not sufficient to lift people out of poverty. Above all, it is not sufficient for people faced with high housing costs.

Now, 43% of poor children in the capital are in private rented accommodation; that has increased from a third 10 years ago. The shift into the private rented sector is happening in large part because the social rented sector is in decline and no longer available for people to live in. People are being diverted into the private rented sector, even though their needs for security and affordability would

be addressed far better in the social rented sector.

It gets worse: there has also been a deliberate policy of raising social rents above inflation, and shifting properties that were once attached to a social rent to a higher, “affordable” rent. In recent years, we have seen 100,000 properties converted from social rents to this Orwellian concept of an affordable rent, which traps even families who live in social rented accommodation into paying a much higher proportion of their income as rent than they were. That in itself is a reason why even in the social rented sector an additional 40,000 children now live in poverty.

A second report was launched today by Shout, the campaign for social housing, written for it by [Capital Economics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_Economics) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_Economics). It found that the policy of raising social rents is bad economics, as well as being bad for low-income families, because it reduces people’s ability to earn, and even families in homes for social rent are finding themselves unable to cover their housing costs. They will also increasingly be subject to the caps that flow out of the £25 billion taken out of social security expenditure by the Government.

We know, from the lived experience of British poverty in the last few years, that measures cutting social security, raising housing costs, reducing the availability of social rented housing and cutting vital support services do not work. We know that because poverty is going up, and it is predicted by the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Fiscal_Studies) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Fiscal_Studies) to rise sharply by 2021. As a consequence of those policies, we anticipate the first sustained increase in inequality in this country since the 1980s. We know from experience abroad that a policy that drives low-income families into high-rent accommodation does not work; it is bad for work incentives, and bad for those families.

The answer to all that—apart from unfreezing benefits, tackling the structural problems with universal credit, and dealing with issues such as the million children who, under universal credit, will lose entitlement to free school dinners—is to tackle the rent burden on families. That is best done by ensuring that low-income people have the opportunity to live in the social rented sector.

This was uttered today by the Conservative chair of the [Local Government Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Government_Association) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Government_Association), in endorsing the Capital Economics report on the problem of high social rent:

“We have to let the state build and dispel the myth that state [intervention](#) (/glossary/?gl=39) is subsidy. It’s not. It’s investment in an asset”.

I do not often agree with leading [Conservatives](#) (/glossary/?gl=85), but I firmly concur with that statement. As a famous song from New York City a few years ago stated, “The rent is too damn high”. Until we can tackle this problem, I am afraid we will be struggling with the problem of rising poverty in London.

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Several hon. Members:

rose—

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Henry Bellingham

Conservative, North West Norfolk

Order. According to my calculations, we have 13 minutes left before the wind-ups.

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Edward Davey

Liberal Democrat Spokesperson (Home Affairs)

3:54 pm, 22nd February 2018

I congratulate [Siobhain McDonagh](#) (/mp/?p=10381) on winning the debate and on her speech. We have had a degree of consensus on a number of issues that are critical to tackling child poverty, particularly housing. I want to say quite a bit about housing, but first I want to talk about my [constituency](#) (/glossary/?gl=169).

The [Royal Borough of Kingston](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Borough_of_Kingston) is often seen as a wealthy borough. It is true that it has some very wealthy parts, but over many years representing three quarters of the borough, I have found that that external perception is inaccurate when it comes to the lives of thousands of people in the borough. We have pockets of severe deprivation. In wards such as Norbiton, where we have the Cambridge estate, [Cambridge Gardens](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_Gardens) and the [King Henry](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Henry) estate, people are really struggling, daily. There are also estates in central Surbiton, Chessington and [Old Malden](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Malden) where levels of poverty equal those anywhere in the capital.

