

United for a better childhood

Our five-year strategy 2018-23



National Children's
Bureau

What needs to change?

Poverty & inequality

Poverty affects so many areas of our children's lives – preventing them reaching a good level of health or development, doing well in school or finding sustainable employment.



3 in 10 children are living in poverty and this number is rising rapidly.⁸

- Children in the most deprived areas are **twice as likely** to be **obese** as those in the least deprived areas.⁵ They are also more likely to experience **injury and tooth decay**.⁶
- Children from poorer families are approximately **11 months behind** their wealthier peers when they start school.⁷

By addressing the devastating impact of benefit cuts, shaping good services and focusing on a strong home learning environment, we will counter the impact of poverty on children's lives.

Mental health & wellbeing

On top of the timeless challenges of growing up, our children are now dealing with contemporary pressures such as negotiating relationships in a non-stop digital world and an increasingly challenging jobs market.



Three children in every classroom have a **diagnosable mental health problem**, and this number is on the rise.⁹

- In 2017 **15% of children** had not reached the expected level of personal social and emotional development on starting school.²
- **Only a third of Ofsted inspections** include an explicit reference to pupils' mental health and wellbeing.³
- Long waiting lists and high thresholds mean just **one in four children** with a diagnosable mental health condition can get the treatment and care they need.⁴

We will influence reforms to mental health services to rebalance the education system, develop whole-school approaches and improve both prevention and specialist services for the most vulnerable children and young people.

Government funding for services

There is a crisis in children's social care funding, with increasing demand and reducing resources. Local authorities are increasingly only able to help when families reach crisis point.

Between 2011 and 2016 there was:

- A **30% increase** in 'children in need' assessments.¹¹
- A **54% increase** in investigations of potential abuse or neglect.¹²

And despite this:

- A **24% real terms reduction** in funding for children's services from central government.

Between 2011 and 2016 there was:

- A **40% real terms reduction** in local authority spending on early intervention.¹⁶

Contributing to:

- A **30% increase** in children being made subject to a child protection plan.¹⁷
- A **17% increase** in children being taken into care.¹⁸

We will use our evidence, our influence and our experience of delivering innovative services to hold the Government to account and call for a new approach to sustainable funding for the services our children, families and communities need.

Exclusion

Disabled children and those with special educational needs (SEN) are frequently let down because schools and services are unable to meet their needs.



Children who qualify for SEN support are over **seven times more likely** than other children to be permanently excluded from school.¹⁴

- **Unidentified or unmet needs** can lead to children being labelled as having 'behavioural difficulties'.¹⁵
- Lack of appropriate local support means increasing numbers of children with the most **complex needs** and **challenging behaviour** are ending up in **Assessment and Treatment Units** miles from home.¹⁹

We will continue to champion disabled children's rights by ensuring education providers have an inclusive curriculum which meets their needs and supports their aspirations, while rigorously monitoring their progress and involving them in the decisions that affect them.

Bereavement



Every day 112 children are bereaved of a parent.¹

▶ We will ensure children have the right support to manage the impact of death on their lives.

Bullying



One in four 7-15 year olds say they are frequently bullied.¹⁰

▶ We will bring organisations together to create safer environments in which children can live, grow, play and learn.

Relationships & Sex Education



46% of 11-25 year olds say they didn't learn at school how to tell if a relationship was healthy.²⁰

▶ We will champion quality relationships and sex education for all children.

We're driving changes across all these areas so children in England and Northern Ireland grow up safe, secure and supported.



Better is a big ambition

For 50 years we've been influencing policy and improving practice to make childhood better. And better. And better.

This gradual, consistent approach is at the heart of who we are as a charity.

It stems from our unrivalled capacity to ground our work across England and Northern Ireland in high quality evidence about the impact of Government policy on children and young people, especially those who are most vulnerable and whose welfare is most at risk.

By gathering and analysing the evidence, by listening to children's experiences and by getting organisations to unite in pursuit of shared goals, we're able to influence legislation and drive changes right across the system that make things work better for children and communities.

