



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Improving Lives

Helping Workless Families

April 2017



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## 2 Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families

# Foreword by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions



This Government is committed to creating a country that works for everyone. We want to create a fairer Britain where success is based on merit, not privilege, and where everyone has the chance to go as far as their talents and hard work will take them.

We have started to rebalance our society in favour of ordinary working people, but now need to do more to turn Britain into a Great Meritocracy where success is defined by work and talent, not birth or circumstance. By making housing more secure and affordable, giving more children the opportunity to go to a good school, and tackling historic injustices like racial discrimination and inadequate mental health services, we are helping those who work hard but struggle to get by.

But for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the norm. These families often face huge barriers to getting on with their lives and taking the opportunities on offer in a fairer society. Parents' ability to work is frustrated by issues like low skills or poor mental or physical health, or drug and alcohol dependency – holding them back from fulfilling their potential and leaving children without the stability they need.

The strain caused by worklessness intensifies other problems, undermines relationships and destabilises the family. We also know that growing up in households affected by these issues not only causes problems during childhood, but also disproportionately limits people's chances to succeed throughout their lives. As well as the effect on families, this comes at a huge cost to the taxpayer through welfare spending, health costs and in the criminal justice system.

We want to help workless families with complex problems so that they too can take advantage of the opportunities in a fairer Britain. We want parents to have the chance to go out and earn a living and to enjoy the dignity of work. And we want children to benefit from the stability and good example of working parents.

In doing so, we recognise the need to understand the complex issues that some families face and to develop a new approach to tackling poverty and engrained disadvantage. Because the root causes are not financial, our approach goes beyond the safety net our welfare system provides. It is about helping families overcome the problems they face so that they can go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. We won't retreat from acting to tackle disadvantage, because we believe in the good that government can do and we know the costs of inaction to individuals, communities and society.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Damian Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Damian Green

**Secretary of State for Work and Pensions**

# Executive Summary

### Introduction

1. This Government is committed to creating a country that works for everyone, in which everyone can go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. However we know that, despite record employment, for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the norm. Our analysis has revealed how this worklessness and the complex problems associated with it hold people back and prevent them from reaching their potential.
2. We cannot afford not to act: the issues faced by children in workless families – of which there are 1.8 million<sup>1</sup> across the UK – combine to impact upon their development and education, limiting their future employment prospects, and reducing their opportunities to succeed throughout their lives.

### Our analysis and the case for change

3. Our new analysis shows just how stark the difference is between outcomes for children in workless families and those in lower-income working families. Children growing up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to fail at all stages of their education (DWP, 2017).
4. This analysis reveals that parents' ability to work is frustrated by complex issues that prevent them from fulfilling their potential and leave children without the stability they need. Our work has shown that workless families are considerably more likely to experience problems with their relationships, have poor mental health, and be in problem debt (DWP, 2017).

### Next steps for action

5. This Government wants the parents of these children to have the chance to earn a living, and to overcome the issues that hold them back. We will:
  - **Set out the next phase of the Government's Troubled Families Programme** so that it has an even greater emphasis on helping people back into work and tackling the disadvantages associated with worklessness. We will do this by building on the strengths of the current programme – its focus on supporting the whole family by understanding how issues interconnect; and its role in driving local service reform.
  - **Reduce parental conflict** through the launch of an innovative new programme to support evidence-based interventions delivered by specialist organisations at a local level – saving money and transforming lives by giving parents, whether together or separated, the right help before things get worse.
  - **Set new expectations for Jobcentre Plus** to identify people with complex needs at the right time, to strengthen partnership working with local authorities, wider public services, and the voluntary sector, to share information more effectively between partners and work with local strategic boards to more efficiently address claimants' needs.
  - **Tackle dependency by implementing recommendations made by Dame Carol Black's review** of employment and drug and alcohol dependency. We will bring forward a trial of the Individual and Placement Support approach to help those dependent on drugs and alcohol back into employment, build a network of peer mentors to help those dependent on drugs and alcohol

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<sup>1</sup> See [page 8](#).

move into work and expand eligibility for Access to Work grant funding to provide those on a treatment programme with the support they need to enter or continue work.

### Tracking progress

6. The policies we are bringing forward in this document will build on the work the Government is already doing to help families overcome the disadvantages they face and stabilise their lives. They also set a clear direction for how public and local services will work together in the future to improve the support provided to families with complex needs.
7. We are publishing national indicators in nine areas – two statutory and seven non-statutory – to track progress in tackling the disadvantages that affect families' and children's lives. These indicators will allow us to track national progress over time, and have been carefully developed and rigorously tested with external academics.
8. By publishing our latest analysis and the compelling evidence around multiple disadvantage, we will help local authorities and others in their work to improve children's outcomes. As part of this evidence-sharing approach, we are making local level data available through the local government data tool, LG Inform.
9. We are also bringing forward a new evidence resource on multiple disadvantage in families and its impact on children – and will develop this jointly with others so that this important analysis can be used by a range of professionals to help them commission and deliver effective interventions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged families.

### Devolution

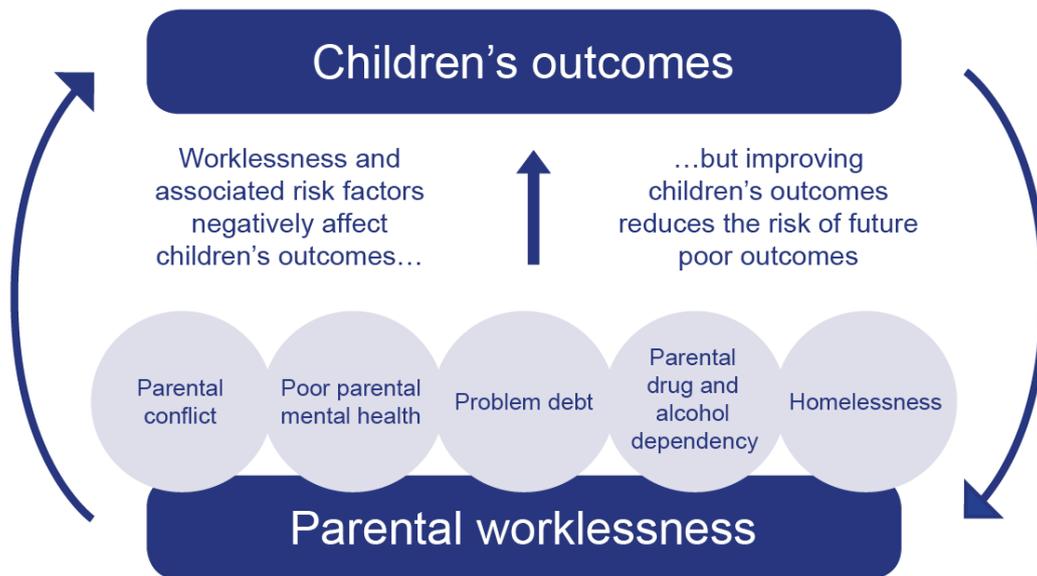
10. Government will take action to invest directly in specific programmes and transform the way we deliver services. Disadvantage is complex and so tackling it requires policies across education, health and employment. We recognise that many of these are devolved matters and that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be bringing forward policies to tackle these issues in their own administrations as they consider appropriate.