I often worry that the external perception, whether in [City Hall](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Hall), [Whitehall](#) (/glossary/?gl=101) or even the Guildhall in Kingston, means that people do not recognise that there are families in real need. As we do not have some of the social infrastructure found in other boroughs, some children in those struggling families get an even worse deal, because there is not that wider network of support. I am not asking the Government to give us the sort of money for social deprivation that other boroughs might get—that argument would be rejected—but I want the [Minister](#) (/glossary/?gl=35) to work with his colleagues and realise that in boroughs such as mine, there are vulnerable families. That needs to be recognised more. If he takes nothing else away from my speech, I hope he takes that point.

Housing issues are as severe in Kingston as in many other boroughs in London, and of course the most vulnerable and low-income families are affected most severely, in numerous ways, many of which have been touched on. To give an example of how that can multiply child poverty, when these families are evicted by their private rented sector landlord, they ask the council for support and are given temporary emergency accommodation outside the borough, sometimes miles away from the children's schools and where the parents work—and the parents are often in work.

The impact of poverty on those children can be severely affected by the dislocation in how our housing support works. Often they cannot go to school, and in that temporary period, which can last for months, they are often in very poor accommodation. As a result, the school is less able to support that family. That is just one example of how housing policy in London is affecting many people day in, day out, and making the experience of children that much worse.

The hon. Member for [Mitcham and Morden](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) talked about the importance of social housing; that has been a general theme. I could not agree more. We need to completely change the whole approach to building houses. For decades, under all Governments, we hoped that the private sector would produce the houses, but if we look over five or six decades of house building, we see that we have only ever had serious increases in housing when the state has been directing and building houses. I think it was the hon. Lady who said that 1968 was the last peak year of house building. The idea that the private sector and the free market will deliver the amount and types of homes that we need to go back to those periods is for the birds. It is just not true.

I am fascinated by the quote from the Conservative leader of the [Local Government Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Government_Association) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Government_Association). Maybe we are moving toward an understanding, at least in local government, that the state needs to drive house building; otherwise we will never meet demand, particularly in London, but no doubt also in cities elsewhere.

I hope the Minister will address the need to rethink the fundamentals of our approach to house building. We will not take communities with us and build the number of houses necessary unless councils and the state are allowed to be far more proactive, not just in finances, but in how the whole planning system works.

I end by talking about one of the major poverty reduction programmes in recent decades, how it worked and the lessons we should take from it: the [Sure Start](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) project. I found the Sure Start programme, brought in during the first term of the [Labour Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government), very exciting, because it was trying to take an area-based approach, so that there was no stigma in the services being provided, and to take a more holistic approach, bringing different service providers together in a way we had not seen before. To some extent, it worked. In its first years, there were no Sure Start projects in my constituency, and I went to other boroughs in London to visit them, to see how they were working and to learn about them, because I thought it was an important policy innovation.

There is no doubt that some evidence suggests that for some people, Sure Start was effective. However, we should also look at the evidence that showed that there were poor families with children that it did not reach—particularly what are sometimes called the hard-to-reach families. Sure Start often did not manage to reach those. We need to think not just of area-based poverty programmes, although they still have a role, as Sure Start showed. Those projects that innovated by using a whole series of indicators to try to identify the families who were in most need, most under threat and most vulnerable had some promise.

One of the things I regret in recent years is that some of the innovative programmes outside the Sure Start family that tried to help those who are, in many ways, the most vulnerable in our society, were cut. If we are to make a sustained attack on reducing child poverty, we need to think of policy programmes that will meet the needs of those particular families. Otherwise, we are not providing for the children most in need. I hope the Minister will respond on whether the issue is only area-based programmes, or whether there are targeted, innovative programmes that we should look at as well.

Link to this speech

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Andrew Slaughter

Labour, Hammersmith

4:02 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend [Siobhain McDonagh](/mp/?p=10381) (</mp/?p=10381>) on securing the debate, and on the way she has set the scene. She sets a real example to us all as a champion of her [constituency](/glossary/?g=169). (</glossary/?g=169>) and our city.

