



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2018-0028, 7 February 2018

Strengthening Families

Summary

This House of Commons Library debate pack briefing has been prepared in advance of a debate entitled "Strengthening Families". This will take place in Westminster Hall on 8 February 2018 at 1:30pm and will be led by Fiona Bruce MP. This debate pack contains background information, parliamentary material, press articles, and further reading suggestions which Members may find useful when preparing for this debate.

In September 2017, Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Farmer, with the support of over 50 other Conservative MPs and Peers, published a set of proposals called [A Manifesto for Families](#). The policies in this document aimed to create "stronger families" which would, in turn it was argued, result in better social mobility, families which are less reliant on state support, and children with better physical and mental health.

The manifesto touches upon a variety of different policy areas, including early intervention, benefits and tax credits, drugs policy, the Armed Forces Covenant, childcare and parenting services, children's mental health services, prisoners' family ties, and relationship education. Background information on all these policy areas, and how they relate to families, is provided in this briefing.

Following the publication of this manifesto, Lord Farmer [led a House of Lords debate](#) on its proposals on 2 November 2017. The House of Lords Library published [a briefing in advance of this debate](#) which provided further information on the relevant issues concerned.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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1. Background

1.1 “A Manifesto for Families”

In September 2017, Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Farmer, with the support of over 50 other Conservative MPs and Peers, published a set of proposals called [A Manifesto for Families](#) (referred to hereafter as the Families Manifesto). The policies in this document aimed to create ‘stronger families’ which the authors believed would have benefits including:

- better social mobility;
- families less reliant on state support; and
- better physical and mental health among children.

The Manifesto proposes policy changes in eight areas:

A. Create a Government focused on supporting families.

Appoint a Cabinet-level Minister to ensure family policies are prioritised and coordinated. Ensure that in each department a senior Minister is responsible for delivering policies to strengthen families and for carrying out Family Impact Assessments.

B. Encourage every Local Authority to work with voluntary and private sector partners to deliver Family Hubs.

The Government should encourage and enable Councils to develop Family Hubs which co-locate superb early years health and other services with help for parents with children across the age ranges, and develop relationship support services for couples in distress or at risk of separation.

C. Promote the importance of active fatherhood in a child’s life.

To ensure fathers are involved as much as possible from day one, maternity services should review and improve their support for fathers. Legal changes mandating fathers to be named on birth certificates should be brought into force.

D. Remove financial disincentives for those on low incomes to form lasting couple relationships.

Boost the marriage allowance for lower income couples with children and enable those on Universal Credit and entitled to marriage allowance to receive it automatically. Reduce remaining couple penalties in Universal Credit.

E. Use childcare funding to support parenting. Taking part in a weekly Stay and Play session with their two year old child should be a requirement of accepting free childcare provision where the parent is not in work.

F. Promote healthy relationships to tackle the country’s mental health crisis.

Ensure children and young people’s mental health services help families, offering couple counselling where this is needed. Any child experiencing domestic violence should be offered support.

G. Relationship education should promote a culture that supports stronger families. Relationship education should promote the importance of commitment and go beyond the classroom with a Government-funded online platform targeted at enabling young people to develop good relationships.

H. Help prisons to put the role of families at the heart of efforts to reduce reoffending. Family and other supportive relationships must be treated as indispensable to the success of the Government's reforms which aim to make prisons safer and reduce re-offending.¹

The Manifesto explains its specific policy recommendations in more detail, and much of this debate pack (sections 1.2 to 1.8) provides background information on some of these policies.

The House of Lords Library also published a briefing paper on the [Debate on the possible impact of *A Manifesto for Families*](#) that took place on 2 November 2017, which also outlines many of the Manifesto's proposals in more detail. The [Lords debate on *A Manifesto for Families*](#) is available via Hansard online.

1.2 Government policy towards families

The Manifesto calls for a greater recognition of families within Government by appointing Family Ministers at both Cabinet and Departmental levels. It further encourages the Government to publish an annual report on its progress in "strengthening families".

In 2012, the then Coalition Government published a policy document entitled [Social Justice: transforming lives](#). Chapter 1, "Supporting Families", outlined the problems that the Government saw within the family unit, including the quality and stability of relationships, and policies that acted as a disincentive to the formation of couples.

