

Child Poverty and Free School Meals

Free School Meals

Key information

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The Mayor should publish a strategy for tackling child poverty in London as figures show one in three children in the capital are growing up in poverty, according to the **London Assembly Economy Committee**.

Its investigation found that while London is one of the wealthiest cities in the world, a third of children in the capital grow up in poverty, and parts of London have some of the highest child poverty rates in the country. The Committee explored the policy of free school meals, and scrutinised the Mayor's programme of universal free school meals for primary school children. It agreed that a long term funding settlement for universal free school meals is essential to address child poverty in London.

Across two evidence gathering sessions as part of an investigation into child poverty and free school meals, the Committee heard from organisations including 4in10, Child Poverty Action Group, Pecan and Trust for London.

The Committee heard that there are multiple drivers of child poverty in London. These include low pay and insecure work, the benefits system, the cost of housing in London and additional costs such as childcare.

The percentage of children living in relative poverty after housing costs in London in 2019-10 to 2021-22 was 33 per cent, which amounts to around 700,000 children.

The Committee heard that growing up in poverty can have detrimental effects in relation to mental and physical health, education, housing and crime.

It has published its report, with findings including:

- Poorer households spend a greater share of their income on basic services such as food and energy, and have therefore been disproportionately impacted by rises in inflation.

- Rates of child poverty differ considerably across demographic groups, with children of single parents, children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups and children living in a family where someone is disabled more likely to be living in poverty than other groups.
- Work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty in London, due to the prevalence of low pay and insecure work.
- London needs a long-term funding settlement for universal free school meals provision for primary school children. The Mayor's funding for a universal free school meals programme is welcome. However, funding is not guaranteed in the long-term.

The Committee makes **nine** recommendations to the Mayor, including:

- The Mayor, working in conjunction with local authorities and the voluntary sector, should publish a child poverty strategy for London in 2024-25.
- The Mayor should continue to work with both public and private sector employers in London to encourage and incentivise them to become London Living Wage employers.
- The Mayor should use his convening role to assist London boroughs to implement auto-enrolment processes for free school meals and pupil premium.
- The Mayor should use the findings of the evaluation into his universal free school meals programme to lobby the Government to introduce a long-term funding settlement for universal free school meals for all primary school children in London.

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