

# TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN

## 30 General Election pledges

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*Together for Children is a large network of organisations and individuals in England which seeks to uphold the principles and fundamental legal protections contained within the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).*

*We support a rights-based children's social care system, where entitlements to care, protection and support are:*

- ~ Clear*
- ~ Non-stigmatising*
- ~ Universal in scope, and*
- ~ Can be defended by recourse to the law.*

*This year is the 30th anniversary of the Children Act and the UNCRC. We have therefore chosen 30 pledges (some of which are grouped) which we believe would most transform the lives of children and young people, and their parents and carers, in England. Organisations and individuals who support these pledges are listed at the end of the document.*



**O**ur focus is children's social care though other services and areas of policy (education, health and social security for example) deeply affect the lives of children, young people and families. The changes we propose would give the most help to children and families presently in the greatest need. We recognise the time and cost implications of our measures, though believe they can be afforded and implemented with the right political will. Some of our very specific proposals inevitably require further discussion and consultation with those most affected.

These 30 pledges combine comprehensive measures to support families with vital improvements to children and young people's care and protection within the community and especially for those who no longer live with their families. All of the pledges relate to existing obligations within the UNCRC; we have signposted the most pertinent articles accordingly.

# GENERAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

- 1.** Incorporate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK law.  
[UNCRC article 4](#)
- 2.** Recommit to end child poverty through a progressive taxation system and social policies which tackle structural inequalities. Implement the socio-economic duty in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to work towards reducing inequalities arising from socio-economic disadvantage.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 23 and 27](#)
- 3.** Redress negative effects of Universal Credit: remove the five-week waiting time which has led to families living in debt, and withdraw sanctions which cause families misery and fear. Reinstate social security for all children: remove the two-child limit, under-occupancy charge ('bedroom tax') and the benefit cap.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 18\(2\), 23, 24, 26 and 27](#)
- 4.** End discriminatory social security for asylum seeking families, ensuring equitable levels and the removal of the stigmatising and restrictive state (ASPEN) debit card. All children to have full and equal access to social protection (including health, education, social care) regardless of their immigration status. Abolish the policy of no recourse to public funds in its entirety for families and care leavers.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 18\(2\), 22, 24 and 26](#)
- 5.** Review the diversity, availability, resourcing and quality of education, health and social care services for children and young people in the community and away from home – encompassing NHS and local authority provision and the voluntary and private (for profit) sectors.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 20, 24, 28 and 29](#)

- 6.** Introduce a comprehensive children's workforce strategy integrating health, education, social care and youth justice to ensure sufficient numbers and capacities to meet the needs and uphold the rights of children and young people within the community and in residential (including secure) settings.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 18\(2\), 20, 24, 29, 37c and 40](#)
- 7.** Introduce a statutory principle of 'close to home' for children's mental health in-patient services and other specialist residential provision. Ensure no child is forced to live many miles from home unless this is in their best interests, and their wishes and feelings have been given due consideration. Introduce statutory waiting times for children, young people and parents in need of mental health care, and provide information and assistance to help people access this support.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 9\(3\), 12, 20, 23, 24 and 42](#)
- 8.** Remove the 'reasonable chastisement' common law defence so that children have the same protection from assault as adults.  
[UNCRC articles 3, 6, 12, 19 and 37\(a\)](#)
- 9.** Close child prisons, ensure children's contact with the criminal justice system is a last resort and develop the capacity of local authority secure children's homes for those children for whom it is unsafe, at the present time, to live within the community. Ensure no child is criminalised as a result of abuse and/or exploitation. To protect children from damaging contact with the criminal justice system, substantially raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 19, 20, 37, 39 and 40](#)
- 10.** Continue the UK's commitment to the Dublin III Regulation. If leaving the EU, establish the agreements necessary to ensure that children seeking protection can be reunited with family in the UK.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 10 and 22](#)
- 11.** Review leave policies for children subject to immigration control and ensure the child's best interests is a primary consideration in all decision-making, ending uncertainty and providing security of residence. European national children in the UK to be automatically granted settled status.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 10 and 22](#)

# FAMILY SUPPORT

- 12.** Adequately fund local authorities to meet their statutory obligations in the Children Act 1989 (using calculations produced by the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and others). Accordingly, strengthen the capacity of local authorities to provide financial and other support to families to prevent children entering care, to prevent offending by children and to prevent children being deprived of their liberty – as the 1989 Act intended. Ensure that access to support services for vulnerable children, including those in kinship care, reflects their needs rather than being dependent on their legal status.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 9\(1\), 18\(2\) and 20](#)

- 13.** Amend statutory guidance to the Children Act 1989 to make it explicit that no child can be separated from their family and brought into the care system due to poverty or homelessness alone. Establish a national programme to support care-experienced young people who are becoming parents, with the aim of keeping families together. Introduce policies which keep families subject to immigration control together.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 9\(1\), 18\(2\), 20 and 26](#)

