



Children at the Table

Parliamentary briefing

Children
at the Table



“There are so many people filled with knowledge, fresh ideas and experiences which should be included in decisions that affect us all. If we are not, the decisions are made for us not with us” - Young person, Children at the Table participation group

Children at the Table means the next Government committing to:

- An **ambitious cross- Government strategy** and outcomes framework to drive improvements for babies, children and young people.
- A **new approach to decision-making that places children’s needs, wishes and outcomes at its heart**, involving children and young people every step of the way.
- **Investing more of our national wealth in improving the lives of babies, children and young people** and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention.

Why do we need Children at the Table?

For too long, babies, children and young people have not received the focus needed from policy makers. More children live in poverty, face a growing mental health crisis, and are waiting too long to receive urgently needed support. There are rising numbers of children persistently absent from school, more children being impacted by abuse, exploitation and online harm, and a greater number of children being taken into care due to reaching a crisis point in their lives.

We want all children to be safer, happier, healthier and have more equal access to opportunities. That’s why we’ve come together as five of the largest charities working to support children and young people in the UK. We’re calling for the next UK Government to put babies, children and young people at the heart of Government policy making, backed by a step-change in investment to transform childhoods across the UK.

This means commitment from the very top of Government to deliver an ambitious strategy that will improve outcomes for babies, children, and young people, with their voices and insight represented from the start and throughout. This commitment must also include investing more of our national wealth so that we can achieve this transformation and shift the dial from crisis interventions to proactive and early help.

We stand ready to work with the next UK Government, devolved Governments, all politicians, the voluntary and community sector, academics, and healthcare professionals to give children a seat at the table and transform childhoods for the better.

“Because it’s about our future and trying to make it a little better and more accessible for us. It’s not just us [young people] but it’s the youngest kids as well.”

- Young person, Children at the Table participation group

Around 4.2 million children in the UK today are growing up in poverty, including 48% of children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

One million children are living in extreme poverty and one in 12 parents have a child who has had to share a bed with them or a sibling because they cannot afford another bed.

In 2023, more than 83,000 children in England were looked after by local authorities – an increase of 21% over the last 10 years.

In 2021-22, of the 1.4 million children estimated to have a mental health condition in England, less than half (48%) received at least one appointment with NHS children and young people mental health services – 32% of children referred for support were turned away.

We are asking the next Government of the UK to:

1. Commit to an ambitious cross-Government strategy and outcomes framework to drive improvements for babies, children and young people growing up in the UK.

- A personal pledge by the next Prime Minister and Chancellor to be champions for children, putting them at the heart of their next Government.
- The Prime Minister to drive forward coordinated work to deliver the strategy through a Cabinet Committee attended by Ministers across Government to ensure children today and tomorrow are safer, happier, healthier and have more equal access to opportunities.
- Introduction of a single, consistent child identifier to make it easier to identify what works for children and young people by assessing their experiences and outcomes across health, education and social care and to enable improved information sharing across agencies to keep children safe.
- Coordinated leadership across the four UK nations to ensure the needs of babies, children and young people are the political and investment priority of every nation of the UK, including in inter-Governmental engagement and structures.

2. Commit to a new approach to decision-making that places children's interests, wishes and outcomes at its heart, involving children and young people every step of the way.

- Cultural change in children's policy development: moving away from engaging children and young people in a tokenistic way at the end of the policy-making process, to engaging them meaningfully as expert partners from the start and throughout.
- A '*check and challenge*' committee of children, young people and the parents and carers of babies, representing diverse communities and needs, that shadows the development and implementation of the cross-Government strategy and outcomes framework, ensuring this work is informed by the experts themselves.
- The needs and best interests of babies, children and young people to be cemented into all policy development and decision-making across Government, through mandatory Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments.

3. Invest more of our national wealth in improving the lives of babies, children and young people and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention.

- A commitment to increase the proportion of our national wealth that we invest in babies, children and young people.
- A commitment to eradicate child poverty, once and for all.
- The first King's Speech after an election should include a Bill to enshrine a target to end child poverty in legislation, with clear milestone commitments every 2-3 years and a clear overall deadline.
- Wholesale reform of children's social care backed by significant investment in early intervention services to reduce the number of children who need to enter the care system and to achieve better outcomes for those who do.
- Investment in improving babies, children and young people's physical health, mental health and wellbeing.
- Equitable distribution of funds across the UK to ensure the benefits of additional investment are felt by babies, children and young people in every nation of the UK.

How you can help:

- Become a Parliamentary Champion of Children at the Table, taking crucial actions to help highlight the campaign in Parliament. This might include tabling a Parliamentary Question, tabling debates or raising it at Prime Minister's questions.
- Write to your party leader and manifesto-writers expressing support for the campaign, encouraging them to include our asks in the manifesto and to meet with the Children's Charities Coalition.
- Visit one of the Children's Charities Coalition members' services in your constituency to meet young people and discuss their priorities
- Show support on social media with **#ChildrenAtTheTable**.

Suggested social media posts:

Option one: *I'm pleased to support the Children at the Table campaign for safer, happier, healthier childhoods: childrenatthetable.org.uk*

Option two: Children & young people's voices must be heard ahead of the #GeneralElection. Let's make the UK the best place in the world to grow up. I support #ChildrenAtTheTable's recommendation for a cross-gov strategy to improve children's lives. Visit childrenatthetable.org.uk

To **download a supporting image** for your post [click here](#).

For further information please contact: public.affairs@barnardos.org.uk