## Our evidence and analysis

11. This Government paper is underpinned by a strong evidence base that has been created with the cooperation of leading academics, analysts and policy-makers across government as well as local authorities and front-line workers. It takes the best existing evidence and adds new insights by combining survey and administrative data. This has allowed us to reach a more detailed and sophisticated understanding about root causes of disadvantage and their impact on the outcomes of children in families where no parent is working.
12. We have used national snapshot surveys that tell us about people's participation in the labour market and their personal and family characteristics, alongside longitudinal household surveys and birth cohort studies, such as the **Understanding Society Survey** and the **Millennium Cohort Study**. This presents a rich picture of families facing a multitude of disadvantages over time. We joined data on how pupils perform in key tests and exams to the Understanding Society data – and this has shown us for the first time what a difference it makes to children's educational attainment if they live in a workless family.
13. We have been able to benefit from world-class thinkers in this area who have worked with us to apply the latest evidence and to help interpret it. The bank of evidence that we have amassed (and set out in the supporting documents) is derived from literature searches, with the addition of rigorous discussions with groups of academics. We have built statistical models to help us understand the importance and relevance of different factors of disadvantage on children and family outcomes, and tested our conclusions with experts.
14. This paper not only presents the data, but also allows us to create practical and meaningful tools to support local delivery – and collaboration between central government and practitioners at this early stage paves the way for these to be developed further, to the benefit of children and families.

# The Case for Change

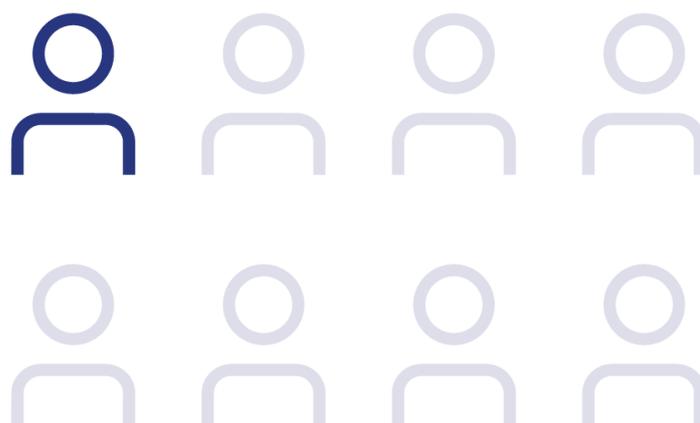
15. This Government is committed to creating a country that works for everyone. We want to build a fairer Britain in which everyone can go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. However, we know that despite record levels of employment, for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the norm. These families face huge barriers to entering work and taking the opportunities on offer in a fairer society. Worklessness damages lives. Not only does it reduce family income, it can also damage families' resilience, health and stability, and thus undermine child development. This is because many workless families are held back by disadvantages such as problem debt, drug and alcohol dependency, and by homelessness. Many suffer from parental conflict and poor mental health which can have a long-term impact on children's development. Where problems such as these combine and fuel each other, families edge further and further away from the benefits of work, and children face a greater and greater prospect of repeating the poor outcomes of their parents. This chapter sets out the evidence behind some of the issues associated with persistent worklessness, how these disadvantages are often connected with factors such as parental conflict and how they impact on children's outcomes.



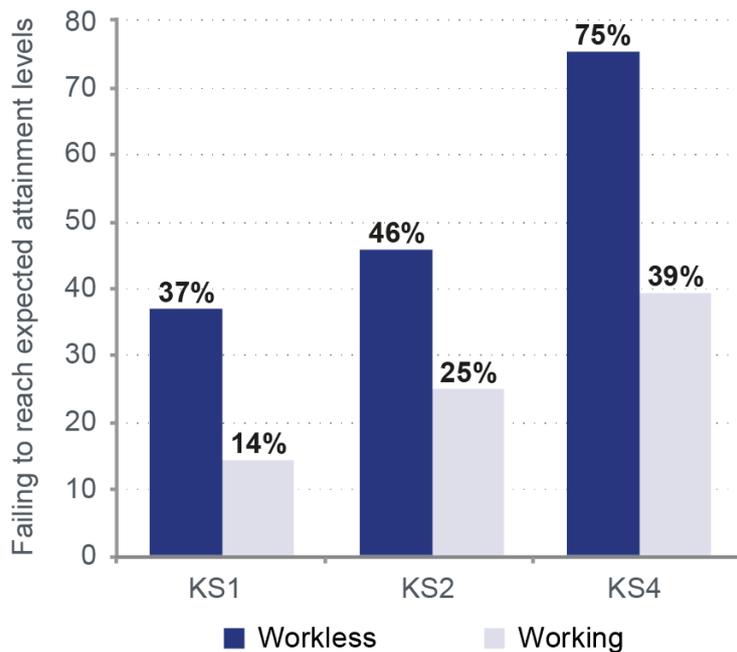
### Parental worklessness and its impact on children

