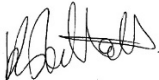


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Themed Debate on Child Poverty	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Council	DATE 8 th January 2026
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report provides an overview of the Full Council themed debate on 17 th November 2025. The report summarises the key points made by the 4 speakers, and the subsequent debate at Full Council. The report highlights the next steps from the discussion. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information The following reports were used to produce this report: Contact Officer: Abigail Knight Public Health Consultant for Child Health Equity, Strategy and Partnerships Abigail.knight@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Council is asked to note the report.	

Signed: 

Kirsten Watters, Director of Public Health

Date: 05/01/2026

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Camden has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, when housing costs are factored in. An estimated 15,700 children, almost 4 in 10 (39%), are living in poverty after housing costs, making Camden the borough with the fourth-highest rate in London.¹ This is concerning and tackling child poverty is a priority for the council.
- 1.2 There are many drivers behind these difficult financial circumstances. House prices in Camden are amongst the highest in the UK, averaging £797,520 in 2024, with median rent £2,102 per month meaning housing affordability is low. An increased number of families (968 in 2024, compared with 663 in 2023) are in temporary accommodation.² 6,940 children in Camden are living in overcrowded conditions, which are linked to negative outcomes such as increased incidence of respiratory disease, poor educational outcomes, and domestic abuse.³
- 1.3 A key factor for low-income families with children is welfare benefits levels, specifically the two-child limit and the benefits cap which impose constraints on family incomes. Families in Camden, especially those in private rented accommodation, can be affected by both policies, due to the borough's extremely high housing costs. These policies disconnect the level of need from the support provided, meaning many families receive far less than is required to cover essentials like food, clothing and energy. In Camden, we know at least 3,500 children live in households affected by the two-child limit, meaning household incomes are likely to be far below what is needed to cover the families' essential costs.
- 1.4 In Camden, a school-based survey suggests 24% of pupils report worrying about their own mental health "quite a lot" or "a lot" and the prevalence of mental health disorders are 33% higher than the national average.⁴ Living in low-income households is a risk factor for poor mental health. Research suggests that tackling poverty and preventing long periods of time spent living in poverty are key factors to tackling poor mental health in parents and children.⁵
- 1.5 In Camden, there is significant difference between the percentage of children who require Special Educational Needs (SEN) support or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in the most socioeconomic deprived quintile (21.5%) and the least deprived (12.2%). The majority of children (71%) requiring SEN support or on a EHCP are living in the two most deprived quintiles. While pupils from low-income families are more likely to be identified as having SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), they are less likely to receive support or effective interventions to help to address their needs.⁶ Health needs, especially those of children with disabilities, often place further financial strain on families. The Council frequently supports families whose children have undiagnosed needs or are waiting for

¹ [Deprivation – JSNA Hub](#)

² [4512-8-state-of-the-borough-report-2025-v9-july-amends-1](#)

³ [Raise Camden Child Health Equity Data Audit](#)

⁴ <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/camden-children-and-young-people-health-needs-assessment-24-25>

⁵ [The impacts of poverty on children's social, emotional and behavioural outcomes. - UK Data Service](#)

⁶ [Special educational needs and their links to poverty | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

assessments and services, including EHCPs for appropriate school placements. These health needs often come with extra costs, such as specialist aids, resources, increased energy use or transport expenses.

