



Will your organisation endorse the following statement?

**CALL FOR A CABINET MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Ofsted Head, Amanda Spielman, categorises children as either born 'lucky' or facing '*disadvantage right from the start ... unable to follow what's going on. Unable to keep up with their classmates. Unable to reach their potential.*'

Menaced by five 21st century 'evils'

- obesity and physical inactivity
- adverse childhood experiences
- rising mental health issues
- dominance of social media and screen time influence
- socioeconomic disadvantage and cultural/ethnic divide

our children may become the least healthy adult population in living memory.

We need an authoritative voice within the Cabinet to bring all these issues together and devise solutions that will be more than just firefighting on an individual policy front and so **we call upon Government to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.**

Please let us know if we can add your name to the list of endorsements. We need your name, position and organisation.

We are at [phil@royalpa.co.uk](mailto:phil@royalpa.co.uk) or [helenwest1@gmail.com](mailto:helenwest1@gmail.com).

A full supporting document follows, or go to our website:  
<https://childrenfirstalliance.co.uk>

## **WHY WE NEED A CABINET MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of **Children First** is to encourage policy-makers to put children at the heart of all decision-making.

Children First's founder and leading spokesperson was Steve Franks, Chief Executive of Water Babies. Steve was also a Board member of the ukactive Kids Council, with lead policy responsibility for Early Years Physical Activity. Sadly, we lost Steve to COVID-19 in April 2020 but Water Babies continues to support the Alliance in his memory.

**Children First** is co-ordinating sector-wide support for the Government to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.

This strong voice for children at Cabinet level would work in the same way that the interests of women are served by the current Cabinet Minister for Women and Equalities. Similarly, a Minister for Loneliness at Cabinet level has been in post since July 2018.

The breadth and depth of some existing barriers to a fit and healthy childhood are given later in this briefing – and are but a snapshot of an entrenched and increasingly intransigent problem. Ideally, they would merit the appointment of a full Secretary of State supported by a dedicated Department and Select Committee, but this type of structural change cannot be achieved overnight.

Yet, in so many ways children cannot wait and neither should they. They need help now and therefore taking significant action in the short term must be considered to be not only desirable but essential.

**For this reason, we are calling upon the Government to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.**

The current junior Ministerial post for children is not an insignificant role either by intention or scope. However, children's needs will always elude pigeon-holing because they are not confined to a single issue or even one policy set. A junior Ministerial post is therefore incapable of driving with the requisite authority an integrated cross-Departmental response to the challenges.

Ireland has a dedicated Department for Children and Youth Affairs. Detailed information is available here:

<https://www.dcyu.gov.ie/docs/EN/Strategy-Statement-of-Department-of-Children-and-Youth-Affairs/2084.htm>

## Background

As policy-makers have progressively addressed the now ubiquitous ‘obesity crisis’, a greater understanding of the wider significance of child health and wellbeing has grown. It has never before been so clearly demonstrated that adults carry and transmit to successive generations many of the positive and negative aspects and experiences of their own childhoods.

A focus on childhood obesity has led to the availability of a wealth of valuable information about what it means to be a child living and growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century United Kingdom. The steadily corrosive reduction in physical activity, a less healthy diet and the alarming increase in child mental health problems are now thoroughly documented. Some illustrative examples can be found below.

## What are the choices?

The ‘no change’ option of accepting the progressive decline in the childhood experience as inevitable or ‘too big to tackle’ pleases nobody. The overwhelming current, ongoing and future financial burden to the NHS of treating illnesses in the adults that our children will become is of itself an overwhelmingly persuasive argument for early intervention.

There is no magic wand or catch-all single bullet. Necessary progress is going to require determination, sound and decisive judgement and a long-term focus rather than a quick fix mentality.

In order to achieve this, it is important that the Government is seen to openly recognise the fact that improving the current experience of childhood **for every child** is not a luxury but a necessity.

## **The first step in that process is to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People with the power of inter-Departmental audit.**

A properly integrated approach, designed to consider the ‘whole child’ is the only long-term guarantee of success. Fire-fighting on individual policy fronts will not succeed as the issues are various, complex and inter-linked. They require a strategy that is of its nature, holistic rather than necessarily limited by a ‘single issue’ identity.