16. Work is the best route out of poverty (DWP, 2014), and great strides have been made over the last few years, helping many more people into jobs. Employment runs at a record high and unemployment remains at an 11-year low (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). Over the last 20 years, the employment rate for lone parents has increased by 20 percentage points (Office for National Statistics, 2016). In the last three years we have seen the disability employment rate increase by over 5 percentage points, to where it now stands at 50 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2017b). We know that good-quality work is also good for individuals' mental and physical health (DWP and Department of Health, 2016). However, despite this progress, in 2014-2015 there were 1.8 million children in workless families; in over eight out of ten cases the child was in a long-term workless family (DWP, 2017).<sup>2</sup>
17. As is well known, children do worse in workless families. Our new analysis shows just how stark the difference is between outcomes for children in workless families and those in lower-income working families. Children growing up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to fail at all stages of their education. 37 per cent of children in workless families in England failed to reach the expected level at key stage 1 (aged 7) compared with 19 per cent in lower-income working families. 75 per cent of children in workless families failed to reach the expected level at GCSE, compared to 52 per cent in lower-income working families (DWP, 2017). Most of these differences can be explained by the associated disadvantages faced by workless families, though for some specific outcomes – such as behavioural difficulties – we can isolate persistent parental worklessness as having an independent, negative association over and above other factors (DWP, 2017; Schoon et al, 2012). It is through tackling these problems collectively and helping parents in these families into work that we can improve their lives and the lives of their children.
18. Without doing so, children in workless households are considerably more likely to repeat the poorer outcomes of their parents – an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. Children who grow up with workless parents are more likely to be workless themselves as adults, in comparison to children who grow up with working parents (Gregg et al, 2017; Schoon et al, 2012).

### One in eight children live in workless families



<sup>2</sup> The children in workless families figure is based on the *Understanding Society Survey* 2014–2015. The measure captures dependent children (i.e. children up to the age of 16 and those 16–18 in full-time education) in families that are workless. The children in workless households measure (i.e. children below the age of 16) is based on the Labour Force Survey. This is the statutory measure of parental worklessness and it stands at 1.3 million in the fourth quarter of 2016. In addition to the differences in definition of a child and the time period, the children in workless families figure and the children in workless households figure differ because multiple families can live in the same household.



Children in workless families are almost **twice as likely** to fail **at all stages of their education**

## Parental worklessness and its overlap with other disadvantages

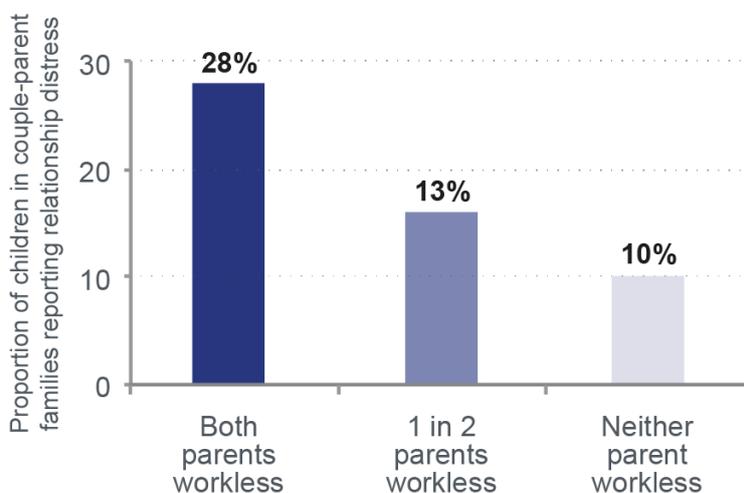
19. Our new analysis has shown that parents' ability to work is frustrated by complex issues that prevent them from fulfilling their potential and leave children without the stability they need. It shows that half of children in workless families are living with parents who have at least three characteristics associated with worklessness, such as ill health, low qualifications or living in social housing. It also shows how these other barriers and disadvantages can be both causes and effects of worklessness, and can have their own direct impact on parents and children as well as in combination (DWP, 2017).
20. Because of the ways in which these problems fuel each other, it is hard to isolate the impact of any one disadvantage – either on parental worklessness or on children and their outcomes. Two factors that feature particularly strongly in the lives of workless families are parental conflict and poor parental mental health. These are problems that often accompany each other as well as other difficulties besides unemployment. Both can be associated with problem debt, drug and alcohol dependency – all of which can ultimately lead to homelessness. Each of these issues has the potential to compound other problems, making it harder for parents to return to work and creating more difficult environments for children to grow up in. Together these problems strip away at opportunity and make it harder and harder for families to go as far as their talents will take them. Below we consider how these complex issues relate to worklessness, and how they impact on parents' and children's lives.

### Parental conflict

21. For most of us, family is the bedrock of our lives. Acute parental conflict disturbs this foundation. It is important to help parents develop strong relationships so that they can better support each other and their children. Evidence clearly shows that children growing up with parents who have good-quality relationships (whether they are together or separated), tend to enjoy a wider range of better future outcomes. These span mental and physical health and educational attainment (Harold et al, 2016). Our work has shown that workless families are considerably more likely to experience problems with their relationships. Relationship distress is almost three times as prevalent in workless couple-parent families compared to when both parents are working. Parents experiencing relationship distress are more likely to separate – and children whose parents have recently separated are eight times more likely to live in a workless family than those whose parents have stayed together (DWP, 2017).

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22. Poor relationship quality is strongly associated with maternal psychological distress (Papp, 2010) and depression (Papp et al, 2007). Common mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, have been found to be more prevalent in people who are experiencing relationship distress than those who are happier in their relationships (Whisman and Uebelacker, 2003; Harold et al, 2016; DWP 2017).
23. Children’s chances are strongly influenced by their parents’ relationship – whether they are together or separated. Exposure to parental conflict can have long-term negative impacts on children’s early emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social development (Harold et al, 2016). Persistent and unresolved parental conflict is likely to drain the emotional resources required to parent adequately, putting children at greater risk of emotional and social problems (Mooney et al, 2009). New academic evidence shows that frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict causes stress and depression for the whole family including children, undermining their education and employment prospects (Harold et al, 2016).
24. If parents separate it is beneficial for children to maintain a relationship with both parents where it is safe to do so. There are benefits to having a good-quality relationship between the child and the non-resident parent (most commonly the father) for children (Mooney et al, 2009) – and regular contact between the non-resident parent and the child is usually a good indication of a better co-parenting relationship (DWP, 2017). We know that a child who has a supportive and close relationship with their father is more likely to do well in adulthood regardless of whether or not they live with him when they are growing up, and that fathers who have a poor-quality relationship with their child’s mother are less likely to be involved in their children’s lives (Asmussen & Weizel, 2010). However, only around half of children in separated families see their non-resident parent every fortnight or more (DWP, 2017).