The Government then outlined how it intended to deal with these issues:

- reform of the welfare system so that those in receipt of benefits are not penalised for forming a couple (see section 1.5 for more details);
- £30 million over the following four years to provide relationship support for couples. This was to be directed towards "expert providers" in the third sector;
- £20 million to help separated and separating parents, and an extra £10 million on legal aid for family mediation; and
- accepting the recommendations of the 2011 [Family Justice Review](#).²

In April 2013, the Government published [Social Justice: transforming lives - One year on](#). This detailed how the money committed the year before had been spent, as well as progress made by the Government in:

- promoting positive family relationships (including counselling and educational classes, and providing helplines and online help pages to help parents dealing with difficult behaviours);

¹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017

² HM Government, [Social Justice: transforming lives](#), Cm 8314, March 2012

- supporting early years – including increasing the numbers of [Family Nurse Partnerships](#) and extending the offer of free childcare to working families;
- supporting Troubled Families – by adding a conjoined network of advisors from Jobcentre Plus to the Troubled Families programme to help adults in vulnerable families to find work;
- supporting separating families – including making contact orders more neutral, encouraging couples to make arrangements outside of court or the Child Maintenance Service, a new “Sorting out Separation” app, and testing interventions to reduce conflict;
- improving the adoption and care system; and
- tackling domestic violence – including a new definition of abuse, making victims easier to identify, and easing conditions for victims claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance.

In October 2014, the then Government announced the introduction of “Family Tests” when a new policy is developed. Since then, Government departments have been encouraged to apply this test whenever making a policy which affects individuals, families or communities. In particular, departments are encouraged to consider five questions:

- what kinds of impact might the policy have on family formation?
- what kind of impact will the policy have on families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities or the onset of a long-term health condition?
- what impacts will the policy have on all family members’ ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities?
- how does the policy impact families before, during and after couple separation?
- how does the policy impact those families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown?³

Family Tests are not mandatory. Private Member’s Bills have attempted to make Family Tests a statutory requirement, including the [Assessment of Government Policies \(Impact on Families\) Bill 2015-16](#) and the [Family Relationships \(Impact Assessment and Targets\) Bill \[HL\] 2017-19](#) (currently before Parliament). The Manifesto calls for the latter Bill to be supported by the Government.

In December 2017, Fiona Bruce asked various departments about their efforts to support families. Their answers provide a useful outline of each Department’s perspective in this regard: they can be seen in section 3.1 below. What follows is an examination of those policy areas which the authors of the Manifesto believe affect families and can be used to strengthen them.

1.3 Drugs policy

In July 2017, the Government published its new [Drugs strategy](#), in which it announced the appointment of a new “Recovery champion”, chairing the Drug Strategy Board. The Recovery Champion will be

The House of Commons Library has published a paper on the [Family Test](#) which provides further information.

More information on the Drugs Strategy can be found in the Commons Library debate pack on [Drugs Policy](#) from July 2017.

³ Department for Work and Pensions, [Family Test: Guidance for Government Departments](#), 31 October 2014

responsible for “for driving and supporting collaboration between local authorities, public employment services, housing providers and criminal justice partners, ensuring that these critical public services are able to contribute fully towards securing effective outcomes for individuals suffering drug dependence”.⁴

The authors of *A Manifesto for Families* believe the Recovery Champion should also publish an annual report on how families are being involved in the recovery process. They also go on to say that the Drugs Strategy Board should also consider how “parents can be supported to prevent addiction to drugs and alcohol from developing in young people”.⁵

1.4 Armed forces

A Manifesto for Families also suggests that there should provision of parenting and relationship support for military families, outside of the military, as part of the Armed Forces Covenant (referred to as the “Military Covenant” in *A Manifesto for Families*). The Ministry of Defence published a [UK armed forces families’ strategy](#) in 2016 which stated: “we recognise and value the essential contribution that Service families make to Defence”. Specific measures aimed at Service Families are summarised in the annual updates to the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and its core principles were enshrined in law, for the first time, in the *Armed Forces Act 2011*. The Covenant applies to all three services and articulates the view that the nation has a moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces Community in return for the sacrifices they make. Specifically, the Covenant outlines two core principles:

- no disadvantage: no current or former member of the armed forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services;
- special consideration: special consideration is appropriate in some cases, particularly for those who have been injured or bereaved.

The Covenant does not currently create legally enforceable duties or services.

1.5 Family hubs and early intervention

The establishment and running of Sure Start children’s centres has been a statutory duty of local authorities since 2009. Each children’s centre must deliver, or provide information about, early childhood services, which are defined as:

- early years provision (early education and childcare);
- social services functions of the local authority relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
- health services relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
- training and employment services to assist parents or prospective parents; and

The Library papers on the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) and [Support for UK Veterans](#), provide further information regarding the covenant and services for people who have served in the armed forces.

⁴ Home Office, [Appointment of a Recovery Champion](#), September 2017

⁵ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017

- information and advice services for parents and prospective parents.

The idea behind these centres was to provide support for vulnerable children at an early stage, to improve the life chances of children born into vulnerable families.