## THE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE TODAY

The selected evidence below illustrates the need for policy makers to 'put children first'. They have been thematically grouped and all have links which show the sources and further information.

Go directly to a section by clicking the headings below:

[Obesity/overweight issues](#)

[Physical activity/play](#)

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[The care system](#)

[Food poverty](#)

[Education](#)

[Crime](#)

[Benefits/services/taxes](#)

### Obesity/overweight issues

[The economics of obesity: How cheap processed food is fuelling the pandemic](#) Sep 19

Easy access to cheap unhealthy food is causing obesity in Europe and the West to spiral - and the phenomenon is spreading to developing countries.

[New childhood obesity figures 'paint bleak picture'](#) Sep 19

Official report says 30% of Scottish children are not at a healthy weight.

[Supermarkets accused of fuelling obesity crisis](#) Sep 19

The layout, pricing strategies and shopping environment of supermarkets is fuelling the obesity epidemic, according to a study.

[Brain differences may be tied to obesity, US study says](#) Dec 19

New results from the largest long-term study of brain development and children's health raise provocative questions about obesity and brain function.

[Obesity in children is increasing](#) Mar 17

Nearly a third of children aged 2-15 are overweight or obese and younger generations are becoming obese earlier and staying obese for longer.

[Cost of Treatment of Obesity and Diabetes](#) Mar 17

Annual spend on the treatment of obesity and diabetes is greater than the amount spent on the police, the fire service and the judicial system combined.

[Increase in children and young people hospitalised for obesity-related problems](#) Mar 18

From 676 admissions in 2014-15 to 905 in 2016-17

[UK is overtaking US in child obesity rates](#) Dec 18

Health survey figures show that more children in England are classed as obese at the age of 11 than in the US.

[Child obesity higher in deprived areas](#) Dec 18

Health survey states that Barking and Dagenham, Sandwell and Copeland and Cumbria are amongst the areas for the highest recorded levels of child obesity.

[Year 6 obesity up to 20%](#) Jul 18

The proportion of children aged 10/11 presenting as severely obese has reached an all-time high.

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## **Physical activity/play**

['Global epidemic' of childhood inactivity](#) - BBC Online Nov 19

11- to 17-year-olds around the world are not taking enough physical exercise, according to an analysis.

[Children become less active with each year of primary school](#) Nov 19

Children become less physically active as they move through primary **school**, a new study has found.

[Physical activity helps children to deal with life's challenges](#) Jul 19

Study finds that only 16% of parents realise that physical activity can help children develop attributes which make it easier to cope with set-backs.

[Playground closures and screen time](#) Aug 19

Children are spending more time indoors with television, mobile phone and computer screens, a new survey has found.

[Sharp drop in primary pupils' activity levels](#) Dec 19

New research has revealed a dramatic drop in the activity levels of primary school pupils.

[Children are not meeting recommended activity levels](#) Dec 18

Only 17.5% of children are meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of more than 60 minutes of activity a day, every day of the week.

[Children spend less time outdoors than prisoners](#) Mar 16

Unilever Project '[Dirt is Good](#)' campaign found that most primary school age children spend less time in outdoor play than prisoners are required to have by law.

[Children can no longer roam unsupervised](#) 2012

Report finds that the area where children are allowed to roam unsupervised around their homes has shrunk by 90% since the 1970s.

[Playgrounds are closing](#) Mar 18

Local authorities closed a total of 347 playgrounds across England.

[Children are not learning to swim](#) Jul 17

A third of Year 6 pupils unable to swim despite a national requirement that every primary school leaver be capable of unaided swimming over 25 metres.

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## Health

[Dental caries and obesity: their relationship in children](#) Nov 19

Current evidence about the relationship between dental caries and obesity in individuals and populations.

[Infant mortality rates](#) from 2014

UK had the fifth highest mortality rate for babies under one year out of 19 European countries.