Workless parents are **more likely** to experience relationship distress

### Poor parental mental health

25. Poor parental mental health can cause huge difficulties. For those in work, it can lead to them losing their job and then struggling to get back into work. Unable to support themselves and their family, and without the positive psychological and social support that comes from work, their mental health can decline further. All of this can make it harder for them to get back into work and support their families.
26. There is strong evidence that a person’s employment status directly impacts their psychological wellbeing. Moving from employment to worklessness is predictive of lower psychological wellbeing, even after taking account of other factors (Flint et al, 2013). While around 14 per cent of adults in full-time employment had a common mental health problem, rates were over twice as high for those who were out of work (Mental Health Foundation, 2016).

27. Poor mental health can create further barriers to work. Alongside the impact of the mental health condition itself, including the loss of motivation or confidence (Rinaldi, 2008), individuals with a history of mental illness report a reluctance amongst employers to employ them (Boardman et al, 2003). Some fear being discriminated against in the process of job seeking, at times due to previous experiences (Boyce et al, 2008), and low expectations amongst healthcare professionals who may underestimate the skills, experience and capabilities of their clients (Rinaldi, 2008).
28. DWP analysis shows that poor parental mental health is much more prevalent in families that experience problem debt, worklessness, and relationship distress (DWP, 2017). The Troubled Families Programme shows that around two in five families have at least one family member who has been identified in the last twelve months as having a mental health problem on entry to the programme (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2017).
29. A large number of children live with parents who have poor mental health. In 2014-2015, around one in four children lived with at least one parent reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression. While mothers were significantly more likely to report symptoms of anxiety or depression than fathers, for around one in ten of these children both parents reported such symptoms (DWP, 2017). For young people growing up in these environments, this can be damaging for their development. Parental depression is associated with an increased risk of subsequent behavioural and emotional difficulties in children (Marryat and Martin, 2010; Ramchandani et al, 2008). Children with mothers who had repeated mental health problems were almost twice as likely to have poorer relations with peers at age three than those whose mothers remained mentally well or who had only brief episodes of poor mental health (Marryat and Martin, 2010). Similarly, children whose fathers had persistent depression (in both the antenatal and postnatal periods) have higher risks of subsequent emotional and behavioural problems at age 3 ½, even when controlling for other factors such as maternal depression and paternal education level (Ramchandani et al, 2008).



Children in workless families are almost **twice as likely** to live with at least one parent reporting symptoms of **anxiety and/or depression**



**One in four children** lives with **at least one parent** reporting symptoms of **anxiety and/or depression**

### Parental drug and alcohol dependency

30. Drug and alcohol dependency can ruin parents' and children's lives, making existing health and employment problems worse and creating new problems that make it harder for them to recover. Both problems are closely associated with worklessness: research shows higher rates in unemployed people compared to employed people, and that substance misuse increases the risk of unemployment, and decreases the chances of employment (Burton et al, 2016). This partly reflects the often substantial physical and mental health issues lying behind substance misuse – some of which result from dependency itself, and some of which are the original triggers. In addition, there may be significant perception barriers: employers report themselves as being wary of taking on people with a history of drug problems (Klee et al, 2002).

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31. Dependent drug and alcohol misuse is associated with a wide range of harmful social and health impacts and costs for the individual, their family and community. It is both a cause and a consequence of wider factors, including poor physical and mental health, difficulties securing and sustaining employment, and housing and crime issues (Department of Health, 2007; Bauld et al, 2010). Alcohol misuse can also be an important factor in relationship breakdown (Burton et al, 2016).
32. Growing up with a parent who is addicted to drugs or alcohol can have a significant impact on a child's upbringing. In 2014/15 around 200,000 children were living with parents with alcohol dependency (DWP, 2017). Children affected by parental alcohol misuse can have a higher than average incidence of physical, psychological and behavioural problems (Burton et al, 2016). In 2011/12, the most recent year for which figures are available,<sup>3</sup> around 162,000 children were living with a parent of working age who was an opiate user (DWP, 2017).<sup>4,5</sup> Parental drug dependency can have significant adverse consequences for children at all stages of their development. These include poor physical health and wellbeing (including poor diet and poor hygiene), an increased risk of early substance misuse, a higher risk of offending behaviour and/or lower educational attainment, neglect and taking on inappropriate caring roles for siblings or dependent parents (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2003).



### Problem debt

33. Problem debt, where debt and arrears absorb an excessive proportion of family income, can place a heavy burden on families. This can create a debt spiral in which low-income families become trapped in problem debt, further reducing disposable income, increasing mental stress, and reducing the ability to meet repayments or seek help. It typically arises because of 'shocks' to income, and persistent low income. The two are often connected; an initial shock, such as unemployment, can lead to a downward cycle of debt dependence and growing debt burden (Disney et al, 2008). In 2013/14, 14 per cent of all workless households were in problem debt, compared to 6 per cent of households where both adults were working (DWP, 2017).
34. There is strong evidence that financial problems are often part of relationship breakdown (Rowlingson and McKay, 2001). In addition, there is a well-established association between problem debt and poor mental health (Fitch et al, 2007). Problem debt is found to be a common correlate with depression, anxiety and even self-harm (Hatcher, 2004; Maciejewski et al, 2000; Reading and Reynolds, 2001; Gathergood, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> 2014/15 estimates are to be published later this year.

<sup>4</sup> This may double count a small number of children where both parents are misusing opiates.

<sup>5</sup> Alcohol and opiate dependency estimates are based on adults living with children.

35. All of these issues – problem debt itself, poor mental health, family stress and relationship breakdown – have a direct impact on children. As around 660,000 children in Great Britain (six per cent) were living in households in persistent problem debt between 2011/12 and 2013/14 (DWP, 2017), this presents a serious challenge. As well as being exposed to the negative impacts of poor parental mental health and relationship breakdown, problem debt can also mean cutting back on basic necessities, such as food and clothes (Hartfree and Collard, 2014).