We build partnerships and train those who work directly with children, young people and families, to make sure the changes are long-lasting.

We then begin again – examining, listening, forging, equipping, influencing and, ultimately, championing children's right to be safe, secure and supported.

So when we say we're here to make childhood better, we know exactly what we mean and what it will take.

We mean getting the support right for families in their early years, where a little intervention goes such a long way towards preventing crisis later on.

We mean making the funding of children's services a top priority, developing a workforce which provides support and intervention at the right time, in the right way, for all the children who need that support.

We mean giving children in or leaving care the quality of support and relationships they need to overcome trauma, get on in education and cope well with the transition to independence.

We mean tackling the growing crisis in children's mental health, rebalancing the education system to focus on wellbeing as well as academic attainment.

We mean ensuring disabled children feel included in their education; tackling bullying in all its forms; giving schools confidence to teach a comprehensive curriculum of relationships and sex education; making sure all children who have experienced bereavement can get the support they need.

Making childhood better across all these areas is deeply ambitious and we're uniquely placed to do it.

We can do it because our considered, evidence-based, collaborative approach has given us credibility with decision makers at the highest level. It's also earned us the trust of the charities, local authorities, schools and all the others we bring together as partners to create the change we need to see.

This document is our vision for the world we all want for children by 2023 and our strategy for making it happen. It's also our invitation for you to work with us.

With your help and support, we can build a better childhood for every child.

Anna Feuchtwang
Chief Executive

What better looks like

We are driving change across the whole system to make the biggest impact for children, families and communities.

E A R L Y Y E A R S

We want every child to get the best start in life, because we know that the early years are the foundation on which their future life chances are built.

- All young children whatever their background have access to high quality early education and childcare
- Parents and carers are given the right support so they can help their young children develop and learn
- Parents are supported to nurture good relationships and attachment with their child
- All families, especially the most disadvantaged, have access to high quality universal services that promote the early health and development of babies and young children.



H E A L T H

We want to tackle the root issues affecting our children's mental and physical health and wellbeing, making sure they get the support they need at the right time.

- All children and young people's services promote good mental health and wellbeing
- Children get the help they need early, whatever their age and circumstances
- Health services for children are integrated and child-centred
- Children who are bereaved, and their parents or carers, get the support they need to live with and beyond their loss.



S O C I A L C A R E

We want all our children, especially those who are most vulnerable, to get the intensive support they need before their families reach crisis or they are put at risk of harm.

- Children who need social care support receive effective, well-funded services that respond to their individual needs and voice.
- Children in or leaving care are supported to improve their wellbeing and mental health and find the stability they need to manage the transition to independence.
- Children and young people who are off the radar, such as those who are missing from education, are identified early and get the support they need to thrive.



E D U C A T I O N & E Q U A L I T Y

We want our education system to support the ambitions and aspirations of all our children. We want disabled children to be recognised as children first, with their own lives to lead and rights to nurture and protect.

- Our children experience an education system which supports their mental health and wellbeing as well as their academic achievement.
- From birth to adulthood, disabled children and young people receive services which take a whole child approach, where they are empowered to achieve the goals that matter to them.
- Disabled children and those with special education needs are fully included in an education which is responsive to their needs and supports their aspirations.
- Children with the most complex needs and challenging behaviour are able to access suitable services in their local area.
- Children can live, grow, play and learn without fear of bullying
- Every child gets good quality relationships and sex education.



How we will get there

We want every child to get the right support in the right place at the right time, no matter what challenges they're facing.

To make this happen, in everything we do we will focus on five priorities to build a better childhood:

- 1 Influencing legislation, policy and practice to make sure it's based on high quality evidence about what works for children
- 2 Enabling children and young people to actively participate in decision making and influence change
- 3 Bringing organisations together to put the best interests of children first
- 4 Developing a workforce that is knowledgeable and skilled to make positive changes for children
- 5 Building respect and trust as a pioneering and high-performing charity



United for a better childhood

Wherever you look in NCB you will find experts in their fields, with the credibility to influence Government and the ability to bring people together to achieve shared goals.