[Tooth decay in children](#) Sep 18

Hospital admissions for tooth decay for children aged 5-9 increased for the second consecutive year from 25,923 in 2016-2017 to 26,111 in 2017-2018.

[Type 2 Diabetes in children](#) Aug 18

Audit finds that the number of children and young people currently receiving treatment for type 2 diabetes in England and Wales has risen from 507 to 715 in four years

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## Mental health

[UK is 'sleepwalking into crisis of childhood', charity warns](#) Jul 19

Action for Children has found young people struggle to fit in and worry about issues such as Brexit, poverty and the climate crisis.

[Young people in crisis waiting hours for A&E help](#) Dec 19

Figures show thousands of under-18s seeking care in England are not seen in four hours.

[Video games 'setting kids up for addiction' with loot boxes](#) Jan 20

Gaming companies risk "setting kids up for addiction" by including gambling tasks in their video games, the director of mental health for the NHS said.

[One in four young people with mental health referral 'rejected'](#) Jan 20

It is estimated that more than 130,000 of those referred to specialist services in 2018-19 were "rejected", among them young people who have self-harmed, suffered eating disorders and experienced abuse.

[Structured play helps treat mental health conditions](#) Nov 17

A study of the introduction of a structured play regimen reported highly significant gains on motor, cognitive and social function measures.

[Mental health in children and young people](#) 2015

The current system of child mental health is funded, commissioned and supplied by many differing organisations. Lack of collaboration and fragmented care, waiting list pressure and the infrastructure of allocated funding all add up to a service in crisis. The overall picture is challenging, as illustrated by statistics supplied by Young Minds:

Approximately 850,000 children and young people have a clinically significant mental health problem

- 1 in 10 children between the ages of 5-16 years (3 in every classroom) have a diagnosable mental health problem

- 1 in 4 children showed evidence of mental ill health (including depression and anxiety)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are, on average, turning away nearly 25% of child referrals
- 75% of mental health trusts between 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 have had budgets cut or frozen; CAMHS budgets have been annually depleted in this way since 2010. Only 0.75% of NHS budget is directed to children's mental health; 6.36% of total NHS mental health-spend.

[Self-harming in girls doubled over 20 years](#) Aug 18

The figure reached 13,463 in 2017 against 7,327 in 1997. In comparison, the figure for boys who self-harmed rose from 2,236 in 1997 to 2,332 in 2017. The number of girls treated for attempting a substance overdose increased more than tenfold to 2,736 in 2017 from 249 in 1997, while the number of boys treated increased from 152 to 839 last year.

[42 NSPCC counselling sessions per day](#) Aug 18

The NSPCC provided young people with 15,376 counselling sessions in 2017; equivalent to 42 per day

[Children wait up to 18 months of mental health treatment](#) Mar 18

The Care Quality Commission Review of Children and Young People's Mental Health Services found that long waiting lists, inappropriately high eligibility criteria, and gaps in service provision all make it harder for children and young people to access the right support at the right time

[American study into teenage mental health](#)

Studies involving 1.1 million adolescents concluded that 'iGeners' (born around 1995) are on the verge of a severe mental health crisis. Psychological well-being was lower in years when adolescents spent more time on screens and higher in years when they spent more time on nonscreen activities, with changes in activities generally preceding declines in well-being.

[Intensive exposure to screen activities may result in brain changes](#) 2016

There is a possibility that intensive routine exposure to certain screen activities during critical stages of child brain development may alter gene expression in the brain, resulting in structural and functional changes that could lead to Screen Dependency Disorders.

[Teachers have seen an increase in pupil mental health problems](#) Apr 19

83% of teachers in a survey had seen an increase in the number of pupil/student mental health problems in the previous two years.

[Seven year olds with obesity at risk of later mental health problems](#) Apr 19

A study found that obese 7-year-olds are at greater risk of suffering emotional problems, such as anxiety and low mood, when they reach 11.

[Primary teachers feel unequipped to deal with mental health issues](#)

More than half of primary school teachers say they do not feel adequately trained in supporting pupils with mental health problems, research suggests. Just one in 10 "strongly agreed" with the statement that they felt they had the necessary training to feel confident about what action to take when a child was experiencing a mental health problem.