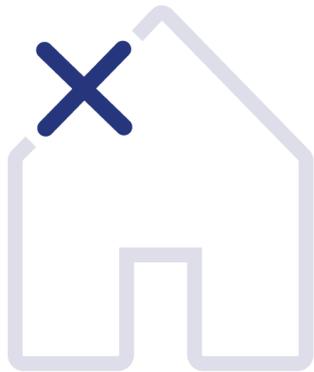


**660,000**  
**children**  
 live in households in  
 persistent problem debt

## Homelessness

36. Without a stable home, most families struggle. Adults struggle to maintain employment and children's schooling and development can be disrupted. Homelessness can present significant barriers to employment. Without a permanent address it is difficult to send and receive communications from employers (Opinion Leader Research, 2006). Lacking a proof of address can then make it difficult for people to open a bank account, a requirement for most employers (Singh, 2005). Those in temporary accommodation (as well as rough sleepers) also report employer discrimination during hiring, and dismissal once hired, when their homelessness was discovered (Opinion Leader Research, 2006).
37. Homelessness (including rough sleeping and temporary accommodation) is often accompanied by other factors which themselves present barriers to employment, including substance abuse and dependency, mental health problems, and a lack of qualifications, skills, training and experience (Opinion Leader Research, 2006; Singh, 2005).
38. Around 41,000 households with dependent children were recorded as statutorily homeless in the last twelve months in England. Since 2011 there has been an increase in the number of households with dependent children living in temporary accommodation to just over 60,000 in 2016, although this is lower than the previous peak of around 74,000 in 2005.<sup>6</sup> Such insecure housing is strongly associated with poor child health and mental health problems (DWP, 2017). Children who spend prolonged periods in temporary accommodation are more likely to demonstrate problems such as anxiety and depression than other children (British Medical Association, 2003). Moving into temporary accommodation often means changing schools, which is strongly associated with poorer attainment (Strand, 2009). The impacts of school moves are worse if there are multiple moves (Ziol-Guest and McKenna, 2013; Mehana and Reynolds, 2004). This puts children at a severe disadvantage growing up and the effects can persist into adulthood.

<sup>6</sup> Households are statutorily homeless if they are unintentionally homeless and meet a priority need category, such as having dependent children. Households in temporary accommodation have been provided accommodation by a local housing authority as part of their statutory homelessness functions.



**60,000**  
**households**  
with dependent children live  
in temporary accommodation

## Conclusion

39. We need to help families tackle the difficult issues outlined above so that they can get on with their lives. Without help, families who experience major barriers to work will struggle to overcome the problems they face. Parents will struggle to move back into work and stabilise their lives, children will struggle at school and into the future. They will be unable to take advantage of the opportunities in a fairer Britain. In the next chapter we present some policies which will do more to tackle the root causes of some of these profoundly difficult issues.

## Next steps for action

40. Tackling the complex issues that some families face is essential if we are to help them move into work and go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. The previous chapter set out how worklessness and the problems associated with it undermine families. Not only does worklessness affect income, family stability and thus child development, it often goes hand in hand with other serious issues that prevent families from getting back on their feet. In this chapter we set out some next steps to help parents overcome their problems, reduce parental conflict, and have the opportunity to give their children the benefit of the stability that work affords.
41. Government is already heavily engaged in this work. We have made great efforts to help people into work, reforming the welfare system to make work pay and introducing Universal Credit as a major step to help people move into work quicker, earn more and stay in employment for longer. We have invested in free childcare to support parents back into employment and by 2020/21 we will be spending £6 billion a year on childcare. The Government's new childcare offer will support working parents with the cost of childcare encompassing Tax-Free Childcare (up to £2,000 to help with childcare costs), offering extended entitlement to free childcare of up to 30 hours and enhanced childcare support through Universal Credit.
42. An essential part of building a Great Meritocracy is ensuring that every child has the chance to go to a good school. In *Schools that Work for Everyone*, we have set out ambitious steps to achieve this, lifting restrictions on new and expanding selective schools, and an expectation that universities and independent schools do more to support state schools, including through sponsoring or setting them up. Budget 2017 announced the expansion of the current 'extended rights' entitlement to free home-to-school travel to cover selective schools. This will help to ensure that the cost of transport is not a barrier to children from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing the best possible education. Since the introduction of the Pupil Premium five years ago, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed both at primary and secondary levels (DWP, 2017).
43. As announced in *Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability* Green Paper, we are introducing an enhanced offer of support specifically for new Employment and Support Allowance claimants called the Personal Support Package, which is tailored to people's individual needs to support them on a journey towards employment. We asked Dame Carol Black to review the employment support for drug and alcohol dependent claimants and the forthcoming Drug Strategy will set out further plans to improve the lives of those facing substance dependency.
44. As outlined by the Prime Minister in January, the burning injustice of mental health and inadequate treatment demands a new approach from government and society as a whole. We are transforming the way we deal with mental health problems at every stage of a person's life: not only in our hospitals, but in our classrooms, at work and in our communities. We will make sure that children and young people get the support they need by introducing new support for schools, with every secondary school in the country to be offered mental health first aid training and new trials to look at how to strengthen the links between schools and local NHS mental health staff. We are bringing forward a green paper on children and young people's mental health to set out plans to transform services in schools, universities and for families, and we will eliminate inappropriate placements to inpatient beds for children and young people by 2020/21.

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45. We want to make housing more secure and affordable so as to help those who work hard but struggle to get by. The recent White Paper on Housing, *Fixing our broken housing market*, contained measures to ensure the housing market works better, including for those on lower incomes, renters, disabled and older people. The Government is investing over £500 million this Parliament to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in England, including a £50 million Homelessness Prevention Programme. We are currently supporting the Homelessness Reduction Bill to make sure more people get the support they need to avoid homelessness.
46. To prevent households from falling into debt, we recently launched the Help to Save scheme, where families on low incomes receive a 50 per cent Government bonus on up to £50 of monthly savings. We have made free debt advice available through the Money Advice Service.
47. Because we realise that sometimes all of these problems elide, crucially in 2012 we established the Troubled Families Programme and renewed it at the start of this Parliament.
48. However, we know that there is further to go. Around ten per cent of children still live in households in which no one has been in work for 12 months or more (DWP, 2017). Many of these live in families that face complex barriers to work and which suffer from additional strains. In this chapter we set out four major policies that together will support parents with complex problems back into work, reduce stress and conflict in workless families, and tackle collectively the multiple disadvantages facing too many children and families.

