

# END CHILD POVERTY once and for all

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## Ending child poverty is no picnic

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Paul Boateng took part in an End Child Poverty picnic on Brighton beach on the first day of Labour Party Conference.

Children, parents and mentors from local befriending group Fun in Action were given the chance to put their questions to the cabinet minister. They also cut a cake to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the government's pledge to end child poverty within a generation.



Paul Boateng and children from Brighton's Fun in Action

'Our pledge to end child poverty within a generation is at the heart of this government's vision for Britain. Tax credits, investment in childcare, Sure Start, the Children's Fund and Children's Centres are all making a difference.

But we still have a way to go. Central to our getting it right is to give a voice to children and young people and listen to what they tell us about the impact of our policies on their lives,' Boateng said.

In the exhibition hall of the conference, End Child Poverty invited delegates to look at the world through the eyes of a child by wearing 3-D masks to watch a video about child poverty. The stall attracted several high profile visitors including Cherie Blair and several Government Ministers.

End Child Poverty also held fringe meetings at all three party conferences. At Labour Party Conference Stephen Byers MP and Lisa Harker spoke on 'Ending child poverty: Labour's third term legacy?' while at the Liberal Democrat and Conservative conferences End Child Poverty joined forces with Age Concern. For more information see page 3

# The view from here

**Jonathan Stearn, Director, End Child Poverty**

The first milestone in ending child poverty should be reached at the end of this year (2004/5). All the signs are that the government will have met its target of reducing child poverty by a quarter – that’s a million children.

Good news. But from now on the going gets tough.

Some £6.8 billion is needed to close the poverty gap. It’s a substantial amount of money but not huge – just one tenth of the NHS annual budget. But in addition we need clear improvements in health, education, transport and social services if we are to guarantee that children living in poverty do not get poor services. Take the welcome 2,500 Children’s Centres promised in the Spending Review - we need at least 10,000 if we are going to get the centre in every community that ministers aspire.

Ending child poverty means reaching those in severe and persistent poverty and that means reaching children in lone parent households, larger families, black and minority ethnic families, and families with disabled children.

‘Work for those who can and support for those who can’t’ is the mantra that drives the government’s child poverty strategy. It is support that is key to many of the families in severe and persistent poverty and they will stay in poverty as long as benefit levels remain around 20 – 30 per cent below the poverty line. And work, in itself, is not necessarily the solution. More than half (52 per cent) of children in poverty have at least one parent in work.

If 3.6 million more children are going to be taken out of poverty, their needs must shift higher up the government’s agenda.

Earlier this year, an MP tabled a parliamentary question for every relevant government department asking what they were doing to end child poverty. The joined-up answer that came back from every department was (to paraphrase) ‘don’t ask us, ask the Department for Work and Pensions’.

Since then, the Treasury’s *Child Poverty Review* has been launched. The review lists a range of activities by government but they don’t add up to a strategy. You



get the impression they were taken off the shelf in response to a Treasury request.

If we are to tackle child poverty, we need a strategy that has the buy-in and support of every secretary of state and all government departments. A strategy that is made to measure for all the children in the UK living in poverty that will make sure that no children face poverty in the future.

Not only does that bespoke strategy need to be created and delivered across government, it needs to work between central and local government, throughout the four nations and include business and the voluntary and community sector.

Then and only then will End Child Poverty have the confidence to say that as the going gets tough, the government is equipped to keep going.

# End Child Poverty at the Party Conferences

Speaking on the subject of 'Ending Child Poverty: Labour's third term legacy?', former Cabinet Minister Stephen Byers stressed that tackling poverty is core to Labour's values and principles and that the child poverty pledge was, and remains, one of the government's defining domestic political commitments.

The government's approach to this issue had been to pursue 'social justice by stealth', he said, and it needed to become more explicit about its commitment to tackling poverty. Child poverty, he argued, should be at the centre of



Stephen Byers at Labour Party Conference

Labour's domestic agenda.

At the Liberal Democrat and Conservative conferences End Child Poverty joined forces with Age Concern England to address the issue of 'Tackling child and pensioner poverty – an affordable

goal?' At the Liberal Democrats Vincent Cable MP outlined recent work by his party on pensioner poverty. He stressed his disapproval of a system where people on lower incomes spent a higher proportion of their income on tax than people on higher incomes.

And at the Conservative Party Conference David Willetts MP, shadow secretary of state for work and pensions and welfare reform, highlighted the government's failings in tackling poverty. He admitted that in the past lots of effort had been put into saying that poverty is not a problem and that the first step to tackling poverty is to admit it is a problem.