A Manifesto for Families argues in favour of expanding the remit of children's centres to help all families with children regardless of age; the so-called "Family Hub" model. Family Hubs are described as:

[...] 'one stop shops' offering families with children and young people, aged 0-19, early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships. Such provision is typically co-located with superb early years health care and support - such as in transformed Children's Centres - supplementing and not supplanting these vital services. The Government should put in place a transformation fund and national task force to encourage Local Authorities to move towards this Family Hub model, working closely with charities and local businesses, that will particularly help children in need.⁶

In July 2016, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres published a report, [Family Hubs: The Future of Children's Centres](#). The APPG believed that children's centres could be expanded to provide support for:

- employment (training, links to Jobcentre Plus);
- relationships (such as counselling and classes);
- child care;
- pulling together specialist services;
- making the provision of mental health services easier via better integration with other services; and
- earlier intervention⁷

The Children's Commissioner for England, building upon the work of the APPG, also published a report, [Family Hubs: a discussion paper](#), which was supportive of the model as a way of delivering "holistic, early intervention services to a whole community", in particular vulnerable families.⁸

The APPG on Children's Centres highlighted that Family Hubs have been shown to integrate with other Government initiatives such as the Troubled Families Programme. The Programme encourages local authorities in England to identify "troubled families" with multiple issues, such as crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse. The council then usually assigns a case worker to help the family deal with these particular problems.

See the Commons Library briefing paper on the [Troubled Families Programme \(England\)](#).

⁶ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017, p7

⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres, [Family Hubs: The Future of Children's Centres](#), July 2016

⁸ Children's Commissioner for England, [Family Hubs: a discussion paper](#), October 2016

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) policy paper, [Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#), published in April 2017 set out an evidence base for the impact of worklessness and conflict on children.

As part of the launch, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced £30 million of funding over three years for relationship support for families experiencing worklessness, which would be delivered through the Troubled Families Programme. Before this announcement, Government-funded parenting classes, available to all parents, were trialled between 2011 and 2014, but plans to extend these were dropped in December 2016.

More information can be found in the [Commons Library briefing paper on early intervention](#).⁹

Parenting

A Manifesto for Families calls for fathers to be more involved in maternity services at an earlier stage. It also argues that:

Government should bring into force Schedule 6 of the 2010 Welfare Reform Act which requires all fathers to be included on Birth Certificates (with appropriate exemptions). As well as improving child maintenance, this would enable local authorities to identify almost all fathers in their local area and [...] ensure support could be offered to fathers at an early stage.¹⁰

Section 1.2 of the Lords Library briefing on the [Debate on the impact of the 'A Manifesto for Families'](#) provides details on shared parental leave and the current status of fathers on birth certificates.

More information on shared parental leave can be found in the Library briefing paper, [Family-related leave](#).

1.6 Financial incentives

Benefits and tax credits

A Manifesto for Families states:

Couple Penalties for couples in receipt of tax credits means it often pays more to live apart than together. For low income couples this is a tax on sticking together. [...] They should enable those on Universal Credit and entitled to Marriage Allowance to receive the tax break automatically as part of their claim, and ensure it is not tapered away. Over successive budgets the Government should work towards reducing remaining couple penalties on Universal Credit.¹¹

There is a long-standing debate about whether the benefits and tax credits system discriminates against couples (married or otherwise), and about whether it creates a disincentive for people to move in together (or an incentive for couples to split up).

The main criticisms levelled at the current system are:

- people who start living together can find that the financial help they get from the State is less than the combined amount they

⁹ Commons Library, [Early Intervention](#), 26 June 2017, esp. p29

¹⁰ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017

¹¹ *Ibid.*

were formerly receiving as individuals (or conversely, couples who split up can find that they receive more financial assistance as individuals).

- benefit rates underestimate the needs of couples or, conversely, overestimate the needs of single persons and/or lone parents. The argument here is that relative benefit rates are not justified by studies which have attempted to calculate the amount different households need to attain a particular standard of living.
- the Working Tax Credit discriminates between couples and lone parents because it takes no account of the presence of a second adult. In other words, couples and lone parents with the same income will receive the same amount of Working Tax Credit.

The only way to end the couple penalty in the benefits system would be to treat everyone as individuals for benefits/tax credits purposes. This would however be expensive (in 2010 the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimated it would cost at least £34 billion a year, if benefit and tax credit rates for single adults were to be maintained).¹² It would also lead to situations that would be difficult to defend politically, e.g. a non-working spouse of a millionaire would be entitled to the same amount of benefit as a single unemployed person.