We're working with every local authority in England, and across Government in Northern Ireland. We're able not only to influence the formation of major legislation such as the SEND reforms in the Children and Families Act, but also to develop guidance and practical tools to support their implementation.

We're able to raise concerns about the impact of Government policy on the most vulnerable children, and then produce unflinching, passionate and evidence-based reports setting out authoritative recommendations for action.

Over the past 50 years we've formed specialist membership groups to draw partners together to drive change in key areas where we need to make childhood better.

Every single one of these groups is a unifying voice speaking with clarity and influence, working according to the five priorities of making evidence count, involving children, bringing organisations together, developing the workforce and building respect and trust.

United for better early years

We continue to play a leading role to improve policy and practice relating to early childhood.

While we no longer run a membership network, early years remains a specialist area for NCB. We develop research, policy, programmes and campaigns to tackle specific issues such as early literacy and mental health, equipping partners to improve outcomes for children.



The voice of sex education in England, we unite a growing membership of schools, colleges, local authorities, NHS trusts and others to promote children's right to good quality relationships and sex education.

Having successfully campaigned for RSE to be made statutory, we provide the latest practice, research and policy information to make sure education prepares every child for adult life.



Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) is a 10-year programme to transform the lives of babies and young children in four particular wards. One of the five 'A Better Start' partnerships, it is supported by the Big Lottery Fund using National Lottery funding.

Leading this local partnership gives NCB the opportunity to make childhood better for thousands of children and see directly how policy and practice makes a difference to families' real lives and experiences.



We unite the disabled children's sector, bringing together professionals, practitioners and policy-makers to champion children's rights and support their aspirations.

We've formed several influential membership groups to address specific issues, providing expert support and advice through training, resource development and best practice.

We run the Special Educational Consortium to provide an independent voice, supporting Government to develop policies that work for disabled children and young people and those with SEN, and challenging them when they do not.



A unique coalition of organisations and individuals united against bullying, we're the national voice for evidence-based practice, delivering varied programme work to end bullying and bring lasting change to children's lives.

We raise awareness of bullying through Anti-Bullying Week each November. We support a network of thousands of schools and colleges, and our membership is growing fast in profile and influence.



We bring together a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations, taking action to end the bullying of children and young people in schools and communities across Northern Ireland.

We support schools and organisations in the development of effective anti-bullying policy and practice, raise awareness through the annual Anti-Bullying Week campaign in Northern Ireland and inform and influence policy makers at all levels of Government.

United to tackle child poverty

We're bringing our convening power to bear on child poverty, as rates are continuing to soar with wide-reaching consequences for our children's wellbeing and development. Our chief executive chairs the End Child Poverty coalition, as we strengthen partnerships to tackle this issue.

United to improve children's mental health & wellbeing

We're bringing together organisations from across the sector to respond to a crisis in children's mental health services. As a coalition, we're influencing policy and improving practice to place wellbeing and mental health at the heart of every school's culture, so all children and young people get the right support.



We're here to unite all those supporting bereaved children, young people and their families across the UK.

We bring our members together across localities, disciplines and sectors to improve the range and quality of bereavement support for children and increase access to childhood bereavement information, guidance and support services.

1 Making evidence count

Decisions affecting children and young people must be based on sound research about what works.

Over the past half century we've influenced legislation and brought organisations together to tackle the inequalities preventing children from getting the help they need.

From transforming approaches to early years services to improving the wellbeing of children in and leaving care, our evidence and insight has secured major changes. But there is so much more to do.

While profound economic and diplomatic questions dominate the political agenda, our society is facing real challenges in areas such as children's mental health, social care and poverty. We will not allow these children to slip off the radar.

- We will challenge and scrutinise the status quo where children's rights and welfare are at risk, raising awareness amongst decision makers, practitioners and the general public.

