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## Children's Commissioner urges PM candidates to invest in services for vulnerable children

03 Jul 2019, Katy Morton

Launching her third annual vulnerability report today, Anne Longfield argued that Boris Johnson's income tax plans and Jeremy Hunt's corporation tax plans, estimated by the IFS to be worth £9 billion and £13 billion a year, should instead be used to invest up to £10 billion a year to rebuild services for the most vulnerable children.

- [Councils running out of funding to provide statutory children's services](#)
- [Children's commissioner warns of speech and language therapy postcode lottery](#)

The Children's Commissioner for England report estimates there are 2.3 million children in this country growing up with a vulnerable family background. It also finds:

- 831,000 children are living in households that report domestic abuse.
- 472,000 children are living in families with addiction problems.
- 900,000 children are growing up in a family where there are parental mental health problems.
- 2 million children are living in food poverty.

The report also shows that the number of children living in temporary accommodation has increased, along with the proportion of children with an emotional health problem such as anxiety or depression.

Ms Longfield is challenging Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt to turn around the life chances of millions of vulnerable children by dealing with issues like inadequate children's mental health support, rising school exclusions, poor educational outcomes for children growing up in disadvantaged areas and insufficient funding for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

With the Local Government Association and HCLG Select Committee both warning it will cost £3 billion a year just for over-stretched children's services to 'stand still', she said that the next Spending Review should be an opportunity to 'restore and build' new services that tackle problems early.

Ms Longfield said that children and their families needed support from before birth and throughout childhood, and that without this help, children can fall behind in school. It can also have a huge impact on their health.

She called for a properly evidence-based strategy including:

- Investment in the early years, Sure Start, family hubs and parenting support.

- Earlier help for children with mental health problems and special educational needs.
- A reinvigoration of the Troubled Families programme.
- Schools to open later and in the holidays and youth services to tackle gang violence.

She also said that the estimated £8 billion a year cost of scrapping tuition fees in Labour's 2017 manifesto could be used to 'radically' improve children's early years.

## Comments

Launching the report, Ms Longfield said, 'We know enough about the devastating impact on childhood and on lifetime prospects of a poor start. Tackling the scale of the problem will require strong leadership from central government, capital investment in institutions to help our most vulnerable children, a 10-20 year investment in family and child support, commitments and targets to identify and support children's mental health needs and those of their parents.'

'I want to challenge the contenders for the Conservative leadership and the keys to No 10 what they intend to do about this.'

'Our initial calculation suggests it might cost in the region of £10bn per year to fix this broken system. It might be more, it might be less, but what I do believe is it'll save money in the long term. The cost of social chaos is immense.'

'I want to throw down the gauntlet today to whoever is next Prime Minister, and to the Opposition parties as they prepare their general election manifestos and ask: what are you going to do about this?'

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said, 'The picture facing children with special educational needs is bleak. Not only are school budgets at breaking point, there have been severe cuts to health and social care provision. Schools are left struggling to meet the needs of our most vulnerable pupils. Without sufficient funding and a more coherent approach, the SEN code of practice is nothing more than an empty promise from government to parents and children.'

'The education budget was never intended to meet all the needs of pupils with SEND. Currently the 'health and care' are missing from children's Education, Health and Care Plans, with little funding or support from health and social care services. Education cannot do it alone. Schools need the support of specialist services to meet vulnerable children's needs. The Government must provide more funding for health and social care services.'

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) welcomed the report.

Its director of policy & practice Donna Molloy said, 'Beyond the headlines, this report draws attention to how difficult it is to get accurate data on numbers of children and levels of spending.'

'The Children's Commissioner has previously indicated there are 1.6 million children in England who are living in families with substantial complex needs, without an established form of additional support. This means 1.6 million opportunities for effective early intervention to make a difference in these children's lives.'

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