One of the myths my hon. Friend has buried today is that London is a rich city for the many, rather than just the few. We have seen that, in fact, London has the worst levels of child poverty of any region of the country. Indeed, as my hon. Friend [Ms Buck](/mp/?p=10075) (</mp/?p=10075>) indicated, what are often thought of as some of the richest boroughs in the centre of London—Westminster, Camden and Islington—are right up there in terms of child poverty levels.

My borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is not far behind: after housing costs are taken into consideration, 35% of children there live in poverty, and 33% do not reach the expected levels of speech and language skills at the age of five. Where children are on free school meals, that rises to 43%, and I have schools that have up to 70% of children on free school meals. If one looks at the worst-affected wards—in my case, the Wormholt and [White City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_City) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_City) ward—the figure for children living in poverty after housing costs is 45%.

As has been said by a number of [Opposition](/glossary/?g=29) (</glossary/?g=29>) Members, housing is perhaps the most significant issue that makes a difference here. If one looks at Wormholt and White City, the figure is 30% before housing costs are taken into consideration—still very high—but 45% afterward. In some ways that is slightly counterintuitive, because it is a ward with high levels of social housing, where

one would expect rents to be relatively low, compared with the very high market rents, let alone the cost of purchasing a property, in the area. However, as was indicated, in many ways, social housing is a thing of the past—not only because of the conversion, particularly by some housing associations, of social rents to affordable rents, but because of the sale of council houses, which are then not replaced. We have the obscenity of slum landlords owning sometimes dozens of properties on estates, and renting them out at—or in some cases above—the housing benefit cap, driving families into poverty, as well as making them live in extremely poor conditions.

It is not the case that nothing is being done to address that. I praise my council, Hammersmith and Fulham, which moved to Labour control in 2014. It has done what it can to revive and support [Sure Start](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sure_Start) and, sadly in some ways, to support food banks and open new centres to support advice services. It has done what it can, given the vast local Government cuts over that period, to try to alleviate the worst effects of child poverty. I praise the [Mayor of London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London), [Sadiq Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadiq_Khan) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadiq_Khan), who has also been mentioned. He is trying to tackle low pay, improve childcare and build genuinely affordable housing—very different from his predecessor. They are pushing water uphill, however, given the cuts that have been made.

In an [intervention](/glossary/?gl=39) (</glossary/?gl=39>), I said £27 billion had been taken out of social security programmes since 2010. That is a phenomenal sum of money. We have seen the effect across a whole raft of Government policies, deliberately introduced by the coalition Government, and continued by this Government: the two-child rule; the benefit cap; the benefit freeze; and now universal credit.

One figure that caught my eye in the excellent briefings we were given for this debate was evidence from [Southwark Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southwark_Council) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southwark_Council) that the average council rent account is £8 in credit; but for universal credit recipients, it is £1,178 in arrears. People are being evicted and are struggling to make ends meet because of the effects of universal credit, particularly the housing elements. Until we see a change in Government policy, or better still a change of Government, the situation will not get better. The prediction is that it will get worse, and that average levels of child poverty will be back well over 40% in a few years' time.

I conclude by referring to a debate I had in this Chamber on Tuesday, on regeneration and social housing in an area called Earl's Court and [West Kensington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Kensington) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Kensington), in my and the neighbouring borough. It is billed as the largest onsite development in the world outside China. There, 760 affordable homes and council homes are to be demolished without the promise of a replacement home for all the people living there. Some 7,500 homes are to be built, with not one additional social rented home on that site. When such policies are pursued, it is no wonder that we are dragging people into poverty and not giving any hope to children who are growing up in overcrowded, appalling conditions. That was not an accident or market forces, but the deliberate policy of a [Tory](/glossary/?gl=135) (</glossary/?gl=135>) [Secretary of State](/glossary/?gl=23) (</glossary/?gl=23>), Tory Mayor and Tory council leader, conspiring to ensure that we got fewer genuinely affordable homes.