In particular, we will be calling for:

- Whole-school approaches to promoting children's mental health and wellbeing.
- A clear vision for nurturing emotional wellbeing in the early years.
- Sustainable funding for children's social care and early intervention services.
- Urgent action to tackle unacceptable levels of child poverty.

- We will identify gaps in knowledge of the impact of Government policy on children and generate new evidence to fill the gaps through focused research, analysis and evaluation.
- We will produce research which builds a powerful case for changing legislation, updating guidance and developing practice to make childhood better.
- We will develop a framework for assessing the quality of our evidence.
- We will continue to support networks and organisations that pool knowledge and expertise including the All Party Parliamentary Group on Children, the Children's Inter Agency Group, the End Child Poverty Coalition, and our Specialist Membership Groups and partnerships.

>> We will shine a light in the key areas where children's rights and welfare are at risk.



2 Involving children & young people

When the voices of children and families are heard, policies are more relevant and services are improved.

We make sure that children and young people's views and experiences, inform every aspect of our work because we recognise they are experts in their own lives. We work directly with parents and carers because their direct input makes our work even more effective.

We also support policy makers, commissioners and service providers to be prepared to hear the voices and value the knowledge. Building this collective capacity is key to successful and sustainable change.

Through our established participation programme we've enabled children and families to influence service planning and speak directly to power, from the boardroom to the House of Commons. We will strengthen these opportunities so more young people can speak out directly about the issues affecting them, and through our networks and partnerships we will create a louder, collective voice.

Our parent champions drive our work via co-design and co-production of services. We are inspired by their lived experiences that bring truth to the table when we talk about policy and delivery. We will bring those voices to the table and support the decision makers to listen and act.

- We will deliver "seek, listen, act" training and support to policy makers, commissioners and service providers so they can re-design their approach and hear the voices of the most vulnerable children and young people.
- We will enable children and young people to inform the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children and have their voices heard in Parliament.
- We will encourage commissioners and service providers to draw on the experiences of parents when designing services.
- We will ensure that all of our work across, research, policy and programmes includes the voice of the child or young person.
- We will expand our parent champion model across local authorities in England and Health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland.
- We will highlight actual life experiences of our most vulnerable children, young people and families, using these experiences to inform our own work and campaign for better outcomes.



>> We will make sure these voices are sought, listened to and acted upon.

3 Bringing organisations together

Organisations must work together to put the best interests of children first.

NCB was formed in 1963 to gather organisations together to address growing concerns over the treatment of neglected children. This collaborative spirit still defines us today.

Our approach has always been to identify an issue affecting children and then bring together all the organisations who can help to drive the changes required to address that issue.

Right now we lead wide-reaching, influential partnerships to address bullying, sex education, childhood bereavement, mental health, and several particular issues affecting disabled children and families. We will strengthen these and establish new partnerships to make the biggest impact we can for children.

- We will be a strong organisation in local and regional collaborations, working with commissioners and leading or convening partnerships that have local relevance.
- We will include children and young people in all our partnerships, addressing barriers to inclusion and giving them a stronger voice.
- We will develop strategic partnerships and collaborative relationships that reach across sectors and political divides, inspiring others to work in partnership.
- We will convene new partnerships which bring the right organisations together to tackle emerging issues where children's rights and welfare are at risk.

Who do we bring together?

Our convening power is one of NCB's most distinctive features.

At a national level, at a local level and in each of our specialist areas we're able to bring together a wide variety of professionals working across education, health and social care, as well as community organisations, policy makers, researchers, charity partners and more.

We're able to lead these partnerships to speak with a unifying voice on the issues that affect children's lives.

We welcome partnerships with all those who share our mission to make sure children are safe, secure and supported.

>> We will create and strengthen partnerships to bring effective change for children.



4 Developing the workforce

An up to date and skilled workforce is vital if we are to achieve lasting changes for children and families.

Giving children and families early help can prevent minor issues escalating to the point where children are excluded from school, become the subject of a child protection plan or are taken into care. That's better for children and better for everyone.