- 1.6 Child poverty negatively affects not only childhood outcomes but opportunities and outcomes throughout life. These include lower birth weight, poorer child development, educational attainment and employment opportunities, income, mental and physical health. Poverty and deprivation have also been identified as contributory factors within child death reporting.^{7,8} Children growing up in poverty can miss out on childhood experiences, for example having less opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities, school trips, parties and other leisure activities, and clothing⁹. Children report this leads to feeling left out, being bullied⁹ and they miss out on benefits attributed to extracurricular activities such as sense of belonging, social skills, and increased confidence,¹⁰ which can lead to loneliness. The duration and depth of poverty matters, as children who experience poverty persistently over years suffer more serious and enduring disadvantage than those who experience short-term poverty.
- 1.7 Camden Council have also embedded tackling inequality and improving opportunities for children within its vision for the borough "[We Make Camden.](#)" Through this vision the Council has outlined its ambition to ensure every child has the best start in life. A key action to achieve this ambition is to reduce the number of children and young people living in poverty.
- 1.8 The report to the Full Council Debate in November included the definitions of child poverty, and information on:
 - The impact of child poverty
 - National context
 - Child Poverty in Camden
 - Work currently underway to address poverty for Camden Families.
- 1.9 The following provides a summary of the debate on this item at the Full Council meeting on 17 November 2025. For the official record please refer to the approved minutes, which take precedence over this summary. It summarises the views of speakers and subsequent debate within the Chamber and provides an update on how Camden, with partners, will respond to prevent, and address the impact of child poverty.
- 1.10 The Council was grateful to have four speakers join the debate to speak about the impact of child poverty on children of all ages and their families:
 - Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive Officer – National Children’s Bureau
 - Sophie Livingston, Chief Executive Officer – Little Village (baby bank)

⁷ [Effects of poverty | CPAG](#)

⁸ [Contributory-factors-guidance.pdf](#)

⁹ [Child poverty – RCPCH – State of Child Health](#)

¹⁰ [An unequal playing field: extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility - GOV.UK](#)

- Don McGibbon, Headteacher – Rhyl Primary School
- Ibrahim, Young Ambassador – Young Camden Foundation

2 SUMMARY OF FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

- 2.1 The debate was introduced by Cllr Aref-Adib, Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living. Cllr Aref-Adib opened by stating 2 in 5 children are growing up in poverty in Camden after housing costs and the council have a duty to do all they can about this. Cllr Aref-Adib illustrated what this means for Camden children including inequalities in birth weight, educational attainment, employment opportunities, and childhood experiences. Cllr Aref-Adib highlighted the existing work in Camden to address child poverty, including the cost of living fund which supported over 2,000 households last year. Camden offers one of the most generous Council tax support schemes in the country, which takes 16,000 households out of having to pay council tax all together reducing cost of living for those on the lowest income. The Family hubs pregnancy grant supports families with greatest financial need, with £500 cash transfer before their child is born. Measures to tackle child poverty should take place before birth. The Council have set the Raise Camden taskforce to work with partners to address child poverty.
- 2.2 Cllr Aref-Adib stressed that without measures at a national level, Camden Council will not be able to fully address child poverty in the borough. As an example, there are at least 3,500 children in Camden living in households affected by the two-child benefit limit. Cllr Aref-Adib would welcome a change to this at the autumn budget but stated the cap needs to go completely to benefit families in Camden. Additional welfare changes such as unfreezing local housing allowance to enable housing to be more affordable for Camden families would also be welcome. The Council remains committed to ensuring children have the best start, and happy, hopefully and healthy life.
- 2.3 Anna Feuchtwang spoke from National Children's Bureau (NCB), but also as a parent of children who grew up in Camden, a trustee of Young Camden Foundation and member of the Raise Camden Taskforce. Anna spoke about how Camden is one of the most unequal places to live in the country. Anna provided some national context stating that 4.5 million children are growing up in poverty, which will rise to 4.7 million by the end of this parliament if there is not decisive action in the next budget. Everyone one of these children is being denied the chance to fulfil their potential with wider impacts on them, schools, health, and social services. Anna made three points to inform the debate:
- Local areas cannot tackle child poverty alone. There needs to national investment, social security, and legally binding national targets
 - We need to start early, right at beginning of life
 - We need to address special educational needs and disability

The NCB have developed sector wide consensus on ambitions on child poverty including lifting the two-child benefit limit. Anna provided examples from her work including Lambeth's Early Action Partnership (LEAP 10 year lottery funded programme) where 20 services were co-designed with families and providers, using a universal and targeted approach meaning LEAP could reach the most disadvantaged

communities. Findings from the programme found children were 40% more likely to reach expected development at 2.5 years, with biggest gains in the most disadvantaged areas of the borough. Camden could learn from LEAP to build on the work already going on in Camden to tackle the impact of poverty.