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Julia Lopez

Conservative, Hornchurch and Upminster

Will the hon. Gentleman [give way](/glossary/?gl=176) (</glossary/?gl=176>)?

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Andrew Slaughter

Labour, Hammersmith

I do not have time, I am afraid.

The [Minister](#) ([/glossary/?gl=35](#)) knows that, because he was a deputy Mayor for London at the time, so he might want to address his record, as perhaps might some of the other Members who have spoken. I am afraid to say that [Sir Edward Davey](#) ([/mp/?p=10155](#)) might want to address his record in government, because that is when this dates back to.

I have 20 seconds left in which to speak, and I would not like to refuse courtesy to the hon. Lady, so I will [give way](#). ([/glossary/?gl=176](#)).

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Julia Lopez

Conservative, Hornchurch and Upminster

I think it should be agreed that housing supply issues are failure of successive Governments. I recall that, between 2000 and 2010, there was a buy-to-let boom, the arrival of huge sums of foreign cash, extremely loose monetary policy, extremely loose borders, the forced divestment of council housing stock to arm's length management organisations or housing associations, and a very low level of social housing being built—in fact, lower than in the Thatcher years. The hon. Gentleman should have the good grace to take responsibility for that.

Link to this speech

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Andrew Slaughter

Labour, Hammersmith

I will never be accused of not having good grace. I leave the hon. Lady with one fact: in the last three years in which the [Conservatives](#) ([/glossary/?gl=85](#)) were in power on [Hammersmith and Fulham Council](#)

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammersmith_and_Fulham_Council), they actually managed to reduce the number of social homes. That is quite some achievement.

Link to this speech

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**Margaret Greenwood**

Shadow Minister (Work and Pensions)

4:10 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate my hon. Friend [Siobhain McDonagh](#) (</mp/?p=10381>) on securing such an important debate.

I have been struck by the passion and clear sense of all the speeches we have heard from Members championing the need to improve the situation of those in poverty. From the stories my hon. Friend told about some of the impacts, I think we will all remember the image of children guarding their school dinner plates with their arms to stop other people taking their food. That is horrific, given the scale of wealth in this country. She made a powerful and moving speech.

I also draw particular attention to the speech by my right hon. Friend [Joan Ryan](#) (</mp/?p=10523>), who, along with my hon. Friend [Ms Buck](#) (</mp/?p=10075>), talked about her pride, which I share, in the last [Labour Government](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government)'s record in lifting 1 million children out of poverty. I also draw attention to the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for [Westminster North](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North), which was also touched on by my hon. Friend [Andy Slaughter](#) (</mp/?p=11559>), in talking about how such extreme wealth can sit next to such poverty, and the image that people from outside London have of it.

The debate was prompted by the release of disturbing new statistics by the End Child Poverty coalition, which show that, in some parts of London, more than half of children are now growing up in poverty; in [Bethnal Green and Bow](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethnal_Green_and_Bow) it is 54%, and in [Poplar and Limehouse](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_and_Limehouse) it is 53%. The [Minister](#) (</glossary/?gl=35>) questioned those statistics at the last Work and Pensions questions. I suggest that Government Ministers are in no position to do that, given the Government's reluctance to publish up-to-date figures on a wide range of social security issues. The coalition Government only agreed to continue to publish data on child poverty at all after being pressured by the [Opposition](#) (</glossary/?gl=29>) and voluntary organisations working in the field.

However, even the [DWP](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DWP>)'s statistics on child poverty show that London has the highest rate of child poverty of any part of the [UK](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>). According to DWP figures, 37% of children in London are growing up in poverty after housing costs are taken into account. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Fiscal_Studies) estimates that current Government tax and benefit policies will see that rise to 41% over the next two years.

