



**Chris Heaton-Harris**  
Member of Parliament for Daventry  
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Tel: 020 7219 7048

November 2020

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about child poverty.

I can assure you that eradicating child poverty is an absolute priority for the Government. I proudly stood on a manifesto that pledged to continue efforts through the tax and benefits system to reduce poverty, including child poverty and I firmly believe that children should grow up in an environment with no limits to their potential. Indeed, the Government is making it a priority to put more money in the pockets of low-paid workers.

The way we measured child poverty in the past, based on median income, was deeply flawed. For example, by this measure the number of children in poverty went down significantly during the last economic recession. So new measures have been introduced to focus on the root causes of poverty, chief among them being educational attainment and levels of work within a family.

The Prime Minister's made and is keeping to a clear commitment to do whatever it takes to support people during the Coronavirus crisis and I welcome that this has included a number of measures to protect children and ensure no child goes hungry. Due to the pandemic, I know that many children and parents in and around my constituency faced an entirely unprecedented situation over the summer. To reflect this, additional funding was provided for a 'Covid Summer Food Fund' which enabled children who are eligible for free school meals to receive food vouchers covering the 6-week holiday period.

This is part of the wider support available for children and families at this challenging time. An additional £63 million has been distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials. In addition, Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit have been uplifted by around £1,000 a year for the next 12 months as part of an injection of over £6.5 billion into the welfare system.

The old income-based child poverty measures, introduced in the Child Poverty Act 2010, did not address the root causes of poverty. That is why the Welfare Reform and Work Act repealed the 2010



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measures and introduced new life chances measures of worklessness and educational attainment. Annual reporting on these new measures will ensure action is focussed in the areas that the evidence shows are most important for children's life chances.

Setting targets based on relative income does not encourage policymakers to address the underlying causes of poverty. In fact it led the previous Government to simply spend more and more money on income transfers to lift people just over the poverty threshold, without doing anything about why those people were in poverty in the first place. The relative income measures showed the number of children in relative poverty falling during the last recession because of falling median incomes, but in reality children were not better off at all.

Ministers have committed to continuing to publish official data annually on low incomes in the Households Below Average Income statistics. These figures include measures of both relative and absolute low income and will be there for all to see.

The "family test" has been formalised as part of the impact assessment for all domestic policies, meaning the Government is always thinking about the impact of its actions on families. Additionally, the Marriage Allowance recognises marriage in the tax system and means families up and down the country can get a little bit of extra support and financial security.

The level of support for childcare costs within Universal Credit has increased from 70% to 85%. This support is available to lone parents who are in paid work regardless of the number of hours they work. This helps ensure families with children are not disadvantaged when seeking work or looking to progress in their career, perhaps by taking on more hours. This is part of a wider package of increased childcare provision. This includes an extra 15 hours of free childcare available to working parents of 3 and 4 year-olds since September 2017, and the gradual introduction of Tax-Free Childcare for working parents of children aged up to 12 and disabled children aged up to 17.

On top of all this there are plenty more initiatives in this area. For example, the Soft Drinks Industry Levy raised £251 million between April and October 2019. This money goes toward doubling the Primary Sports Premium, the creation of a Healthy Pupils Capital Fund to help schools upgrade their sports facilities – designed to give children access to top quality PE equipment and give a funding boost for healthy school breakfast clubs.

I will be keeping a close watch on this issue and will do all I can to ensure our children are protected from poverty, but my final point is a political one (even though it shouldn't be!) The best way to move children out of poverty is to have an economy where people are allowed, encouraged even, to be create wealth and businesses are encouraged to thrive. The tax then paid means government has more money to spend on improving education and health provision and means everyone has the chance to succeed – and a good education means access to better jobs and higher levels of income.



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Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**  
**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**