



DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY SERVICES SPRING BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024

We are Daughters of Charity Services, a family of charities across Great Britain dedicated to improving the lives of people experiencing the effects of poverty, social exclusion and injustice.

Our member charities provide essential services to a wide range of people across England and Scotland, from the elderly to families with young children in unacceptable living conditions.

The following five issues have been raised by our charities as the most pressing matters affecting the most vulnerable people in our society, and it is vital that they are addressed in the Spring Budget:

- 1.Support Families through the Cost-of-Living Crisis
- 2.Support for Children and Schools
- 3.Support our Social Care System
- 4.Support for Homeless People
- 5.Support for Local Authorities

Support Families through the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the 2021 cost-of-living crisis, more and more families have been struggling to afford basic needs, such as energy bills and putting food on the table.

While government interventions, such as the Household Support Fund and the Energy Bills Support Scheme, have been positive first steps, our member charities continue to report heightened levels of dependence on them for food

and support with the cost of living.

Parents at St Vincent's Family Project, one of our member charities, have highlighted their struggles, with one parent recently stating:

"Groceries have become expensive... electricity and gas has gone up - it is double what people paid last year - it keeps going up. We are not even switching on our heating - people that are vulnerable or elderly with kids don't turn it on."

There are clear steps that the government can take to address the levels of poverty in the UK, such as removing the two-child limit to benefits. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) estimates the policy pushes 1.1 million children into poverty, and while removing it would cost the Exchequer £1.3bn, 250,000 children would be lifted out of poverty, with a further 850,000 being lifted out of deep levels of poverty.¹

Without the following support in the Budget, the situation will only get worse:

- Recognise food and fuel poverty as significant issues for young families.
- Extend the Energy Bills Discount Scheme and revive the Household Support Fund to alleviate fuel poverty and allow targeted support to those in need.
- Abolish the two-child rule on child benefits, which disproportionately impacts ethnic minorities who tend to have larger families, and those living in areas with high levels of poverty.

Support for Children and Schools

Poverty is still a huge issue for families – in particular young families. CPAG notes there were 4.2 million children living in poverty in 2021-2022, which made up 29% of all children.²

Parents who seek our projects for support – such as St Vincent's Family Project – have reported concerns about lack of funding for mental health resources and services for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as struggles with the cost of school uniforms, and schools not having enough money for repairs.

1. https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Six_years_in_two_child_limit-final.pdf

2. https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures#footnote1_qsnbruu

Focusing on school uniforms, while the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021 was a welcome step, it is not clear that this has reduced costs for parents. Figures from the Children's Society placed the cost of school uniforms per secondary school child at £337, equivalent to £410 today with inflation. However, 2023 figures place the cost at £422 per child – above the inflation rate. Cutting VAT by half on school uniforms would save £35 a year per secondary school child, which for families with multiple children could be a saving of more than a hundred pounds per year.

The Education Secretary Gillian Keegan herself admitted recently that the SEND system was “not working well for anybody: for parents, for kids, and for teachers and for special educational needs schools, and for councils as well.” Children with SEND and their families depend on services provided by schools and local communities the most, therefore it is vital that they are sufficient and at a high standard across the country.

These issues negatively impact children's experience of the education system and must be addressed through increased funding for schools.

We call on the government to:

- Address the high cost of school uniforms by cutting VAT on school uniforms from 20% to 10% - this will reduce the burden of higher costs on struggling families in August and September.
- Extend free school meals to cover all primary-age children in England.
- Provide enhanced funding for mental health support in schools.
- Address the challenges faced by children with SEND and their families, such as the lack of resources in schools and the lack of specialised facilities in local communities.

Support our Social Care System

A recent survey carried out by Daughters of Charity Services found there are clear signs of uncertainty and pessimism within care organisations across England about the ability of the social care sector to solve its problems without increased government funding. Of the 138 responses collected, a clear majority of respondents agreed that even more government funding will be necessary than what was announced in 2022's Autumn Statement.