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## Nutrition

### [Food banks in schools are increasing](#) Sep 19

More schools in England are setting up food banks to help feed their pupils' families, according to the biggest school governors' organisation.

### [Rise in sugar levels in confectionery in the UK](#) Sep 19

Research from the Queen Mary University of London has found that sugar levels in chocolate confectionery within the UK have risen significantly over the past two decades.

### [The sugar content of children's beverages sold in the UK before and after the soft drink industry levy](#) Sep 19

This study suggests the necessity to adapt the soft drinks sugar tax (SDIL) to include all drinks aimed at children as their total sugar content is above the recommended quantities for this age group.

### [Ensuring a nutritious breakfast for children](#) Oct 19

Kellogg's survey suggests children are displaying behaviour issues at school because they are hungry.

### [Fast food, unhealthy snacks & sugary drinks dominate teen social media engagement](#) Nov 19

Social marketing to teens is gaining influence and unhealthy brands are the main beneficiaries, according to fresh research.

### [With our food market dominated by big chains, it is harder for people to make the healthy choice](#) Jul 19

When it comes to public health, dietary risks are second only to tobacco as a leading cause of preventable illness.

### [Baby foods high in sugar and marketed 'inappropriately'](#) Jul 19

A high proportion of baby foods are being incorrectly marketed as suitable for infants under six months with many of those foods containing "inappropriately" high levels of sugar, according to two new studies.

### [Nearly all U.S. children are eating added sugars before age two](#) Jan 20

Nearly 85% of toddlers and infants in the United States eat foods containing added sugars and artificial sweeteners on any given day, researchers say.

### [Young children's snacks](#) May 17

An analysis of snacks found that there is much work to be done as sweet tastes still dominate.

### [Young children are developing sweetened palates](#) May 17

Young children are presently under-consuming vegetables compared to sweeter fruits.

### [Some baby snacks are 'as bad as sweets'](#) Jun 19

Report calls for Government crackdown to tackle misleading claims and to cut the amount of sugar children consume.

### [Effects of junk food advertisting](#) Mar 18

A study found that the more junk food adverts seen on TV by young people, the more they eat.



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## Emotional needs

[Neglected children end up with 'smaller brains'](#) Jan 20

An early life full of neglect, deprivation and adversity leads to people growing up with smaller brains, a study suggests.

[Impact of maternal health problems on children](#)

Maternal mental health problems have been found to have negative physical and emotional impact upon children including child anxiety and depression, symptoms of ADHD, conduct disorder and prenatal stress.

[Increase in children living with emotionally distressed parents](#) Mar 19

In 2016-17, around 1 in 3 children lived with at least 1 parent reporting symptoms of emotional distress, up from the previous year.

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## Poverty

[Child poverty set to increase](#) Nov 17

The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicted that between 2015-16 and 2021-22, absolute child poverty would increase by around 4 percentage points with around three-quarters (equivalent to 400,000 children) attributable to benefit changes

[Poor people need affordable healthy food](#) Jul 19

Outgoing Chief Medical Officer says poor people need to be able to afford healthy foods to tackle obesity. She is “immensely worried” that it is cheaper for people to eat unhealthy foods.

[Poor children lose out on exercise](#) Dec 19

When it comes to getting enough exercise, wealthier children are beating their poorer classmates, research from Sport England suggests.

[Parent school donations 'exacerbating inequality'](#) Dec 19

Pupils in some of the poorest regions of England are losing out because parents cannot afford to fill a funding shortfall with donations.

[Social deprivation linked to changes in eating styles in early childhood](#) Dec 19

Childhood obesity rates are high in the UK, but not all children are affected equally – a family's wealth makes a big difference to a child's risk.

[At least 135,000 children in Britain to be homeless at Christmas](#) Dec 19

Housing charity Shelter estimates that 183 children lose their homes every day.

[Channel 4's shocking Dispatches on child poverty is a reality check](#) Dec 19

Over four million children live in poverty in the UK, yet their lives are rarely visible.