Although the rate of child poverty is highest in inner London, it is clear that child poverty is a London-wide problem. For example, some 45% of children in Edmonton are growing up in poverty, as well as 40% in [Enfield North](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_North) and 37% in [Croydon North](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croydon_North). It is not only the geographical spread that is the problem but the severity of the child poverty. In 2016-17, 40,000 children in London received help from food banks, according to the [Trussell Trust](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trussell_Trust), which is of course the largest but by no means the only provider of food aid in the UK. The latest figures for this year show a similar level of need.

Free school meals ensure that children in families on low incomes get one hot meal a day, which is vital for their wellbeing and ability to learn. The Labour party would introduce free school meals for all primary school children and all secondary school children whose families claim universal credit. Under Government plans, children in families that claim universal credit will no longer be eligible for free school meals if their families earn more than £7,400 a year, which is such a small sum of money that it is difficult to understand how the Department could come up with that policy. Will the Government step back from introducing a cliff edge for eligibility for free school meals?

Many speakers have highlighted the significance of the high housing costs in London; it is something that those of us who do not live in London find quite astonishing. Last September, the median private rent in London for a one-bed property was £1,250 a month, compared with £595 for England as a whole. The level of private renting is at its highest since the 1970s, and private sector rents in London are more than double the average for England as a whole.

Over the past five years, the cheapest fifth of private rents have increased faster than rents in the sector overall. Although the number of children in social housing living in poverty has risen in recent years, the number of children in private rented accommodation living in poverty tripled over the decade up to 2015-16, by which point more than half of all children in private rented homes were living in poverty.

Seven in 10 households in temporary accommodation in England are in London, and more than 80% of them are households with children. Those children have no security in where they live. Levels of overcrowding in London are more than twice as high as the rest of England, and the rate of overcrowding is especially high for ethnic minority households. That means that children may not have the space to play or the peace and quiet they need to do homework. If there are family tensions, it is harder still for children to escape them.

Just 29,000 homes of all types were built in London per year between 2013-14 and 2015-16, and only 24% were —apparently— affordable, which is down 10% on the previous three years. No homes for social rent were built in London in the current [Foreign Secretary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_Secretary) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_Secretary)'s last year as [Mayor of London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_London). The current Mayor has set a target in his London plan of 65,000 new homes a year, half of which will be affordable. He also wants to redefine “affordable”, as the current definition of 80% of market rate is beyond all too many people, as many Members have said.

Government funding for affordable homebuilding in London is still less than half the amount spent in 2009-10. The [Chancellor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancellor_of_the_Exchequer) ([/glossary/?gl=170](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancellor_of_the_Exchequer)) announced an additional £2 billion for affordable housing in the Budget, but the [Office for Budget Responsibility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_for_Budget_Responsibility) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_for_Budget_Responsibility) later revealed that that came from existing housing pots. [The Mayor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mayor_of_London) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mayor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mayor_of_London)) has called for £2.7 billion a year to fund affordable housing in London. Will the Government ensure that he gets the funding he needs to meet London's housing need?

High London rents mean low-income families are likely to face a shortfall between their housing benefit and their rent. However, the Government have not only failed to back new homebuilding but also cut local housing allowance for private sector tenants in 2011, and then introduced the benefit cap in 2013, which they lowered further in 2016. Will the Government abolish the benefit cap, as Labour would?

In 2013, the Government also replaced council tax benefit with council tax support. Even families with very low incomes are now generally expected to pay some council tax. In 15 London boroughs, 200,000 low-income residents paid, on average, at least £200 or more a year towards their council tax than they would have if they had received council tax benefit. Will the Government recognise the pressure they are putting on the finances of families on low incomes and act to restore council tax benefit?

The result of sharply rising rents and less help with housing costs is that low income families are more at risk of losing their homes, which causes misery, for families with children in particular. The total number of eviction orders rose in the five years to 2015-16. Possession orders, rather than mortgage orders, made up 97% of the total eviction orders in that year. High eviction rates are occurring in boroughs with high proportions of families with children living in the private rented sector and receiving housing benefit. Nine of the 10 boroughs with the highest eviction rates are in outer London.