David Willetts, Polly Toynbee and Nicholas Hillman at Conservative Party Conference

Other speakers included Lisa Harker, writer and commentator, and End Child Poverty Chair Ian Sparks at the Labour Party Conference, Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern England, Cllr Chris Clarke and Jonathan Stearn, Director of End Child Poverty at the Liberal Democrat Conference and at Conservative Party Conference Guardian journalist Polly Toynbee, Policy Exchange Research Fellow and Citizens Advice Director of Policy, Teresa Perchard.

To coincide with these meetings End Child Poverty and Age Concern launched a report, *Family Misfortunes: the links between child and pensioner poverty*, highlighting the clear links between child and pensioner poverty.

Copies of the report are available from [www.ecpc.org.uk](http://www.ecpc.org.uk)



Liberal Democrat Party Conference



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# Capital Losses: Tackling child poverty in London

In June, End Child Poverty with the Association of London Government published *Capital Losses*, a report looking at the unique problems London has in tackling child poverty. The ALG represents all 32 London Boroughs and is committed to establish a forum on reducing child poverty so this represented local leaders uniting to put pressure on the Government to stick to their child poverty pledge.

Though child poverty across the UK continues to fall, the number of children in London who live in poverty is rising with half of all inner London children now classed as living in poverty. If the Government is to meet its target of ending child poverty by 2020 then it must tackle London's unique problems. The report highlights the conditions in London that lead to such high poverty figures, including the high cost of childcare and housing.

Children in the capital face a much higher risk of living in a household where no adult is in employment. There is also a high proportion of groups living in the capital – such as ethnic minorities and lone parents - that are most likely to experience unemployment and poverty. There are thirteen London boroughs in the top twenty areas with the most income-deprived children according to the latest figures.

ALG's deputy chair, Cllr Dame Sally Powell DBE, said: 'It is unjust that children continue to live in poverty in one of the most prosperous cities in the world. That's why council leaders across London have united to call for a poverty free future for all of London's children.'

Copies of the report are available from [www.ecpc.org.uk](http://www.ecpc.org.uk)

## Childcare and child poverty

The Government must dramatically increase spending on childcare if it is to tackle poverty, enhance attainment and promote well-being among children from disadvantaged backgrounds says a report by End Child Poverty and the Daycare Trust, published in July.

Children's centres are key to the Government achieving many of its key policy objectives and supporting all children and families at a crucial time in their lives, the charities argue, and ten thousand new children's centres are needed – 7,500 more than planned – if the government is to provide affordable quality childcare to improve the life chances of all children living in poverty and make its 'back to work' policy successful. £6 billion per year is needed to create and sustain a children's centre providing affordable childcare in every community.

Jonathan Stearn, director of End Child Poverty, said: 'Childcare is a

crucial part of any child poverty strategy. Early years services play an important role in tackling poverty, enhancing attainment and promoting well-being among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. 'The central plank of the government's poverty policy is to get parents back to work. But parents can't get to work if they can't find affordable childcare. It's a gaping hole that needs to be filled if work is going to be made to pay.'

Countries with universal access to childcare have done so through substantial and sustained public investment. Denmark, for example, spends on its early years services six times what the UK government is currently spending on the sector. A long-term strategy for the funding and delivery of universal children's centres can address this gap.

Copies of *Childcare and child poverty* are available from [www.ecpc.org.uk](http://www.ecpc.org.uk)

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## News in brief

In July the government issued its Comprehensive Spending Review and Child Poverty Report. These underline the need for a UK-wide strategy if child poverty is to be ended in a generation. By increasing the number of new children's centres from 1,700 to 2,500, the chancellor Gordon Brown is acknowledging the need to act to support all children living in poverty, not just those in the most deprived areas.

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Following the DWP Select Committee response and the publication of the government's Child Poverty Review, there was a Westminster Hall debate on Child Poverty on July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Key issues included the geographical spread of poverty in the UK, getting parents into work, disabled parents, poverty amongst black and minority ethnic groups and childcare costs.

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The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) released their State of the Nation report in August. Responding to the report End Child Poverty Chair, Ian Sparks said: 'This report provides further evidence that the Government's child poverty policies are having a positive impact and 600,000 children have been lifted out of poverty since 1999. However, as the report demonstrates, there is much left to be done – 3.6 million children currently live in poverty and the government must now redouble its efforts, accelerating the rate of progress towards the eventual goal of child poverty eradication.'