The IFS report noted couple penalties (or premiums) would be undesirable if they distorted behaviour (unless the Government was deliberately trying to encourage certain family structures), or if they were unfair. It noted that while studies suggested that family formation decisions may be affected by couple penalties and premiums in the tax and benefit system, the evidence was “not overwhelming and any impacts are likely to be small.” As regards fairness, a press release accompanying the report observed:

Two adults can almost certainly save on living costs by living together, but whether the tax and benefit system is currently fair to couples compared with single adults, or whether it would be any fairer if there were fewer or more couple penalties, depends on one’s view of fairness. One could take a strict view that the tax and benefit system should treat similar individuals similarly, disregarding whether they live alone or in a couple. Under this view, the current system is not fair, and should be replaced by an individualised tax and benefit system (which would then have no couple penalties and premiums). Alternatively, one could take the view that the amount of support an adult receives from the state should take into account whether he or she is living alone or with a partner, and the income of any partner. Under this view, those aspects of the current tax and benefit system that cause couple penalties – such as assessing support against the combined income of a couple, and setting benefit rates for couples at less than twice those of single adults – are not necessarily unfair. However, the current tax and benefit system is inconsistent in its approach, paying out benefits and tax credits according to family circumstances but levying income tax according to an individual’s income. This inconsistency probably reflects the impossible task

¹² IFS Briefing Note BN102, [Couple penalties and premiums in the UK tax and benefit system](#), April 2010

governments have when pursuing multiple objectives with the tax and benefit system.¹³

The IFS study looked at how entitlement to benefits and tax credits in the UK varied according to family situation. However, the analysis did not take into account the “inherent financial advantage that arises when living as a couple” – the economies of scale enjoyed when people start living together. The study did not therefore address the question of whether couples would be better off living apart than living as a couple.

Some commentators have argued that there is no significant couple penalty in the benefits system, once differences in living costs and taken into account – see the June 2012 report by Donald Hirsch for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Does the tax and benefit system create a ‘couple penalty?’](#)

Policy responses

As noted above, it has been argued that the Working Tax Credit (WTC) – which is intended to help “make work pay” for low income households – discriminates against couples because it does not take account of the presence of a second adult in a household. So, for example, a lone parent with two children who earns £200 a week will receive the same amount of WTC as a couple earning £200 with two children. The Centre for Social Justice, amongst others, argued that the structure of the WTC “actually undermines stable families by disincentivising two-parent family formation”. Its January 2010 [Green Paper on the Family](#) stated:

We recommend enhancing the couple element in Working Tax Credit so that all couples receive the same ratio of support to lone parents as they currently receive in Income Support – the income level of lone parent families would not be affected. This would cost £3 billion and would directly benefit low income families (increasing their weekly income by £38); increasing family stability and alleviating poverty.¹⁴

The Conservative Party’s [2010 General Election Manifesto](#) included a promise to “end the couple penalty for all couples in the tax credit system as we make savings from our welfare reform plans” – a commitment repeated in the then Coalition Government’s [Programme for government](#).¹⁵

This commitment is being met by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC), which is eventually to replace, among other things, Working Tax Credit. Whereas Working Tax Credit gives exactly the same level of support to a couple as to a lone parent in otherwise identical circumstances, under UC the “standard allowance” for a couple with children is worth more than that for a single person with children. The HM Government report [Progress on commitments in Social Justice](#):

¹³ ‘Couple ‘penalties’ in tax and benefit system are widespread, but almost impossible to eliminate’, IFS press release, 29 April 2010

¹⁴ The Centre for Social Justice, [Green Paper on the Family](#), January 2010, p23

¹⁵ The Conservative Party, [Invitation to Join the Government of Britain](#), April 2010, p41; HM Government, [The Coalition: our programme for government](#), May 2010

transforming lives (April 2013) said the introduction of separate rates of standard allowance for single claimants and for couples in the Universal Credit would mean that “the ratio between single and couple rates is consistent with existing out of work benefits.”¹⁶

Other measures introduced by the Coalition Government and/or subsequent Conservative governments arguably create **new** couple penalties. These include:

- the **High Income Child Benefit Tax Charge**, under which Child Benefit starts to be withdrawn from families where the highest earner has an income in excess of £50,000, and withdrawn completely at incomes of £60,000 or more;¹⁷
- the introduction, and subsequent lowering, of the **Household Benefit Cap**;¹⁸
- the cessation of means-tested support for third and subsequent children born after 6 April 2017, as a result of the **two child limit** in tax credits and Universal Credit.¹⁹

In response to a parliamentary question in March 2017 on what the Government’s assessment was of the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit on the existence and size of couples penalties; whether this differed from the impact arising from existing benefits, and if so why; and whether couples penalties would increase or decrease depending on the income of those claiming Universal Credit; the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions said in a written answer:

The information requested is not available and to collect it would incur disproportionate cost.²⁰

Marriage allowance

To offset the ‘couple penalties’ under the tax credit system, the authors of *A Manifesto for Families* argued that

The Government should target an increase in the value of the Marriage Allowance for low income married couples or civil partners with children.²¹

Since the introduction of independent taxation in 1990, all individuals have been assessed for tax as separate persons. This reform reversed a principle that had underpinned the tax system for almost two hundred years: that a married woman’s income was simply part of her husband’s income, and should be taxed as such.