2.4 Sophie Livingston talked about the experiences of families accessing baby banks. Little Village work across London and have been operating in Camden since 2017. Families are referred to the service for range of reasons but described the thing they have in common is there is too much month at the end of their money, they cannot afford essentials for their families. Anna reports seeing families having to make impossible decisions, such as rationing nappies (1 nappy for 24 hours), watering down formula, unsafe sleeping arrangements due to not having room in their accommodation for cots, clothes being rotted from damp and mouldy living conditions, families being housebound as they cannot afford a pram or travel down the stairs from the apartment block with no lift, children being unable to develop physically due to lack of safe space to roam at home. Anna described the consequences of this on infant development and the lifelong impact. Little Village provide clothing packs in hospitals and work closely with the family hubs in Camden but demand for their service is increasing. Anna stated national as well as local action is needed.

2.5 Don McGibbon started by describing his experience of what child poverty looks like from a school perspective. He described:

- Children arriving for school hungry and unable to concentrate due to no breakfast or decent meal the night before
- Exhausted pupils who did not get a good night sleep due to cramped, overcrowded living conditions
- Children not being able to access home learning opportunities due to lack of resources and nowhere to study at home
- Children coming to school without the basics like warm coats, clothes, footwear
- Pupils missing out on extracurricular activities
- Children appearing withdrawn or disruptive but in reality they have adult level worries like rent arrears and sourcing food
- Children falling behind academically, not due to lack of ability or aspirations but due to the emotional and cognitive load poverty places on them

Don talked about when he started teaching in Camden in 2016, 25% of his pupils were on Free School Meals (FSM), now its 60%, which only tells part of the story. Many parents are in low-paid, insecure employment. Don talked about the impact he sees every day as a result of the two-child benefit cap. He praised the London Universal Free School Meals programme as a lifeline not just for families but also schools who would have to write off debt for families were not eligible for the national free school meals programme, however this only applies to primary schools. Schools are doing all they can provides breakfast clubs through Camden Council and Magic breakfast support, staff bring in clothing from own children and have set up clothes bank. Family support workers support families with income maximisation, housing, wider needs, however it is becoming increasingly more difficult to fund these roles. If families had the resources they needed, Don states schools would see calmer

classroom, better attendance, better mental health and improved education attainment.

2.6 Ibrahim talked about the lived experience of young people in Camden. Ibrahim talked about while poverty may not always be visible, you feel it. He illustrated this with examples including:

- When friends say they cannot attend a birthday because they cannot afford a small gift
- Seeing friends skip lunch so their younger sibling can eat
- Stop coming to football training because you cannot afford boots and left watching from the side

Ibrahim talked about the impact this has on confidence and sense of belonging. In Camden you have £1 million flats next to families living in overcrowded conditions. Poverty makes young people think dreams don't include them. Ibrahim talked about what has helped in Camden with specific reference to youth spaces. They provide warmth, wifi, food and space to talk and a place for young people to feel equal, build friendships, confidence, and hope. Ibrahim said if he could ask one thing, it would be to protect these spaces to provide free opportunities and experiences for those who need it the most. Poverty shouldn't decide who gets to belong. Ibrahim ended by asking the Councillors to listen to, and stand with, young people in Camden so no one is left out.

2.7 Housing in Camden was discussed by a number of Cllrs, including Cllr Simpson who commented that the introduction of the renters reform bill will help families, the community investment fund and the investment in new housing in Camden will help but recognised more still needs to be done and will support campaigning around that. The biggest issue facing families in Camden is housing and it should be a right to have a safe place to live. Cllr Abdi-Wali stated less than 2% of property fall under the local housing allocation and good housing should be central to the missions in Camden and Cllr Slater called for unfreezing local housing allowance in the budget. Cllr Cooper called for other political parties to support building of new affordable housing in Camden. Sophie responded to questions that it's not just housing allowances but the condition of housing, for example mould, safe space for children to roam.

2.8 Questions were raised by Cllrs including Cllr Jirira who welcomed the initiative around immunisations, healthy start vouchers and the pregnancy grant but wanted to know if the pregnancy grant pilot would be extended and who is able to access to this grant? Cllr Burrage raised that schools now offer a broader role than education, staff feel the pressure filling the gaps in wellbeing support for children and school deserved recognition for this but there is a need to protect their primary function which is to provide a good, well rounded education. Cllr Ali OBE asked the speakers about how helpful the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) grant extension has been?