- 14.** That kinship care be actively explored for any child who cannot remain at home, with financial and other support for carers (and ensure local authorities are adequately funded to provide this support). As a minimum, grant kinship carers the same access to support as adopters, including the right to paid leave and opportunities for specialist training.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 18\(2\), 20 and 26](#)

- 15.** Reinstate and expand universal, non-stigmatising services for children, young people and their families – from early childhood through to young adulthood.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 18\(2\), 23 and 31](#)



# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- 16.** Make it unlawful for schools to exclude primary school children (fixed period and permanent). Establish a national initiative for achieving inclusion, backed up with resources. Replace the current Admissions Code and amend other national policies to end discriminatory practices in school admissions, exclusions and off-rolling, especially against looked after children.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 6, 23, 28 and 29](#)

- 17.** Review the impact of formal testing and assessment on children's development (including their mental health), to move to a system which puts children's interests first while continuing to hold schools to account.

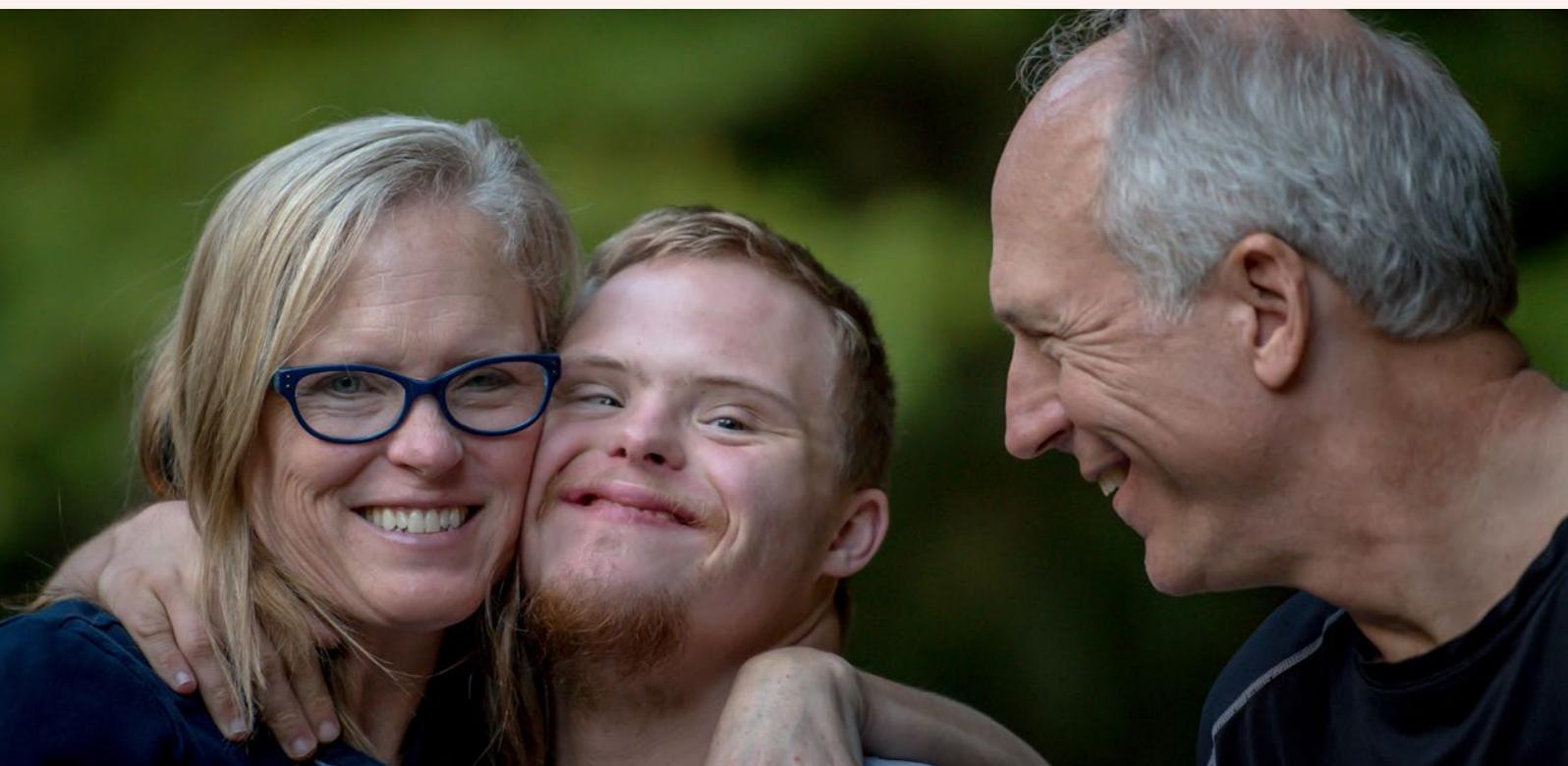
[UNCRC articles 3, 6, 12 and 29](#)

- 18.** Review the support offered to children with special educational needs and disabilities, with a view to substantially increasing resources and the capacity of families and services to work together to ensure each child enjoys their rights to education, health and social care.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 9\(1\), 18\(2\), 23, 24, 28 and 29](#)

- 19.** Extend free school meals to all primary school children, and establish pilots of universal free school meal provision in secondary schools in the country's most deprived areas.