Through our training programmes and resources we're helping to develop a skilled, confident workforce in areas ranging from early years services to sex education. More than that, through our policy and research and our own practice we're highlighting the impact of providing targeted early help services and raising awareness among commissioners and national decision makers.

We will continue to champion workforce development so every child gets the help they need at the right time.

- We will work with the full range of government and arm's-length bodies to ensure evidence of effective workforce development is heard.
- Ensure our training and development courses are evidence-based, using existing research, our own research and evidence drawn from our practice.
- We will train and develop the widest range of practitioners working with children and young people on key issues which impact on them and reflect our key priorities.

This includes:

- Supporting schools to prioritise children's mental health and wellbeing and make sure every child gets good relationships and sex education.
- Working with expert parents to support others on the CAMHS waiting list.
- Ensuring young children in opportunity areas have access to good early literacy.
- Working with disabled people to ensure that professionals understand the mental capacity act.
- We will prioritise key aspects of training and product development which strengthens the rights of children and young people to be heard and have the best possible outcomes.
- We will use a range of measures to understand how our training has made a difference to those working with children, young people and their families.

>> We will equip those working with children and young people with the skills to deliver services that make childhood better.



5 Growing respect and trust

Our core governance principles are based on leadership, integrity, transparency and accountability.

NCB has a long history of attracting trustees, staff and volunteers of the highest calibre whose credibility and expertise make us a trusted organisation able to influence and achieve change for children, young people and their families.

From our newest recruits to those already recognised as being among the leading authorities in their fields, we want all our people to feel motivated, supported and empowered by our ways of working.

We will focus on measuring and communicating our impact so we can see the difference we make to children's lives and attract the broad range of funders we need to support us in our mission. We want everyone involved in our story to feel proud of their contribution to our ongoing development and ground-breaking achievements.

- We will strengthen our cross-organisational systems for gathering data to measure the impact of our work and continually strengthen our performance against our strategic objectives.
- We will embed our core governance principles based on leadership, integrity, transparency and accountability so we can unswervingly meet our charitable objects in changing external landscapes.
- We will attract the highest calibre staff and trustees who feel engaged, valued and motivated to fulfil responsibilities while supported and encouraged in their professional development.

- We will develop our inclusive working culture where our staff are supported, valued and motivated to deliver our strategic direction, inspired by credible and accountable leaders.
- We will ensure our physical and digital working environment has the appropriate structures, systems, processes and policies in place to enable our people to deliver their work efficiently and effectively, achieving optimal results.
- We will increase the diversification of income streams ensuring financial health and sustainability to enable successful delivery across our extensive portfolio.
- We will regularly consult stakeholders to ensure that our work is underpinned by good practice, that we deliver upon our commitments and that we retain our external profile as a respected leader and trusted partner.

>> We will ensure these principles flow through everything we do as a pioneering and high performing organisation.



Let's work together

We need your help to build a better childhood. Together we can take action now to help children grow up safe, secure, and supported.

By achieving our five-year strategy, we will:

- 1 Make children safer, more secure and better supported right from early childhood through to young adulthood.
- 2 Address the range of challenges which affect the welfare of children and young people - from everyday issues to systemic problems.
- 3 Reduce the impact of poverty and inequality, so every child gets the help they need.
- 4 Make a rich contribution towards an inclusive society where all children and young people are enabled to grow up secure and fulfilled.



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S O C I A L C A R E
 H E A L T H
 E Q U A L I T Y
 E A R L Y Y E A R S
 E D U C A T I O N
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 M E N T A L H E A L T H
 I N C L U S I O N

United for a better childhood.

Many children in England and Northern Ireland are not getting the support they need to grow up safe, secure and fulfilled.

We're here to shine a light on the children slipping off the radar, to understand and draw attention to the systemic issues that are failing them, and to unite the organisations, influencers and all the other partners who can help us drive changes across the system to put this right.

Find out more at ncb.org.uk/united



We're always eager to explore new ways of working together towards a better childhood for every child.

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**National Children's
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