### The next phase of the Troubled Families Programme

49. The Troubled Families Programme is currently working to help disadvantaged families with complex needs. However to ensure that the programme reflects our new analysis and deeper understanding of the problems that families face, **we will use the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme to encourage a greater emphasis on tackling worklessness and issues associated with it – such as parental conflict and problem debt – driving more joined up working across services, and delivering savings for the taxpayer in the long term.** By doing more to tackle these problems we will help more families enjoy the benefits of work and a stable home. This will be done without diminishing the other vital work the programme does across the many other problems that families experience, including mental and physical health problems, or domestic abuse.
50. Under the first programme, more than 116,000 families in England saw significant improvements: children back into school, reduced youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and for more than 18,000 of those families, adults in work. The evaluation of the first Troubled Families Programme<sup>7</sup> found that the programme had succeeded in positively changing the way local authorities help families with complex problems – expanding the family intervention workforce, improving the way data is used locally to both identify and support families, and driving better ways of working between different local services. The second programme (2015-2020) has already learnt from the experiences of the first and is continuing to improve lives. We want to build on the strengths of the current programme and its focus on improved outcomes across a wide range of problems, and, crucially, its understanding of how these problems interconnect.
51. The programme is driving service reform, bringing together many different local organisations – from Jobcentre Plus, to Children’s Services specialists and others – to consider how best to achieve positive outcomes for families. But learning from two years of programme delivery, now is the time to consider whether the programme’s design and funding model is incentivising the best possible performance against its overall programme objectives.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-first-troubled-families-programme>

52. To ensure that the Programme works even better for workless families with complex needs in the next phase of the programme, we will now:
- Ensure that the next phase of the programme has an even greater emphasis on the multiple disadvantages associated with worklessness, given how integral these are to improving families' and children's outcomes;
  - Place greater emphasis on the importance of service reform, and ensure that local programmes are informed by evidence and robust cost benefit analysis;
  - Review the programme's payment model to ensure that we have the incentives right to drive long-term sustainable improvements in services and for families.

### Case study of good practice in joined-up service delivery: Michaela, Birmingham

Michaela is a mother of seven who lives with her children in social housing in Birmingham. Following the death of her ex-partner, the children's father, Michaela was off work on sick leave from a part time job, she also had serious financial problems and was at risk of eviction. Michaela was referred to the Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Pathfinder Project, which works closely with the Birmingham Troubled Families Team. The Pathfinder is a partnership of six special schools whose staff receive additional training to offer sustained, enhanced support to pupils and their families with complex needs, as part of a multi-agency team, typically including professionals such as a school nurse; a mental health worker; a substance misuse worker; a youth offending service social worker; as well as a DWP Troubled Families Employment Advisor (TFEA).

Teachers noticed a dip in the attendance of one of Michaela's sons, Billy, and as his behaviour was also increasingly difficult to manage, he was assigned a keyworker from the Pathfinder Project. The keyworker made a home visit where she identified a number of problems, including Michaela's high rent arrears. At this point Jackie, the DWP TFEA, was brought in to support the family's multiple problems. Michaela told Jackie she didn't envisage returning to work because of the emotional strain her financial instability was placing on both her and her children.

Through this programme, Jackie gave Michaela advice around financial planning and helped her to consolidate her debts. She also carried out an "entitled to" assessment to show how, by staying in work, Michaela would be better off. Jackie advised Michaela about the benefits of remaining in work and gave support to help build her confidence. After making her debts more manageable, and receiving advice on how to tackle them, Michaela felt an improvement in her emotional wellbeing and returned to work. She followed the debt repayment plan drawn up by Jackie and was able to stay in her home.

In addition to providing support to Michaela, Jackie identified that she could also help one of her daughters who was out of work on Income Support and her son who was about to leave school. Jackie met Michaela's daughter, Chloe, at the family home where she gave practical advice about looking for a job and helped her to prepare a CV and cover letter. Within a week, Chloe got an interview and was offered a position as a Childcare Assistant.

Michaela's son, Lee, was interested in mechanics, but had left school without gaining any qualifications. Jackie advised Lee to apply for work experience in a local garage and supported him to secure a placement. Jackie then helped the employer to access funding from the Youth Enterprise Initiative in order to develop Lee's work experience placement into an apprenticeship.

*Names have been changed in this case study to protect the identities of the individuals involved.*

## The role of Jobcentre Plus

53. Helping people overcome their barriers to work is essential if we are to help parents to better support themselves and their families. To do this we need to ensure that people get the advice and support they need when they need it. As the above analysis on worklessness shows, it is important that claimants with more complex needs receive the services they require. Jobcentre Plus has a major role to play in this work, but because it cannot tackle this complexity on its own it needs to work with local partners. **Jobcentre Plus will go further to reflect the importance of work with all relevant local partners.** To support the renewed focus on worklessness and the drive for transformed services through the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme, Jobcentre Plus will be involved at a strategic level and will better join up its services with local troubled families teams. Local authorities and their local partners will use a new self-assessment tool developed by the Troubled Families Programme to assess progress towards joining up services around families and better integrate what they offer and how they deliver.
54. Our vision is for joined-up services in Universal Credit, based on these core principles:
- Identification of people with complex needs/barriers, at the right time, and clarity on what the barriers are at point of need;
  - Properly trained staff to identify and tailor employment support and conditionality, and refer to other appropriate services;
  - Strong partnership working in local communities between Jobcentre Plus, local authorities, wider public services and the voluntary sector, so that all parties are aware of what local provision and support is available and can work together to address the claimants' barriers (both on an individual and strategic level);
  - Information sharing between partners so that they can share relevant information with each other and can more efficiently address the claimants' barriers (including automated sharing of data).
55. To get there, we are:
- Committed to Jobcentre Plus participating in the local authority self-assessment to see how effective they are at joined-up working with key partners (the self-assessment tool is known as the Early Help Service Transformation Maturity Model, developed by the Troubled Families Programme as outlined above);
  - Setting new expectations for Jobcentre Plus. To make sure Jobcentre Plus works well with partners to achieve the best results for families, we will set expectations about its membership of local strategic boards (such as Health and Wellbeing Boards). We will also set an expectation that work coaches know and can take advantage of joint working with other services so that they are best able to give support to claimants with complex problems.
56. This Government is determined to do more to support workless families with disabilities. A disability or health condition should not dictate the path a person is able to take in life, or in the workplace. What should count is a person's talents and their determination and aspiration to succeed. As discussed above, the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme will have a greater focus on helping workless families. As 44 per cent of workless families on the Troubled Families Programme have an adult who is out of work due to a health problem, this change should mean that more disabled families receive personalised back-to-work support. However, we also know that too often people who become disabled wait too long for support through the programme. Building on the evidence of the positive impact of work set out in *Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper*, **we will test approaches to improving Employment and Support Allowance Work-Related Activity Group (ESA WRAG) claimants' access to the range of employment and other support available to them.** This will include exploring improved information sharing, with Jobcentre Plus now sharing information with the local authority. This will mean that families who move into ESA WRAG will be able to benefit from earlier access to support from local services including, where appropriate, the Troubled Families Programme.