The government must prioritise the social care system, in particular domiciliary care, which has been neglected. The Homecare Association's Homecare Deficit 2023 report discusses the dire situation the care system is in due to underfunding, and that it would take an uplift of £2.08bn a year to rectify the situation.³

To highlight this, Vincentian Care Plus (VCP), our domiciliary care charity in Westminster, has reported carers having to dip into their organisation's pockets to buy service users necessities such as food and clothing. Nashande T Seraphin-McDonald, Compliance and Quality Manager at VCP, says:

“Social Care charities are already struggling but we are forced to pick up where lack of government funding is failing the vulnerable. So many of our clients can't afford groceries, so Care Workers are having to buy food out of their own money because they can't bear to see them go without. VCP also has to regularly fund service users' basic necessities, such as clothing and gas and electric top ups.”

We urge the government to:

- Commit to increasing funding for social care by £2.08bn a year to ensure that our social care system is fit to serve those who depend on it.
- Set forth an achievable pathway towards meeting Care England's call for a £10bn annual funding boost for the care sector,⁴ recognising the broader impact that social care funding has on families and the mental health of service users.
- Acknowledge and prioritise the need for more resources available to support care workers.

Support for Homeless People

Homelessness is on the rise. In December 2023, new research from Shelter revealed there was a 14% increase in homelessness over the year and, shockingly, nearly 140,000 children in the UK are now homeless.⁵

This trend cannot continue. Without action on the crisis of housing supply in our

3. <https://www.homecareassociation.org.uk/resource/the-homecare-deficit-2023-pdf.html>

4. <https://www.careengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Care-for-Our-Future-Final.pdf>

5. https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/at_least_309000_people_homeless_in_england_today#:~:text=Posted%2014%20Dec%202023&text=This%20is%20a%20stark%20increase,in%20England%20are%20homeless%20today.

country, it is unfortunately the case that councils and charities will struggle to rehabilitate homeless people and rough sleepers. Government data shows that housing delivered in Q2 2023 was 12% lower than the same period in 2022.⁶ Action must be taken to rapidly increase housing delivery to cater for families who are unable to find housing and give people experiencing homelessness an opportunity to have a place to live.

Alongside the need to radically increase housing supply, targeted support must also be offered to people experiencing homelessness and those sleeping rough. Whilst welcome, the £500 million granted to UK councils through the 2022 Rough Sleeping Initiative clearly has not been enough to stop the increase in rough sleeping and more funding must be provided. Therefore, we ask the government to:

- Increase the funding available to local councils through the Rough Sleeping Initiative.
- Ensure that sufficient funding is made available for services working to tackle homelessness in towns and cities across the UK.
- Work with charities so families in precarious housing situations do not become homeless, and ensure support is available from councils for those who need it.

Support for Local Authorities

Local authorities provide many important services across the UK, no more so than support for vulnerable people in a local area. Local authority funding for charities, such as our member charity St Vincent's Family Project in Westminster, is vital in ensuring that people experiencing the effects of poverty across the country are provided with support at community level.

However, a striking report from UNISON estimates there is a £3.5 billion shortfall in council funding for the coming financial year across the UK.⁷ As UNISON notes, "Many authorities will be forced to consider... [slashing] services for the vulnerable and vital community resources."

6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-supply-indicators-of-new-supply-england-april-to-june-2023/housing-supply-indicators-of-new-supply-england-april-to-june-2023>

7. <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2023/09/councils-face-dire-cash-crisis-totalling-more-than-3-5bn/>

Furthermore, a BBC analysis shows UK councils are in a staggering and unsustainable £97.8bn debt.⁸ We cannot see vital services cut, and therefore the government must:

- Provide ring-fenced funding for local authorities to ensure services specifically for vulnerable people in local communities are not cut.
- Address the £3.5bn deficit to ensure councils can continue to provide essential services, which are relied upon by the most vulnerable.

We all have a duty to support the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in our society. Addressing these five points in the Spring Budget will ensure the services that provide people with the dignified support they need can continue to operate through challenging economic times.

8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67707156>