2.9 Don McGibbon responded to the HAF is great but only available to children on FSM/pupil premium. There are lots of other children whose families cannot afford it but would benefit from accessing HAF. Anna added that while HAF makes a big difference, it is not always guaranteed and that can make planning difficult. Sophie added that Little Village do sign post to support such as pregnancy grants, but from their experience many families they work with are very reluctant and scared to access

anything statutory or official. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has an important role in building trust with families and then brokering relationships, and supporting access, to these grants and services.

- 2.10 Additional questions were raised by Cllr Russell and Cllr Simon, around what are the gaps in our support for families in Camden, what can we learn from other boroughs, and what else can national government be doing. Anna praised the Council on commissioning the Raise Camden report as this thoroughly demonstrates gaps in support. Anna noted that Camden is building upon what are already excellent services so is starting from a good base. At a national level, the two important areas are social security (lifting two child limit), and investing in legally binding targets. From Anna's experience and learning in Lambeth's LEAP programme – Lambeth had good services too but the programme allowed them to join up these services so you're getting more than sum of the parts. This included statutory services and VCS. Sophie also supported lifting benefits caps, also there should be a national vision of what a good life looks like growing up in this country. There should be national outrage that 4.5 million children are in poverty and this should be at the heart of our national political discourse, but it is not. Families should be valued for having the time to spend and care for their children, not just treated as working people contributing financially to the economy. Camden was praised for being the best local authority Little Village works with but we would like to work with you to make sure donations get to families as we cannot do this fast enough at the present. Don added about the inequality of opportunity as a national issue. Don gave the example of football clubs, you gain so much from being part of club which children from affluent families get and children in poverty don't. Support cannot just be around school term. He also illustrated the example of school trips and children not leaving London. If you have a school in an affluent area, there's enough parents who can afford the residential/schools trips so the school can subsidise the parents who cannot. In schools like Don's, this is not possible as the school cannot pay for every child. Children miss out of visiting the beach, swimming in the sea, as school budgets shrink these are the things that get cut. That should be addressed nationally.
- 2.11 Cllr Chung asked Ibrahim about his favourite outside space. Cllr Wright asked for chamber to join labour Cllrs in Camden to campaign to scrap two child benefit limit. Cllr Hardwick asked about whether pupil premium sign up should be mandated. Ibrahim talked about Youth Centres specifically KCB (King's Cross Brunswick), which is a second home. The space means everything, stating he doesn't have to worry about anything, access to food. A space where you don't have to think about worries about whether his mum can afford things. Ibrahim talked about only getting one school meal for whole day which isn't enough for whole day. Responding to Cllr Hardwicks question, Don talked about anything mandatory can bring issues and gave example of nursery funding where parents attending his school's nursery are asked to complete HMRC (His Majesty's Revenue and Customs) and Camden enhanced funding form. The majority of parents do because they understand the importance of funding for schools. They haven't seen a decline in those completing the pupil premium forms with the introduction of London Universal Free School Meals programme. The issue with mandating it is it adds clerical load to schools, and they would need additional capacity for this. If someone else, outside of school, would be doing this fantastic but plea to not add additional administration to schools.

- 2.12 Several Cllrs shared their own experiences growing up in poverty, housing insecurity, or working directly with children in poverty. They discussed the personal impact of this and what helped them. For example, university grants free, food provision and school meals. They discussed how without these initiatives they may not have got to the positions there are now and hoped initiatives continued to be supported by local and national government. Cllr Gale discussed the poverty of opportunities, for example children having never left their immediate local area. Cllr Slate talked about families having to travel significant distances to keep their children in their Camden school as they can no longer afford to live near the school.
- 2.13 Cllr Boyland closed the debate by thanking the speakers. While the data is included in the accompanying report, tonight has been about the moving, individual stories that illustrates not only the direct impact of poverty, but also great stories about how communities and partners come together to support Camden's children. Cllr Boyland joined Cllr Aref-Adib and other Cllrs in urging national government to the lift the two child benefit limit and for broader national welfare reform.
- 2.14 Cllr Boyland highlighted three things he would take from the debate; wanting to find out more about the LEAP programme in Lambeth, more support for family support workers, and the importance of spaces for young people. Cllr Boyland responded to Cllr Jirira's question on the pregnancy grant, explaining that families don't need to apply this is. This grant is a success story of partnership working between council, the NHS and Department of Work and Pensions as families are contacted directly by the children centre/family hubs and the cash transfer is direct to families. Cllr Boyland ended by recognising the work of schools, families and social work teams.