In September 2013, the Prime Minister announced that from April 2015 spouses and civil partners would be allowed to transfer £1,000 of their

¹⁶ HM Government, *Progress on commitments in Social Justice: transforming lives*, April 2013, p4

¹⁷ See section 4.5 of Commons Library briefing SN06299, *Child Benefit for higher income families*, 16 April 2012

¹⁸ See Commons Library briefing SN06294, *The Benefit Cap*, 23 November 2016

¹⁹ Commons Library briefing CBP-7935, *The two child limit in tax credits and Universal Credit*, 10 April 2017. See also Sam Royston, *Broken Benefits: What’s Gone Wrong With Welfare Reform*, Policy Press, 2017, p131

²⁰ [PO HL5930 \[on Universal Credit\]](#), 21 March 2017

²¹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, *A Manifesto for Families*, September 2017

own allowance to their partner (10 per cent) – provided neither of them were higher rate taxpayers.²²

In his 2014 Budget speech the then Chancellor, George Osborne, announced that the personal allowance would be set at £10,500 from April 2015, and that the transferable allowance would be increased to £1,050 in line with this.²³ Details of how the new transferable allowance would work were given in a note published alongside the Budget.

Legislation will be introduced in Finance Bill 2014 to provide that from the 2015-16 tax year, a spouse or civil partner who is not liable to income tax because their income is below their personal allowance or who is liable to income tax at the basic rate, dividend ordinary rate or the starting rate for savings will be able to elect to transfer £1,050 of their personal allowance to their spouse or civil partner. There will be a corresponding reduction to the transferring spouse's personal allowance.

A spouse or civil partner who is liable to income tax at the basic rate, dividend ordinary rate or the starting rate for savings will receive the transferred personal allowance. The transferred allowance will be given effect as a reduction to the recipient's income tax liability at the basic rate of tax.

From 2016-17 the transferable amount will be 10 per cent of the basic personal allowance. Further provisions will account for changes to individuals' marital or civil partnership status such as divorce, dissolution and death. Married couples or civil partnerships entitled to claim the married couple's allowance will not be entitled to make a transfer ...

HMRC is developing the process by which the married couple or civil partners will transfer their personal allowance ... The lead option is that one party will apply on-line to transfer the allowance to their spouse or civil partner and HMRC will notify the recipient about the subsequent change to their tax code.²⁴

Initially eligible couples were required to register online for the 'marriage allowance',²⁵ but can now do so by calling HMRC's income tax helpline on 0300 200 3300.²⁶ Couples who register after the beginning of the tax year are still entitled to the full annual allowance. The general time limit for making a claim for repayment of overpaid tax is four years, so that eligible couples who have not claimed for the tax year 2015/16 will have until 5 April 2020 to do so.²⁷

²² [Marriage Transferable Tax Allowance announced](#), HM Treasury press notice, 30 September 2013. In his Autumn Statement in December 2013, the then Chancellor, George Osborne, confirmed that the allowance would be introduced from April 2015 ([HC Deb 5 December 2013 c1111](#)).

²³ HC Deb 19 March 2014 c792

²⁴ HM Revenue & Customs [HMRC], [Transferable tax allowances for married couples and civil partners](#), 19 March 2014. Provision for the new allowance was made by s11 of *FA2014*. It is consolidated in ss55A-E of the *Income Tax Act 2007*.

²⁵ [Registration opens for new married couples tax break](#), HM Treasury press notice, 20 February 2015. Details are on HMRC's site at, <https://www.gov.uk/marriage-allowance>

²⁶ [PQ14045 \[on Married People: Tax Allowances\], 3 November 2015](#)

²⁷ [PQ4733 \[on Married People: Tax Allowances\], 6 July 2015](#); [PQ28276 \[on Married People: Tax Allowances\], 3 March 2016](#)

In the Autumn Budget on 22 November 2017, the Chancellor Philip Hammond, announced that the personal allowance would be £11,850 from April 2018, so the 'marriage allowance' will be £1,185 for 2018/19. As recipients use the transferred allowance to offset against their liability to basic rate tax, which is charged at 20%, the allowance will be worth up to £237.²⁸

At this time the Government also announced that claims for the allowance would be allowed in cases where a partner had died before the claim was made, and that these claims could be backdated by up to 4 years.²⁹ Provision to this effect is included in the [Finance \(No.2\) Bill 2017-19](#) (specifically clause 6 of the Bill).

Free childcare and parenting

All parents of 3 and 4 year olds in England are entitled to 15 hours Government-funded hours of childcare over 38 weeks. Under the Coalition Government, similar provision was introduced for two year olds if certain conditions were met, including that their parents or carers were eligible for certain means tested-benefits, or if the child was, or had been, looked after by a local authority.

A Manifesto for Families suggests that free childcare for two year olds "should be linked to parents attending at least one active 'Stay and Play' session per week where they are not in work."³⁰

In addition, since September 2017 working households (and certain other households) are entitled, subject to a means-test, to 30 hours of free childcare a week over 38 weeks.