The long waits that universal credit claimants experience for initial payment put them at particular risk of eviction. Increasing numbers of families with children in the capital are claiming universal credit as the full service is rolled out. There is clear evidence from the Residential Landlords Association that landlords are also increasingly reluctant to let to universal credit claimants in the first place.

The Government announced the removal of the waiting period and said that they would make it easier to get an advance, but they refuse to publish regular statistics on timeliness or advances. I had to table a written question in January to find out that, even under the old system of a six-week wait, one fifth of claimants were still not being paid in full on time, and 13% were not receiving any payment at all. The Government would not say how many people had requested an advance, so although more people are getting them, we do not know the extent of the need.

[The Minister](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Minister) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Minister) questioned the End Child Poverty coalition's statistics. Since the Minister sets such store by accurate figures, will he give a commitment to publish regular statistics on the timeliness of payments and on how many people both request and receive an advance, so that we know whether the changes the Government introduced are making a difference?

The Government do not publish statistics on households affected by the two-child policy either. Will they commit to doing so? That policy will have a particularly severe impact on some religious communities, where reproduction, use of contraception and family size are determined by beliefs, and where culture is also a factor. Those communities are important parts of London's population, and some of them, such as the Bangladeshi communities in [Tower Hamlets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_Hamlets) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_Hamlets) and Newham, are located in areas of high child poverty. A couple may well have planned a large family, then found that their circumstances have changed and that they need to receive social security. Will the Government reverse the pernicious two-child policy?

The Government's stock answer when called to account on child poverty is that work is the best route out of poverty. Yes, it is better to be in work, but work should pay. That was supposed to be one of the foundations of universal credit. However, cuts to universal credit work allowances will hit families on low incomes hard. It is the case that 58% of people in poverty in London are in a family in which someone is in work; that is up from 44% a decade ago. And 17% of people in in-work poverty live in a household in which all the adults work. During the past decade, average weekly pay in London has fallen. In 2016, just over one fifth of workers in London were low paid, compared with 13% in 2005. There is a range of reasons for that, not least a rise in insecure employment. One third of temporary workers are on a temporary contract because they cannot find a permanent job. The figure is nearly 10% higher than in 2004.

Many parents of very young children want to work, but face the challenge of finding both a job that will fit in with parenting and affordable childcare. A recent Gingerbread study of lone parents in Camden highlighted the fact that very few part-time jobs were advertised on the Government's own job search portal, with which all claimants have to register. The average cost of childcare in a nursery or from a childminder in London is just over £150 a week—more than £40 a week higher than the average for England.

Child poverty in London is not new. [Charles Booth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Booth) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Booth)'s maps showing the geography of poverty at the end of the 19th century or [Roger Mayne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Mayne) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Mayne)'s photos of 1950s [Notting Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notting_Hill) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notting_Hill) testify to that. However, the End Child Poverty coalition's statistics are still shocking. Rather than questioning the figures and trying to brush them under the carpet, the Government should react to them by making the tackling of child poverty the priority that it should be.

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Kit Malthouse

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

4:21 pm, 22nd February 2018

It is a great pleasure to appear before you, Sir Henry. I begin by congratulating [Siobhain McDonagh](#) (/mp/?p=10381) on securing this important and very relevant debate, not least because I spent 16 years as a representative in central London, both as a councillor and as a [London Assembly](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Assembly) member—where I shared a [constituency](#) (/glossary/?gl=169) with the hon. Members for [Westminster North](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North) (Ms Buck) and for Hammersmith ([Andy Slaughter](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Slaughter))—so I am well acquainted with some of the problems. Indeed, I started my career as a councillor as deputy chairman of the housing committee on [Westminster City Council](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_City_Council), dealing with the heavy investment that we made in the Mozart estate in Queen's Park at the end of the 1990s, as the hon. Member for Westminster North may remember. This issue has been of importance to me in the past and remains so.