['Unprecedented' rise in infant mortality in England linked to poverty](#) Dec 19

The study said the rise in infant mortality was not experienced evenly across the population. In the most deprived areas, the previously declining trend in infant mortality reversed and mortality rose, but there was no significant change in the most affluent areas. The

researchers estimate that each 1% increase in child poverty was significantly associated with an extra 5.8 infant deaths per 100,000 live births.

[Fruit and Vegetables 30-40% are more expensive in poor areas](#)

Children growing up in low income groups typically live in neighbourhoods with a denser supply of fast food outlets; less availability of fresh fruit and vegetables and fewer safe places for physical activity.

[40% of children with disabilities live in poverty](#)

Disability Rights UK has estimated that 40% of disabled children are living in poverty. Families with disabled children can face additional barriers to avoiding poverty, e.g. parents can be less able to work and find it more difficult to access childcare

[Constituencies with more than 50% of children growing up in poverty](#) Jan 18

Among the 20 parliamentary constituencies with the highest levels of childhood poverty, seven are in London, three in Birmingham and three in Manchester.

[Firm correlation between ethnic background and poverty](#) Mar 18

Statistics from the Race Disparity Audit show a firm correlation between ethnic background and poverty in the UK: 'Asian and Black households and those in the 'Other' ethnic group were more likely to be poor and were most likely to be in persistent poverty.'

[Health inequalities are growing](#) Aug 17

The health gap between rich and poor is growing in England, according the Department of Health. Rates of death from cancer, heart attacks and strokes are rising among residents of the poorest places compared with those in wealthy areas. The gap in relation to "healthy life expectancy" – defined as a life free of disease or disability – has recently widened to almost 20 years.

[Holiday childcare is increasing](#) 2018

The average price of holiday childcare is now £133 per week in Britain, with significant regional variations. Holiday childcare costs are almost 2½ times as much per week as an after school club.

[Childcare is becoming unaffordable](#) Jun 19

Childcare in England risks becoming the preserve of the wealthy, unless a £660m funding gap in a free childcare scheme is plugged, MPs are warning

[Effects of persistent poverty on children](#) Jun 19

The Millennium Cohort Study found that persistent poverty affects 1 in 5 UK children, and those children were at 3 times greater risk of mental health problems, 1½ times greater risk of obesity, and were almost twice as likely to suffer a long-standing illness. In 2016/17, 30% (4.1 million) of all UK children were reported to be living in poverty, up from 27% in 2010/11. By 2023/24, the figure is expected to hit 37%, affecting an extra 1.1 million children.

[Lower outcomes for children on free school meals](#) Feb 17

Children on free school meals are more likely to be placed in lower sets, have access to less qualified teachers and have lower expectations set for them by the school. They achieve almost half a GCSE grade less progress in 'Attainment 8' core subjects than better- off pupils.

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## The care system

### [Looked after children more likely to have educational needs](#) Mar 18

Looked after children are almost 4 times more likely to have a special educational need (SEN) than all children, and are just over 9 times more likely to have a statement of special educational need or education, health and care (EHC) plan than all children. In 2018, 55.5% of looked after children had a special educational need, compared to 45.7% of children in need and 14.6% of all children.

### [Domestic violence witnessed by half of children in need of help](#) Feb 18

Half of all children identified as being in need of help have witnessed or experienced domestic violence. A child is referred to children's services every 49 seconds.

### [Increase in looked after children](#) Sep 17

An unprecedented 72,670 children were recorded as being in care in 2017

### [Revealed: thousands of children in care placed in unregulated homes](#) Jan 20

Lack of facilities to house vulnerable children in UK has led to a rise in unsafe placements.

### [Vulnerable children moved miles from home – report](#) Jan 20

About 30,000 children in care live outside their local area, with nearly 12,000 placed 20 miles or more from friends and family, a report suggests.

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## Food poverty

### [Parents eat less to feed others](#) Mar 18

In almost half of families surveyed, parents reported eating less than they felt that they should or skipping meals so that others could eat.