A further 15 hours are available to parents, subject to a means test. For further information about eligibility, see the Commons Library paper on [Childcare: "30 hours" of free childcare – eligibility, access codes and charges \(England\)](#).

1.7 Prisoners' family ties

In 2016 the Government asked [Lord Farmer](#), in partnership with the charity, [Clinks](#), to investigate how connecting prisoners with their families can improve offender wellbeing, assist in keeping the public safe and reduce reoffending.

Lord Farmer's report – [Importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime](#) – was published on 10 August 2017. *A Manifesto for Families* believes that its recommendations should be enacted by the Government.

²⁸ HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2017, HC 587, November 2017 para 3.5-6](#)
HMRC estimate that the full cost of the allowance is forecast to be £615 million in 2017/18 – although this one of the estimates that HMRC makes of the cost of principal tax reliefs, that is "particularly tentative and subject to a wide margin of error." In this specific case, HMRC add, "The Marriage Allowance was available from 2015-16. It allowed the transfer of 10% of the tax free personal allowance between couples who are married or in civil partnerships, were born after 6th April 1935 and one partner had an annual income at or below the tax free personal allowance for the tax year, (plus from 2016-17, up to £5,000 of tax-free savings interest) and the other partner's annual income was between the tax free personal allowance and the higher rate threshold for the tax year. The figures reflect the anticipated full take up of the allowance when all retrospective claims have been made, as the allowance can be claimed retrospectively for up to four years." Source: HMRC, [Principal Tax Reliefs](#), January 2018 (see fn43 to [this table](#)).

²⁹ HMRC, [Income Tax: Marriage Allowance claims on behalf of deceased partners](#), 22 November 2017.

³⁰ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017

In the foreword to his report, Lord Farmer notes that the Ministry of Justice's own research shows that for a prisoner who receives visits from a family member the odds of reoffending are 39% lower than for those who do not. Yet, he said, there is an unacceptable inconsistency of respect for the role families can play in boosting rehabilitation and assisting in resettlement across the prison estate.

Lord Farmer, in the executive summary to the report, states the overarching conclusion of his review is that "good family relationships are indispensable for delivering the Government's far-reaching plans across all the areas outlined in their white paper on [Prison Safety and Reform](#)".

The report made detailed recommendations which were welcomed by the then Justice Secretary David Lidington.

Sam Gyimah, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prisons and Probation, responded to a [PQ in December 2017](#) which asked what steps his department is taking to strengthen families. He referred to the Farmer review and said work has already commenced on taking forward some of the recommendations:

We are placing the importance of these relationships at the centre of our processes. In October family budgets were devolved to Governors, which coincided with the commencement of new family services contracts. This has given Governors the necessary levers to deliver tailored support for prisoners, helping them to build or maintain family ties or develop alternative relationships.

Relationships between prisoners, their family or significant others and children are maintained through a range of visiting opportunities. In addition to the statutory entitlement to visits under the Prison Rules 1999, prisoners may also be granted additional visits through local privilege schemes.

Release on temporary licence (ROTL) is another way for suitable prisoners to maintain family ties, and we will be exploring in the coming months how best to ensure access to ROTL for those who would benefit, within a robust risk assessment framework.

A new Family Policy Framework will be published during 2018 to help standardise the quality of services provided across all prisons to help strengthen relationships between prisoners, their family and significant relationships.³¹

The Government has noted that whilst the Farmer review focuses on male prisoners, the recommendations are also relevant to women in prison. In answer to a [recent PQ](#) about women prisoners with children Dr Philip Lee, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Youth Justice, Victims, Female Offenders and Offender Health, said

Work is ongoing to improve the quality of information that sentencers receive about community sentencing options and to ensure that sentencers are made aware and can take account of whether an offender is a primary carer or has been pregnant or given birth within the last 6 months.

³¹ [PQ 119119 \[on Ministry of Justice: Families\]](#), 18 December 2017

We will shortly be setting out our strategy for female offenders, to improve outcomes for women in the community and in custody. This will include women with young children, babies and other caring responsibilities.³²

1.8 Children's mental health services

In December 2017, the Department of Health and Department of Education jointly published the Green Paper announced in Theresa May's January speech, [Transforming children and young people's mental health provision](#).

