

Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Annual Report

January 2024 – October 2025

Overview

Between January 2024 and October 2025, the Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) continued its mission to address the deep-rooted inequalities facing children growing up in the North of England. Working in partnership with Health Equity North and the Northern Health Science Alliance the APPG has brought together parliamentarians, academics, and people with lived experience to highlight key issues impacting children's health, wellbeing, and life chances.

Over the past 12 months, the APPG has published two major reports, held evidence sessions in Parliament, engaged directly with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, and officials, and submitted evidence to the Government's Child Poverty Taskforce.

Child of the North is a research partnership between Health Equity North, The Northern Health Science Alliance and the N8 Research Partnership.

Reports and Findings

1. Children in Care in the North of England (April 2024)

This report revealed the cost of children-in-care rates in the North compared with the South of England.

The North records extreme outliers for high care rates. In Blackpool, one in every 52 children is in care. In North East Lincolnshire, the figure is one in 57. In Hartlepool, one in 63.

Key Findings:

- The North has 93 children in care per 10,000, compared with 62 in the rest of England.
- If the North had the same care entry rates as the South between 2019 and 2023, £25 billion in lifetime social costs could have been saved.
- The North accounts for 28% of the child population but 36% of children in care.
- Two-thirds of local authorities with care rates above 1% are in the North.
- Cuts to prevention services and rising child poverty have directly contributed to increased care rates.

Key Recommendations:

- Reduce child poverty through welfare reform.
- Invest in prevention and early intervention services.
- Strengthen the children's social care workforce.
- Address racial inequalities within the care system.
- Improve national data systems to support better policy decisions.

Impact and Engagement:

- Evidence was presented to MPs and Peers at a parliamentary evidence session, featuring academics, practitioners, and care-experienced young people.
- Findings were shared with Ministers and Shadow Ministers responsible for children, local government, and public health.
- APPG members raised questions in parliamentary debates.
- The report received national and regional media coverage, helping raise public awareness of the North–South divide in child welfare.

2. Hungry for Change: Tackling Obesity and Food Insecurity in the North of England (July 2025)

This report explored how poverty and unequal access to healthy, affordable food are driving higher levels of childhood obesity and food insecurity in the North.

Key Findings:

- Food insecurity rose by 5.5% in the North between 2019/20 and 2022/23, compared with 3.8% in the South.
- Childhood obesity rates in the North East (24.5%) are five percentage points higher than in the South West (19.1%).
- Rates of free school meal eligibility are consistently higher in the North – 32.3% in the North East vs. 20.6% in the South East.
- The North has greater exposure to fast food outlets, with nearly 70% of people living within 1km of one.

Key Recommendations:

- Introduce universal free school meals for all children.
- Expand access to affordable, nutritious food through subsidies and community food programmes.
- Reverse welfare cuts, including abolishing the two-child limit and benefit cap.
- Strengthen early years and family support, including reinstating Sure Start centres.
- Restrict fast food outlet density in deprived areas.

Impact and Engagement:

- The APPG held a parliamentary evidence session bringing together academics, local leaders, and people with lived experience of food insecurity.
- The report's findings were shared directly with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, and HM Treasury.
- APPG members cited the report in Parliamentary debates.

- Media coverage across national outlets and regional press amplified the report's calls for urgent action.

Parliamentary and Policy Engagement

Over the year, the Child of the North APPG has taken an active role in informing and influencing national policy. Key actions included:

- Evidence sessions in Parliament featuring contributions from leading academics, local authority representatives, and people with lived experience.
- Direct engagement with government departments to present evidence and recommendations from the APPG's reports.
- Submission to the Government's Child Poverty Taskforce, highlighting the urgent need to scrap the two-child limit as the single most effective policy measure to reduce child poverty.
- Parliamentary questions and debates raised by APPG members to maintain pressure on government to address regional inequalities affecting children.

The Child of the North APPG was delighted that the Chancellor announced the lifting of the two-child benefit cap in the Autumn Budget (November 2025). Evidence presented by the APPG has consistently shown that the cap pushed hundreds of thousands of children into poverty by denying larger families the support they needed. Its removal represents a significant step toward improving family financial stability and giving children fairer life chances.

Ongoing Priorities

Looking ahead, the Child of the North APPG will continue to focus on:

- Tackling child poverty as the root cause of multiple inequalities.
- Advocating for equitable funding for local authorities and children's services in the North.
- Ensuring that children's voices and lived experiences shape policy recommendations.
- Building cross-party consensus for a fair start for every child, no matter where they live.

Through evidence-based reports, cross-party collaboration, and the voices of those directly affected, the APPG continues to push for meaningful, long-term policy change that gives every child the opportunity to thrive.

Ends