## Tackling dependency

57. Parental drug and alcohol dependency is a major barrier to work and can have a terrible impact on adults' and children's lives. Just as being dependent on drugs and alcohol can make it harder for people to work, we understand that employment, and planning for employment, can be crucial in helping people to recover from their dependency. As Dame Carol Black noted in her review of employment and drug and alcohol dependency, within and after treatment for dependency there must be meaningful activity, preferably work, otherwise the void and boredom risks being filled by a return to old habits. As recommended by Dame Carol, **we will bring forward a trial of the Individual and Placement Support approach to support those dependent on drugs and alcohol back into employment.** We want to place employment at the centre of the recovery journey where work is assessed to be a good option as part of therapeutic treatment for the individual. We will also work to **build a network of peer mentors, to act as advocates and trusted role models for those dependent on drugs and alcohol.** This will augment our existing plans to do this for those whose physical or mental health issues make it more difficult to take up employment. Our aim is that peer mentors will help them to move towards or into work. We will also **expand eligibility for the Access to Work fund so that it provides drug and alcohol dependent people who are on a treatment programme with the support they need to enter or continue in work.**

## Reducing parental conflict

58. Parental conflict destabilises relationships and damages children's upbringing, potentially harming their opportunities well into the future. Children's chances in life are strongly influenced by their parents' relationship – whether they are together or separated. The damage which parental conflict can cause has long-term negative impacts on children, and can result from parental conflict across the spectrum, from lack of warmth and emotional distance right through to violence. Domestic abuse is already widely recognised as an issue that needs to be addressed within families and the Prime Minister recently announced plans to transform the way we think about and tackle domestic violence and abuse. Our focus here is on conflict below that threshold. We now understand more about the mechanism through which children's outcomes are affected by parental conflict: that it directly impacts on children's wellbeing as well as the adults' parenting practices. We also know that relationship distress is almost three times as prevalent in workless couple-parent families compared to when both parents are working (DWP, 2017).
59. **In the light of the strength of the evidence on the damaging impact on children of parental conflict we are launching a new programme to embed proven parental conflict provision in local areas.** We will work with the Troubled Families Programme to support local areas across England to improve the effectiveness of their family services, drawing on lessons from our Local Family Offer trial which has supported twelve areas to link parental conflict support into other local services for families. We know, for example, that local authorities commission parenting classes, but these have limited impact if parents are in conflict. We plan to develop the cost-benefit framework presented in the Analysis and Research Pack alongside this document, to help demonstrate more clearly for local commissioners the savings that could be made to the public purse from investing in reducing parental conflict. This will demonstrate the importance of tackling parental conflict to promoting children's health and educational outcomes, as well as other priorities for local commissioners. We will offer all local areas support to train relevant frontline practitioners in identifying parental conflict and referring families onto appropriate services.
60. Our programme will focus on parents experiencing relationship issues, whether they are together or separated, and in particular on the workless families who are at the centre of our approach. We will shortly be launching an opportunity for organisations to bid to deliver evidence-based work to reduce parental conflict. This will increase the supply of quality services available to local commissioners. Successful bidders will deliver help face-to-face for workless families using interventions which have been shown to make a difference to the quality of inter-parental relationships, and parents' ability to collaborate. Our approach to these contracts will help improve the spread of services and represents

a significant step towards giving all local commissioners access to evidence-based parental conflict provision. Bidders will need to demonstrate that they are able to deliver effective services and that they have robust strategies for securing appropriate referrals from local agencies. Alongside this we will fund more training for practitioners to deliver proven interventions, including Troubled Families key workers, so that there is more help available to meet the needs of families.

61. We understand the importance of both mothers and fathers to children's future outcomes – regardless of whether couples are together or separated. But we often hear that services are less likely to identify men as parents and consider them as having responsibilities to their children. We are ensuring that both mothers and fathers are supported through our parental conflict programme and will continue to look at whether more can be done to ensure services recognise fathers and help them play a full and active role in their children's lives.
62. Our new programme will be enhanced by stronger 'what works' activity to build and disseminate the evidence of the damaging impacts of parental conflict and how local areas can address it. This will be supported by a new resource providing evidence on family disadvantage and child development. This is being developed as part of this document (see below). By helping parents to defuse tensions in their relationships we can help them create a more supportive and stable family environment for themselves and their children.

### Driving local service transformation

63. We believe in the good that government can do and we know that the costs of inaction can be high to individuals, communities and society. If we want to make a meaningful and sustainable difference to the lives of the families and children discussed here, we need to change how we do things, as well as changing what we do. The policies we are announcing, taken together, will drive service transformation, system reform and culture change in local areas, through better joined-up working and use of evidence within government.
64. At the heart of our work to encourage the development of better services for families with complex problems is our new evidence base. Using this evidence we are developing a resource which sets out a detailed picture of how multiple disadvantage can interact and impact on families and children from childhood to young adulthood. This brings together for the first time knowledge on child development from the combined perspectives of education, health, family relationships and work.
65. The resource has the potential to hold a growing evidence base for workless families with multiple disadvantage, and it could be expanded to capture examples of interventions at different levels (national, regional, local, organisational). We will engage others to develop this evidence and co-produce practical tools that will enable commissioners and a wide range of front-line practitioners to better understand multiple disadvantage and make better informed decisions about what action is worth taking. This first version has been developed in conjunction with Professor Gordon Harold, University of Sussex. It runs from pre-conception to 25 and is structured according to accepted age-and-stage phases from early years, middle childhood and adolescence to young adulthood.