3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 During the debate Cllrs and speakers called for national government to remove the two-child benefit limit. The autumn budget (26th November 2025) and publication of the national child poverty strategy: [Our Children, Our Future – Tackling Child Poverty](#) (5th December 2025) announced the lifting of this limit. While this will offer some additional financial resources to Camden's families, we will continue to develop new, targeted, and proactive ways of supporting families at risk of poverty and destitution such as those in temporary accommodation, unaware of benefits they are eligible for, or those with children with additional needs and disabilities. Initiatives that contribute to our efforts to tackle child poverty will continue to be a key consideration in the future use of the Crisis and Resilience Fund and Camden's Cost of Living fund.
- 3.2 The publication of the national strategy allows Camden to develop our response as part of the Raise Camden strategic programme, the development of Camden's child poverty strategy and action plan. We were pleased to see a specific mention of Camden's Family Hubs Pregnancy Grants as a case study for social impact within the national strategy report. Additionally through Camden's Best Start for Baby programme there is more we remain committed to do, in developing community-based and culturally responsive support
- 3.3 In the technical report that accompanied the debate, we stated that the Raise Camden Taskforce will continue to develop policy and initiative proposals to address child poverty over the coming year. Following the debate, the Raise Camden

Taskforce met to discuss the challenge of poverty proofing primary school for families living in complex circumstances. The Taskforce was co-chaired by Cllr Olszewski, Council Leader, and Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of the Institute of Health Equity, and brought together experts from in and outside the borough to discuss and recommend the best ways to work together and address the significant challenges related to child poverty in early childhood. Anna Feuchtwang attended the Taskforce as a standing member and Don McGibbon was invited to attend after the debate. Each Taskforce provides recommendations for a long-term goal and 2-3 quick wins that could be worked on over the next 12 months. The lead member for this Taskforce was Cllr Boyland. After the recommendations have been reviewed by the Raise Camden Youth Panel, the Raise Camden Partnership Advisory Group and the Raise Camden Directors Board, the lead member sponsor will convene an officer's group tasked with taking forward the recommendations. The group will share their action plan and a written update on progress with the Raise Camden Taskforce.

- 3.4 During the debate we heard from Little Village (baby bank) about supplying families with the resources they need. We will continue discussions with partners to develop a more reliable supply line of materials goods to deliver support for ages and stages of development (such as safer sleeping) and social circumstance (such as occupational therapy support tools). We are keen to investigate partners who provide similar services for older children to meet their wider needs.
- 3.5 During the debate the sustainable school clothing scheme (grants and dedicated post) was praised noting it ends in March 2026. The Council would like to maintain the support offered through this initiative and will be reviewing options to reduce the cost of the school day as part of a poverty reduction programme.
- 3.6 During the Debate, there was endorsement for the next steps introduced in the technical report including the importance of partnership working of the Council with the NHS through neighbourhood reform and the structural lever it presents to address childhood poverty in the longer term. The importance of strengthening our work with the VCS sector on addressing childhood poverty was also noted and will be taking forward through both the neighbourhood and Raise Camden programmes of work.
- 3.7 Camden Council remains committed to the ambition to ensure every child has the best start in life. A key action to achieve this ambition is to reduce the number of children and young people living in poverty.

4 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Camden Council, to combat child poverty, has made significant financial investments including working with schools, health and the voluntary and community sector as mentioned in the report. The removal of the two-child limit on benefit payments announced in the autumn budget will also likely go towards alleviating child poverty.

5.2 Plans and opportunities mentioned in the report such as the future use of the Crisis and Resilience Fund and Camden's Cost of Living fund will need to be developed and managed. Any decisions on further investment will also need to be taken in line with the Council's scheme of delegation.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no expected environmental implications.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 There are no appendices to the report.

REPORT ENDS