

# "I want my voice to be heard"

## What London families want from their local councillors

**April 2022**

### Introduction

London is one of the greatest and richest cities in the world. But for too many Londoners and their children, proximity to the city's affluence does not mean sharing in this wealth – adequate employment, affordable housing and fit-for-purpose childcare are often out of reach. In fact, after accounting for housing costs, London has the highest rate of child poverty of any region in the UK.

In order to better understand the concerns, challenges and needs of Londoners living on a low income, CPAG commissioned our London Calling panel of 32 parents from a Black and minority ethnic background - one participant from each of London's boroughs. All panellists are in either full or part-time work and are in receipt of working tax credit or universal credit. They include single parents, couple parents, blended families and extended families. Panellists live in a variety of types of housing.

We asked our London Calling panel what they want their councillors to prioritise. They highlighted five main themes: childcare, free school meals, housing, children's activities and community engagement.

The logo for Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is located in the bottom left corner. It consists of a red trapezoidal shape with the words "CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP" written in white, bold, uppercase letters. The text is arranged in four lines: "CHILD", "POVERTY", "ACTION", and "GROUP".

**CHILD  
POVERTY  
ACTION  
GROUP**

## CHILDCARE

### The problem

Childcare costs are much higher in London than elsewhere in the country and private providers are too expensive for the average family. Parents are caught between wanting to provide financially for their family through work, and not being able to access the kind of childcare that would allow them to do this. This is made harder because some schools have not resumed the additional activities that were offered pre-pandemic, and others have increased the prices dramatically.

### The solution

Increase the provision of wraparound care in schools at a price parents can afford and expand the pre-school childcare offer for lower income families. This will give children more opportunities, transform parent's ability to earn more money and remove one of the biggest sources of family stress.

“ If you think of everything we have to deal with right now, childcare is the biggest help the councils could give us. Being able to work is the only way we are going to get back on our feet after the pandemic. Childcare will help us support our own families.

# FREE SCHOOL MEALS

## The problem

The eligibility criteria for free school meals is too restrictive and some children living in poverty do not qualify. The cost of food is squeezing many families' budgets beyond breaking point.

## The solution

Provide universal free school meals to ensure the most vulnerable children have access to healthy food, mitigate the impact of the rising costs of living and promote inclusivity by removing the stigma of free school meals. At the very least, free school meal provision must be more expansive to ensure families who need support are not left behind.

“ In my school, the cost of lunch is going up. How is that right? Everything else is going up and now the cost of lunch is going up too? If lunches could be free, that would take a huge burden off me and my family.

“ What the kids have missed out on the most (in lockdown) is being with their friends. Imagine if the kids could go and have breakfast as well as lunch for free, that would help them and the parents.

# HOUSING

## The problem

London's high housing costs pose a significant challenge to families in London. There is a severe lack of genuinely affordable housing in the private sector and limited social housing stock. Those able to secure a tenancy with their council may face poor maintenance of their property and communal areas.

## The solution

Introduce stricter regulations for property developments so more homes are built that reflect what families can actually afford, and maintain council-managed homes so they don't pose a danger to residents.

“ Well, they say it's affordable housing but who's affording it? I'm not. Maybe it was affordable before Covid or to people who have well-paid jobs but that's not the point is it? ”

“ The communal area where I live is always disgusting. There's not enough room for the bins and so rubbish piles up then you have to tell the younger kids not to walk near it because it stinks and there are rats. It makes me feel that the council thinks that's all we deserve. ”

## CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

### The problem

The prices of key services like leisure centres have increased, which is locking children out of opportunities. The lack of suitable and affordable activities is a particular problem during school holidays, and makes it harder for parents to balance work and childcare.

### The solution

Provide lower-income families with heavily discounted prices for children's leisure activities, and expand provision during the holidays so that all children are able to access quality activity programmes.



One of our local pools has closed and the other has put up its prices. £25 now to take my family swimming – how can I afford that? My son (with significant special needs) loves swimming, it's the only thing I can do where I know 100% he'll enjoy it and it's good for him but I can't take him anymore.



Yes there are clubs and activities available if you can pay for them but I can't afford £300 for half-term activities. So my kids see their friends going and having fun and hear about what they've done over the holiday but how do I explain to them that we can't afford to do anything with them? That there aren't clubs for kids like them?

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## The problem

Council decisions, procedures and services are poorly communicated, meaning that families miss out on the chance to participate in local decision making and access local services.

## The solution

Take advantage of technology to engage families in council decisions, and advertise local services so that families can participate in a way that works for them. Actively communicate the reasons for council decisions clearly so that families see how communities can impact the outcome.



The council should think of their services like fire exits – you need to know about them before you need them.



The thing is for me, I want to help the council because how can they know what I need if I don't tell them? But I can't make it to these meetings that last for hours across the other side of the borough. I want my voice to be heard but they have to help me do that.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights.

CPAG is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (SC039339). Registered office: 30 Micawber Street, London N1 7TB.

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Trust for London is an independent charitable foundation. The Trust aims to tackle poverty and inequality in London and do this by funding voluntary and charity groups. Currently they make grants totalling around £12 million a year and at any one time they are supporting up to 300 organisations; funding independent research; and providing knowledge and expertise on London's social issues to policy makers and journalists.