The three key elements set out by the Government are:

1. We will incentivise every school and college to identify a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health to oversee the approach to mental health and wellbeing. All children and young people's mental health services should identify a link for schools and colleges. This link will provide rapid advice, consultation and signposting.
2. We will fund new Mental Health Support Teams, supervised by NHS children and young people's mental health staff, to provide specific extra capacity for early intervention and ongoing help. Their work will be managed jointly by schools, colleges and the NHS. These teams will be linked to groups of primary and secondary schools and to colleges, providing interventions to support those with mild to moderate needs and supporting the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing.
3. As we roll out the new Support Teams, we will trial a four week waiting time for access to specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services. This builds on the expansion of specialist NHS services already underway.³³

A Manifesto for Families wants the Government to go further:

Government strategy on improving childhood mental health problems should recognise the importance of improving family relationships and work towards the development of a family mental health service. Given the evidence that couple conflict is a massive driver of young people's mental health problems, couple counselling should be available for parents within Children and Young People's Mental Health teams as a matter of course.³⁴

The document also proposes that:

Police and Crime Commissioners should be encouraged to work with schools in their local area to ensure any child living in a household where domestic abuse is present is automatically offered early support.

NHS and local public health commissioners need to recognise the importance of interpersonal dynamics to good mental health by extending the provision of Couple Therapy for depression where it is likely to offer better results than one-to-one treatment (such as cognitive behavioural therapy). In any given month over 90% of GPs see people with relationship problems and they should be

For more information about children's mental health services, see the [Library paper on Children and young people's mental health – policy, CAMHS services, funding and education](#).

³² [PO 123960 \[on Sentencing: Females\]](#), 25 January 2018

³³ DH and DfE, [Transforming children and young people's mental health provision](#), December 2017, p4

³⁴ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017

able to refer these patients to accredited providers of relationship support.³⁵

1.9 Relationship and sex education in schools

Statutory relationships/ relationships and sex education

Currently, local authority maintained schools in England are obliged to teach sex and relationships education (SRE) from age 11 upwards, and must have regard to the Government's existing [SRE guidance](#).³⁶

Academies and free schools, the majority in secondary education in England, are not subject to the same statutory provisions but if they do decide to teach SRE, they also must have regard to the guidance.

Revised statutory relationships education (primary) and relationships and sex education (secondary)

Section 34 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for all schools in England to teach relationships education at primary level, and relationships and sex and education at secondary level. In December 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a [call for evidence](#) on updated RSE guidance. This will close on 12 February 2018. The expectation is that revised RSE will be taught from September 2019.

The DfE call for evidence outlines themes the Government thinks should be covered in RSE. These include:

How to recognise, understand and build healthy relationships, including self respect and respect for others, commitment (including marriage and civil partnerships), boundaries and consent, tolerance, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships, including bullying, coercion and exploitation; [...] ³⁷

A Manifesto for Families calls for the new curriculum to cover:

- commitment, respect and safety within relationships;
- the importance of active fatherhood;
- the importance of marriage.

It also calls for relationships education to extend beyond the classroom, and for a dedicated online campaign and virtual platform to be set up, designed with young people's "extensive and ongoing" involvement.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ DfEE, [Sex and relationships education guidance](#), DfEE 0116/2000, July 2000

³⁷ DfE, [Changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education and PSHE: A call for evidence](#), 18 December 2017. S.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p9

2. Parliamentary material

2.1 Parliamentary Questions

- [Prisoners: Self-harm and Suicide: Written question - HL4281](#)

Asked by: Lord Murphy of Torfaen | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to implement a systematic and quality assured communications gateway to enable prison staff to work with families to reduce self-harm and suicide.

Answering Member: Lord Keen of Elie | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Ministry of Justice

Families can play a significant role in supporting offenders; positive family relationships have been identified as a protective factor in desistance from crime. For this reason, we are promoting strong family ties (including significant others) as an important plank of our Prison Reform Programme, alongside education and employment.

The Government published a review by Lord Farmer on 10 August, which made several recommendations to strengthen family or significant other ties to help offenders turn their lives around and protect public safety. We are taking the recommendations forward, including (in October 2017) giving Governors the budget and flexibility to spend their resources appropriately to help prisoners keep important family ties.

One of Lord Farmer's recommendations related to the introduction of an "auditable and responsive 'gateway' communication system for families and significant others". We are fully committed to ensuring that prisoners can communicate with their loved ones. We recognise that there is no single method of communication that will be suitable for all users. We will shortly be issuing guidance to prisons on publicising how loved ones can share information about prisoners who may be at risk of self-harm or suicide. In addition, we will issue guidance on facilitating early contact with prisoners' families or their significant others when they arrive at the prison, so that we can involve them in their support and encourage ongoing contact; and on involving families in the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork process for supporting those at risk.

4 January 2018 | Written Questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL4281

- [Ministry of Justice: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Mr Sam Gyimah | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Ministry of Justice

The Government is committed to supporting prisoners to establish or maintain relationships with their families and significant others where appropriate. The Government recently published the report from Lord Farmer, 'The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime'.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf

Work has already commenced on taking forward some of the important recommendations from this review.

We are placing the importance of these relationships at the centre of our processes. In October family budgets were devolved to Governors, which coincided with the commencement of new family services contracts. This has given Governors the necessary levers to deliver tailored support for prisoners, helping them to build or maintain family ties or develop alternative relationships.