[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 18\(2\), 27 and 28](#)



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF PROTECTION

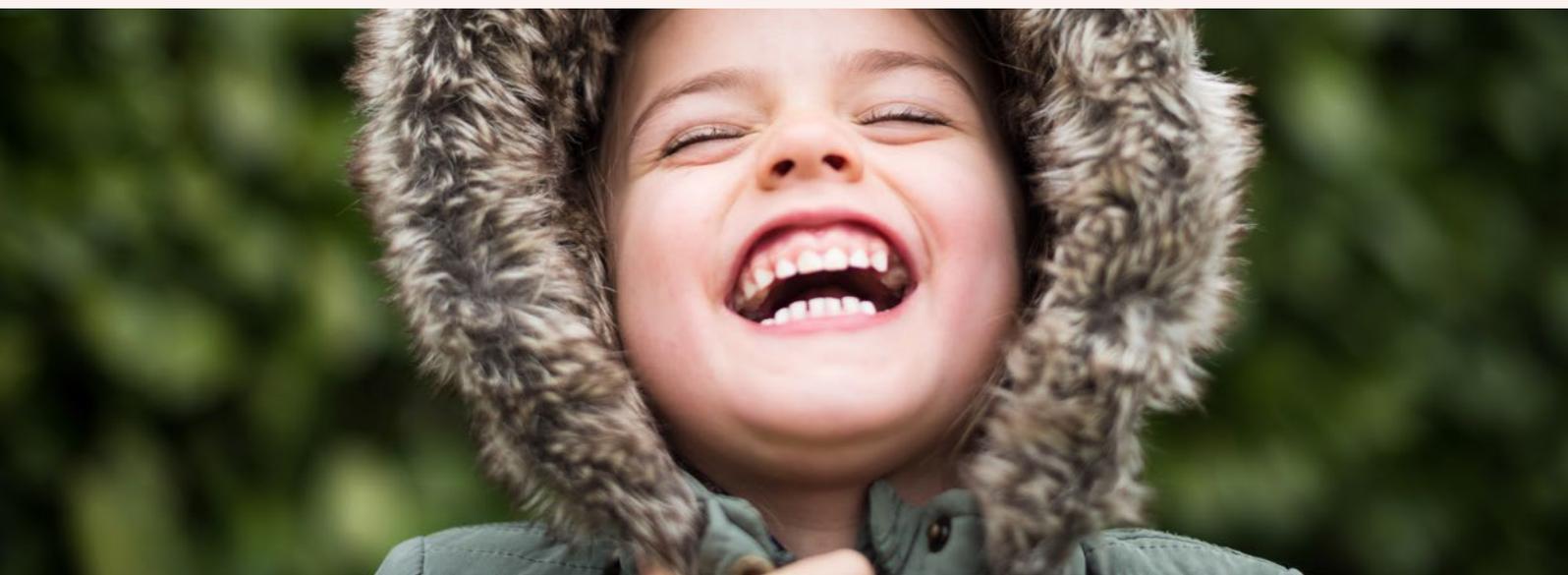
- 20.** Ensure every child has access to an independent advocate so their wishes and feelings are understood and taken seriously.  
[UNCRC articles 12, 13, 17 and 42](#)
- 21.** Ensure timely counselling or other therapeutic support is available to every child who needs it.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 24 and 39](#)
- 22.** Ensure homeless 16-and 17-year olds without the care of their family receive their entitlements to care, protection and support under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12 and 20](#)
- 23.** Ensure semi-independent supported accommodation is subject to registration, regulation and independent inspection, and that providers are required to safeguard and promote each child's welfare. Introduce a legal presumption that children in care stay in accommodation where they are provided care and support until at least 18, unless this conflicts with the young person's wishes and is not in their best interests. Prohibit the use of semi-independent supported accommodation in all circumstances for children under the age of 16.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 20 and 39](#)
- 24.** Establish a national implementation team, with the requisite skills, authority and professional respect, to ensure the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse are acted upon. Prohibit pain-inducing and other forms of dangerous and harmful restraint techniques in all children's settings as a matter of urgency.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 19, 24, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 39](#)

# CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

**25.** Put loving long-term relationships at the heart of the children's care system – including children's relationships with their brothers, sisters and extended families. Amend the third corporate parenting principle in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 ("to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children") by adding "including the changes care experienced people want to see in the care system". Ensure social workers have the time and support to build and maintain meaningful relationships with children and young people.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 20 and 39](#)

**26.** Extend the legal entitlement of 'staying put' to young people living in children's homes to 21 years of age and ensure these arrangements are properly funded. Amend local authorities' statutory obligation of maintaining and providing suitable accommodation by adding, "including the prevention of homelessness". Existing statutory guidance 'Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25' and 'Local offer guidance' recognise that care leavers may benefit from a range of support services up to 25 years of age: amend this to similarly extend entitlement to independent visitors, independent reviewing officers and specialist services.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 20 and 39](#)

**27.** Ensure individuals who were formerly in care have priority for assessment for support services including housing, mental health and drug and alcohol services, and finance local authorities to provide ongoing support for care leavers for as long as they need it.  
[UNCRC articles 20, 24, 26 and 39](#)



# HUMAN RIGHTS AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

**28.** Put respect, equality and fairness at the heart of our public services, bringing an end to programmes and policies which demean and stigmatise communities. Invest in 'active offer' independent advocacy services across all public services, for all age groups, so that those in need do not stand alone. Create new spaces and legal arrangements so that children, young people and adults who need or use public services can lead and influence their design, development, delivery and improvement – at the local and national levels.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 13 and 42](#)

**29.** Reinststate legal aid for advice and representation over all aspects of social protection, including family separation, housing, social security and immigration. Ensure non means-tested legal aid is available where serious human rights matters are under consideration, including inquests held after a child or adult has died in the care of the state.  
[UNCRC articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 24, 26, 27, 37 and 39](#)

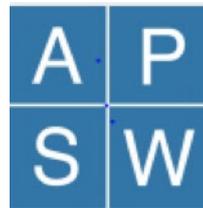
**30.** Extend the right to vote to 16 and 17 year-olds.  
[UNCRC articles 12 and 13](#)

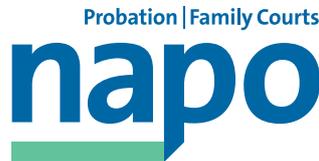


# INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

- ~ Priscilla Alderson, Emerita Professor of Childhood Studies, University College London
- ~ Dr Mohammed Mubashir Mazhar Ali, Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist (latterly visiting psychiatrist to HMYOI Wetherby)
- ~ Raymond Arthur, Professor of Law, Northumbria University
- ~ Dr Maggie Atkinson, Children's Commissioner for England 2010-2015
- ~ Rev. Anne Bennett, former Anglican chaplain to HMYOI Cookham Wood
- ~ Dr Julia Brophy, Independent Research Consultant and Principal Investigator - Family Justice
- ~ Professor Sir Cary L Cooper CBE, 50th Anniversary Professor of Organisational Psychology & Health, University of Manchester
- ~ Martha Cover, Coram Chambers
- ~ Liz Davies, Professor Emeritus of Social Work, London Metropolitan University
- ~ Maud Davis, Children's solicitor
- ~ Ian Dickson, Chair of the Conference for Care Experienced People (retired) and children's rights campaigner
- ~ Anne-Marie Douglas, Founder/CEO of Peer Power Youth
- ~ Dr Jonathan Evans, Professor of Youth Justice Policy and Practice, University of South Wales
- ~ Brid Featherstone, Professor of Social Work, University of Huddersfield
- ~ Professor Barry Goldson, Charles Booth Chair of Social Science, University of Liverpool
- ~ Pam Hibbert OBE
- ~ Ray Jones, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Kingston University and St George's, University of London
- ~ June Leat, Chair of POTATO (Parents of Traumatized Adopted Teens Organisation)
- ~ Jenny Molloy, Author, Adviser and Trainer
- ~ Dame Gillian Pugh, former Chief Executive of Coram and former Chair of the National Children's Bureau
- ~ Nigel Richardson CBE, Children's services adviser and former Director of Children's Services
- ~ Jonathan Stanley
- ~ Mike Stein, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, University of York
- ~ June Thoburn CBE, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia
- ~ Nigel Patrick Thomas, Emeritus Professor of Childhood and Youth, University of Central Lancashire
- ~ Judith Timms OBE, Founder and Trustee of the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and a Vice President of the Family Mediators Association
- ~ Jane Tunstill, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Royal Holloway, London University
- ~ John Weightman MBE FRSA, Former Vice President and Juvenile Lead, National Council for Independent Monitoring Boards

# SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS





This document aims to encourage all political parties to make commitments in their 2019 general election manifestos which would further the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in England. It is not intended to promote or support any particular political parties or candidates, and must not be used for this purpose.