### Devolution

66. Of the new policies we are introducing in this document, two (the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme and the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme) are England only. We recognise that these are devolved matters, and that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will bring forward their own policies to tackle these issues as they consider appropriate. Matters relating to Jobcentre Plus in Scotland and Wales are reserved, and so the policies we are bringing forward to deliver better partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and local partners, along with some of the measures to tackle drug and alcohol dependency identified as part of Dame Carol Black's review, will have implications in these devolved administrations. We will work with the devolved administrations in

Scotland and Wales to ensure these measures can be delivered effectively in their administrations, and are looking to share our evidence and analysis with all three devolved administrations.

## Conclusion

67. To build a fairer society, we need to give more people the opportunity to go as far as their talents and hard work will take them. This means helping some families overcome complex issues that hold them back from working or make life harder, so that they can take advantage of the opportunities in a fairer Britain. Through the actions announced here, we will be able to improve the support given to workless families and their children so that they can overcome the complex problems they face. We know that there are no quick fixes, that entrenched problems can take time to improve and that services need to gradually embed new ways of working. But we are confident that these measures will help families and children stand a better chance of going as far as their talents and hard work will take them.

## Tracking progress

68. In the Case for Change we set out the compelling evidence for the strain that worklessness and problems associated with worklessness have on families and children. We want more parents to experience strong relationships, whether together or separated, so that they can best support each other and their children. We want people to be able to enjoy the benefits of work and give their children the stability that comes with it. The policies we are bringing forward will build on the work the Government is already doing to help families overcome these issues and stabilise their lives. They will also help to bring about longer-term improvements in the way services work together so as to improve the quality of support that people receive. In order to drive this agenda in the future and track progress, we are introducing seven non-statutory indicators (alongside two statutory indicators).
69. The Analysis and Research Pack sets out the comprehensive evidence base underpinning this document. Each indicator is given a separate section, which begins with an overview of the evidence base and the rationale behind the chosen measures. We then present the latest data and trends, along with methodology and contextual analysis to enhance understanding of each indicator. We have also included a summary of the available evidence, drawing together key findings from a range of studies and surveys, with accompanying references for further reading.

### National indicators

70. We are publishing nine national indicators and underlying measures to track progress in tackling the disadvantages that affect families' and children's outcomes, as borne out in our evidence and analysis. These indicators have been carefully developed and rigorously tested with external academics. While the measures may not be immune from external influences, as a suite, they underline the strength of this Government's long-term commitment to improving the prospects of disadvantaged families.

71. There are six parental indicator areas with supporting measures to track worklessness and the associated disadvantages:

| Indicator areas                    | Measures  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Parental worklessness</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of children in workless households (<b>statutory</b>)</li> <li>Proportion of children in long-term workless households (<b>statutory</b>)</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Parental conflict</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of children in couple-parent families living with parents who report relationship distress</li> <li>Proportion of children in separated families who see their non-resident parents regularly</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Poor parental mental health</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of children living with at least one parent reporting symptoms of anxiety and/or depression</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Drug and alcohol dependency</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of parents<sup>8</sup> who are opiate users</li> <li>Of parent opiate users entering treatment in the last 3 years, the proportion completing successfully<sup>9</sup></li> <li>Number of alcohol dependent parents</li> <li>Of alcohol dependent parents entering treatment in the last 3 years, the proportion completing successfully</li> </ul> |
| <b>Problem debt</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of children living in households in persistent problem debt</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Homelessness</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of households with dependent children in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households with dependent children</li> </ul>  |

72. There are three outcome indicator areas with supporting measures for children and young people:

| Indicator areas               | Measures   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Early years</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the school year when children turn five (all pupils and Free School Meals pupils)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Educational attainment</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational attainment at Key Stage 2 of all pupils and of disadvantaged pupils</li> <li>Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 of all pupils (<b>statutory</b>) and of disadvantaged pupils (<b>statutory</b>)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Youth employment</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of people 16–24 that are not in education, employment or training</li> <li>Proportion of young people aged 18 to 24 who have not been in employment or full-time education for two years or more</li> </ul>    |

73. Four of these measures – as marked in the tables – are set out in primary legislation. The Government has a statutory duty to report data annually to Parliament on parental worklessness and children’s education attainment at age 16. We will publish the latest data on non-statutory indicators each year.

<sup>8</sup> Parents in all drug and alcohol dependency measures are defined as adults living with children. They are not necessarily birth parents.

<sup>9</sup> Drug and alcohol recovery measures are based on adults living with children or where they are pregnant.

## Local data

74. As part of *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*, we are making public our latest analysis and the evidence base about multiple disadvantage. This will enable local authorities, local partners and others to understand the complex factors of disadvantage in their local area and take practical action to improve children's outcomes. As part of this evidence-sharing approach we propose to make available local level data on the factors of disadvantage via a local government data tool (LG Inform). The table below sets out the data currently available at local level.

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Parental worklessness</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of children in out-of-work benefit households</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Parental conflict</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Our national indicator is a new statistic and there is no suitable proxy at a local level at this time. Estimates are in development and will be added when they become available.</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Poor parental mental health</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Our national indicator is a new statistic and there is no suitable proxy at a local level at this time. Estimates are in development and will be added when they become available.</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Drug and alcohol dependency</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Data on parent opiate users at a local level is in development and will be added when it becomes available.</i></li> <li>Of parent opiate users entering treatment in the last 3 years, the proportion completing successfully</li> <li><i>Data on alcohol dependent parents at a local level is in development and will be added when it becomes available.</i></li> <li>Of alcohol dependent parents entering treatment in the last 3 years, the proportion completing successfully</li> </ul> |
| <b>Problem debt</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of adults who are over-indebted</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Homelessness</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of households with dependent children in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households with dependent children</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Early years</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the school year when children turn five (all pupils and Free School Meals pupils)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational attainment at Key Stage 2 of all pupils and of disadvantaged pupils</li> <li>Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 of all pupils and of disadvantaged pupils</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Youth employment</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of people aged 16–24 that are claiming unemployment-related benefits</li> </ul>  |

## Conclusion

75. We need to build a country that works for everyone. To do this we need to track how well we are helping families tackle the complex issues they face. The indicators and evidence base set out above form a framework for action – and in doing so, help to drive improvements in children's and families' lives, now and over time. By targeting services on the issues that prevent parents moving into work and cause instability in family life, the Government, working with local authorities and other partners, can help workless families and their children overcome their problems and improve their lives.

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