I emphasise from the outset that the Government are committed—the hon. Member for [Mitcham and Morden](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitcham_and_Morden) referred to this—to building a country that works for everyone, where no one and no community are left behind. I completely agree that we must continue to provide appropriate support for the least well-off and the disadvantaged in our society, so that we can make a meaningful and lasting difference to their lives and outcomes and those of their children.

However, I was disappointed to hear the hon. Lady say, as I think she did on the record, that work is no longer the route out of poverty. The Government believe that work offers families the best opportunity to get out of poverty and become self-reliant. That is why we are undertaking the most ambitious reform to the welfare system in decades—so that it supports people to find and stay in work.

The evidence about the impact of worklessness on children's outcomes, in both the short and the long term, is clear. In 2014-15, 75% of children in workless families failed to reach the expected standard at [GCSE](#) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCSE>), compared with 39% for all working families and 52% for low-income working families.

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**Karen Buck**

Labour, Westminster North

Will the Minister (</glossary/?gl=35>) give way (</glossary/?gl=176>)?

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**Kit Malthouse**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

No, I am short of time. As adults, children who grow up in workless families are more likely to be workless themselves, compared with children who grow up with working parents, which creates an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. It is therefore vital that we continue with our policies to encourage work and to address the often complex employment barriers faced by many disadvantaged families.

A number of hon. Members raised concerns about working families who are in poverty. However, the evidence is clear. Adults in workless families are four times more likely to be in poverty than those in working families. Children living in workless households are five times more likely to be in poverty than those in which all the adults work. Children in lone-parent families are three times less likely to be in poverty if their parent is in full-time work. And the chances of a child being in poverty if one parent works full time and the other part time is one in 20.

We are making good progress. Nationally, there are 954,000 fewer workless households and 608,000 fewer children living in such households now, compared with 2010. In London (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_London), there are 197,000 fewer children in workless households than there were seven years ago. By 2016, the number of children in long-term workless households in London was less than half what it was in 2010. The latest data shows that the London employment rate has increased by 7.1 percentage points since 2010. Comparable national figures show a slightly lower increase of 5 percentage points, so London is doing better.

Universal credit is at the heart of the reforms and the positive change that the Government are committed to driving. Through universal credit, the welfare system is, for the first time, providing working people with the opportunity to progress in work and to work more hours so that they can increase their earnings and become financially secure. Once fully rolled out, it will boost employment by about 250,000 and generate £7 billion in economic benefits a year.

We are also committed to tackling poverty by helping people with the cost of living. The national living wage, rising to £7.83 an hour in 2018-19, has given the UK (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK>)'s lowest earners their fastest pay rise in 20 years. Joan Ryan (</mp/?p=10523>) referred to the London living wage in glowing terms with regard to the current Mayor, but of course that project was started well before he came to office. Indeed, I am pleased to say that the largest expansion of the London living wage came when I was responsible for it at City Hall (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Hall), between 2012 and 2016. However, that is not the only measure that we have taken. We have cut income tax for more than 30 million people and taken 4 million low earners out of income tax altogether. A typical basic rate taxpayer will now pay £1,000 less in tax compared with 2010.

Universal credit, with its generous childcare offer, has been designed to support parents to work after the birth of a child. Working parents on universal credit can have up to 85% of their childcare costs reimbursed, which is worth up to £1,108 a month for someone with two or more children. That is in addition to their entitlement of up to 30 hours of free childcare a week.

Hon. Members have raised serious concerns about child poverty rates, including the key findings in the End Child Poverty report, which came out a couple of weeks ago. Let me take this opportunity to emphasise that whichever way we look at child poverty rates—relative or absolute, and before or after housing costs—the headline national statistics published by the [DWP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DWP) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DWP>) show that in London all are lower than they were in 2010. Across the country, 600,000 fewer people are in absolute poverty now, compared with 2010—the figure is at a record low—and 200,000 fewer children are in absolute poverty.