### [Half of primary teachers say their pupils are affected by holiday hunger](#) Apr 17

51% of survey respondents said that pupils at their school were affected by holiday hunger.

### [Christmas rise in food bank use](#) Dec 17

Typically in December, a higher-than-average 40% of food parcels go to children as demand from single parents and families rises, and school holidays cut off access to free meals.

### [More teenagers going hungry in school holidays](#) Jul 18

59% of teachers reported holiday hunger in their pupils, with 79% saying the situation had either got worse over the years, or stayed the same.

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## Education

### [Schools 'desperately need' cash injection, MPs say](#) Jul 19

Schools and colleges in England need a "multi-billion cash injection" and a long-term approach to funding, say MPs on the Education Select Committee.

### [Schools 'converting toilet blocks into isolation booths'](#) Jan 20

Children's commissioner describes 'horror stories' of children put in isolation.

[Putting pupils in isolation 'drives poor behaviour'](#) Jan 20

Putting challenging pupils in isolation for extended periods at school can harm their mental health, the Centre for Mental Health (CMH) warned.

[Over 200,000 children are trapped in 'dumping ground' schools, report warns](#)

Ofsted said 415 "stuck" schools in England are in "a cycle of poor performance" and have not made the rating for 13 years or more.

[School breaks are decreasing](#) May 19

UCL research shows the amount of time children go outside to play or participate in organised physical activities during a school day has decreased with each passing decade. The main reason given is to create more time for teaching and learning and to manage poor behaviour of students. Afternoon breaks have almost disappeared.

[95% of teachers believe that SATs are harmful to mental health](#) Apr 19

Among the disturbing responses to the stress of the tests seen frequently by hundreds of teachers surveyed were children feeling sick, not wanting to come to school, being teary, anxious, having problems sleeping, headaches, bed-wetting, and displaying emotional outbursts, negative changes in behaviour and low self-confidence.

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## Crime

[Manchester sex abuse: Exploited children 'were not protected'](#) Jan 20

Police and social workers investigating child sex exploitation in Manchester knew children were suffering "the most profound abuse... but did not protect them", a report has found.

[FOI Release: Responses to research into knife crime](#) Oct 19

The provider-level responses from London schools to Ofsted's knife crime survey.

['Thousands' of 14-year-olds carrying knives](#) Nov 19

More than 17,500 boys aged 14 carry a knife or weapon in England and Wales, according to an official estimate from the Home Office.

[Serious Youth Violence](#) Jul 19

Government report finds very strong evidence linking deprivation and vulnerability with knife crime and serious youth violence. The epidemic has been exacerbated by cuts to youth services, reduced police budgets, school exclusions, and a failure of statutory agencies to keep young people safe from exploitation and violence.

[Knife carrying in teenagers](#) Aug 19

More than 17,500 boys aged 14 carry a knife or weapon in England and Wales, according to an official estimate from the Home Office.

[Levels of child criminal exploitation 'almost back to Victorian times'](#) Jan 20

Police chief says the problem is at a high for modern era amid lack of youth facilities. In one three-month period 638 children under 18 claimed to be criminally exploited and the majority was because of county lines, Sawyer said. That was 94.5% higher than the previous year.

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## **Benefits/services/taxes**

### [Low-income families will be £2,500 pa worse off in 2020](#)

In a report assessing the impact of the limit on child tax credits, Policy in Practice predicted that the combined effects of the freeze of benefit rates, the roll out of Universal Credit and higher living costs, including rents, will make low-income families worse off by £2,500 a year in 2020. Larger families in work and in the private rented sector will be among the hardest hit.

### [Closure of children's centres since 2010](#) Feb 18

Local councils in England have closed more than 500 children's centres since 2010

### [An extra 1.5 million children will be living in poverty in 2021/22](#)

Research into the cumulative impact of Government changes to taxes and social security on various groups across society in 2021/22 found that an extra 1.5 million children will be living in households below the relative poverty line, with the child poverty rate for those in lone parent households increasing from 37% to more than 62%

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For further information please contact Children First's campaign manager Phil Royal at [phil@royalpa.co.uk](mailto:phil@royalpa.co.uk)