Let me turn to the figures used by End Child Poverty. Those are projections based on [Her Majesty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_Majesty) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_Majesty)'s [Revenue and Customs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenue_and_Customs) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenue_and_Customs) data from 2014, and even the academics who produced the analysis have pointed out the limitations in the method. More recent data, published by [HMRC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMRC) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMRC>) since the report, shows that rather than rising, the proportion of children in low-income families in London fell in 2015 to an estimated 19%, compared with 24% in 2014. Indeed, every parliamentary [constituency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constituency) ([/glossary/?gl=169](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constituency)) saw falls between 2014 and 2015. That includes some of the areas highlighted by the report. For example, in [Bethnal Green and Bow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethnal_Green_and_Bow) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethnal_Green_and_Bow) there was a fall of 12 percentage points and in [Poplar and Limehouse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_and_Limehouse) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_and_Limehouse) a fall of 11 percentage points. There was a fall of 6 percentage points in [Hackney South and Shoreditch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackney_South_and_Shoreditch) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackney_South_and_Shoreditch), as there was in [Westminster North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_North) and in [Enfield North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_North) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfield_North). The data and the projection from the data in 2014 were immediately contradicted by the data subsequently published for 2015.

Let me deal quickly with some of the specifics that were raised. [Dan Jarvis](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/?p=25067) ([/mp/?p=25067](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/?p=25067)) raised the issue of child poverty targets. Some hon. Members will remember that there was recognition by the Government in the past that making a long-term difference to the lives of disadvantaged children required an approach that went beyond a focus on the welfare system. That is why the Government repealed the income-related targets set out in the [Child Poverty Act 2010](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Poverty_Act_2010) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Poverty_Act_2010) and replaced them with new statutory measures of parental worklessness and, critically, as my hon. Friend [Julia Lopez](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/?p=25652) ([/mp/?p=25652](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/?p=25652)) mentioned, children's educational attainment. That is vital; all the evidence points to its being critical to long-term welfare and prosperity. Those are the two areas that can make the biggest difference.

A number of hon. Members raised issues about housing. The Government have recognised that there is an issue with the housing market, and a huge amount of work is going on at the newly named [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Housing,_Communities_and_Local_Government) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Housing,_Communities_and_Local_Government). On standards, we agree that everyone deserves a decent home. That is why the numbers of homes that have been brought up to standard in both the public and the private sectors have increased very significantly, and the numbers that are below standard now lie at record lows. On housing generally, hon. Members will know that a significant amount of extra money has been put into the Government house building programme. That now stands at £9 billion, and no doubt there will be more initiatives to come from the Ministry of Housing.

We are also supporting, I believe, the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Westminster North. It will give tenants the right to take legal action against landlords who do not fulfil their duties.

It was slightly disappointing to hear from the [Opposition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposition) ([/glossary/?gl=29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposition)) a fairly stout defence of the previous benefits system. As far as I can tell, that was a fraudulent system, perpetrating a lie upon the poor. It was designed to trap them in poverty. That is why we saw very little change in long-term poverty, which is what we are dedicated to tackling. I can reassure hon. Members that we are not complacent and particularly not in London, and we will be doing our best over the years to come to try to address the problems that have been raised.

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Siobhain McDonagh

Labour, Mitcham and Morden

4:29 pm, 22nd February 2018

I love my city. I love my [constituency](#) ([/glossary/?gl=169](#)). I was born in it and have always lived in it. It does the [Minister](#) ([/glossary/?gl=35](#)) no honour to set up an [Aunt Sally](#) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aunt_Sally) on work when he knows very well that there is no Labour Member who does not believe in work. We believe that work should pay. For many of the people I meet in my constituency every week, work is not paying. They have nowhere to live. They have problems with food. Those are not stories I tell because I love to tell them. I say them because I see them. Unless we do something about what we see, we will all be discredited.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House

has considered child poverty in London.

Sitting adjourned.

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