Relationships between prisoners, their family or significant others and children are maintained through a range of visiting opportunities. In addition to the statutory entitlement to visits under the Prison Rules 1999, prisoners may also be granted additional visits through local privilege schemes.

Release on temporary licence (ROTL) is another way for suitable prisoners to maintain family ties, and we will be exploring in the coming months how best to ensure access to ROTL for those who would benefit, within a robust risk assessment framework.

A new Family Policy Framework will be published during 2018 to help standardise the quality of services provided across all prisons to help strengthen relationships between prisoners, their family and significant relationships.

18 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119119

- [Prisoners: Families](#)

Asked by: O'Mara, Jared | **Party:** Independent (affiliation)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what guidance his Department has issued on the provision and supervision of prisoners' family contact.

Answering member: Mr Sam Gyimah | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

The Prison Rules 1999 require Governors to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties, where appropriate. This is integral to the prisoner's right to family life as well as their rehabilitation. Visits are seen as crucial to sustaining relationships with close relatives, partners and friends, where appropriate, and help prisoners maintain links with the community.

The following details the guidance that has been issued to date on the provision and supervision of family contact:

Prison Service Instruction 49/2011 (Prisoner Communication Services) – this policy details the statutory entitlement of prisoners to send and receive letters and sets out that they must have opportunity to make telephone calls;

Prison Service Instruction 16/2011 (Providing Visits and Services to Visitors) – gives details of statutory entitlements to visits and the environment that these take place in, as well as who is eligible, and provides guidance on examples of good practices to be adopted by prisons;

Prison Service Instruction 15/2011 (Management and Security at visits) – details the policy around management of security at visits. It details who can visit, provision for searches and security and also policy for visit that take place in a special or closed visiting room or a similar closed environment, where necessary, and

Prison Service Instruction 30/2013 (Incentives and Earned Privileges) – details, how in accordance with the Prison Rules 1999, prisoners can earn additional social visits (above the statutory minimum set out in the Prison Rules).

The government is committed to supporting prisoners to establish or maintain relationships with their families and significant others where appropriate. The Lord Farmer, published his report in August, produced on behalf of the Government, which we have warmly welcomed. Work has already commenced on taking forward some of the important recommendations from this review.

14 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 117830

- [Prisoners' Release: Mothers](#)

Asked by: Elmore, Chris | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department has taken to help mothers leaving prison rebuild family relationships.

Answering member: Mr Sam Gyimah | **Party:** Conservative Party |

Department: Ministry of Justice

Families can play a significant role in supporting an offender and positive family relationships are an important factor in reducing reoffending.

We have given prison governors the budget and flexibility to spend their resources as they see fit to help prisoners establish or maintain important family and significant other ties. A new contract for family services across the female estate was awarded in early October 2017. This will allow women's prisons to work closely with a single professional family services provider, to develop innovative services including those to support mothers in preparing for their release.

We are also enabling better communication between families and facilitating organised and constructive family days alongside courses and programmes to promote parenting and family engagement.

Community Rehabilitation Companies are responsible for through the gate provision, which includes resettlement support for male and female offenders on release. We recognise that improvements need to be made to current services, and are working with providers to consider further action that we might take.

01 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 109361

- [Department for Communities and Local Government: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Mr Marcus Jones | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Communities and Local Government

This Government wants to fix the broken housing market to help more ordinary working families buy an affordable home and to give people the security they need to be able to plan for the future. Fundamentally, this means building many more houses in the places that people want to live and getting a fairer deal for renters.

At the heart of this Government's policy on housing is our commitment to help hard working families who are just about managing to get by, and to ensure that the housing market is fairer for those who don't own their own home.

My Department also oversees the Troubled Families Programme which supports early intervention to prevent family breakdown. We work closely with other Government departments to help families overcome their challenges and stabilise their lives, for example, our joint work with Department for Work and Pensions on the Improving Lives agenda.

The programme supports families with multiple problems, including for example those affected by domestic abuse, parental conflict, drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and where children are in need of help. Family keyworkers take a whole family integrated approach across multiple services and provide a co-ordinated package of support. Together this approach can lead to greater family stability and help prevent the need for children to enter care. We have committed £920 million to the programme from 2015 – 2020.

21 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119098

- [Families: Disadvantaged](#)

Asked by: Gwynne, Andrew | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, how his Department works with the (a) Department for Work and Pensions, (b) Ministry of Justice, (c) Home Office, (d) Department for Education and (e) Department of Health to deliver the troubled families programme.

Answering member: Mr Marcus Jones | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Communities and Local Government

Governance structures are in place to ensure my officials work closely with those in other Government departments, including, but not limited to, the five highlighted here. This is underpinned by extensive informal contact. Officials work together to identify and agree actions to support the delivery of the Troubled Families Programme. This also ensures that other policy areas can share in the learning from the Troubled Families Programme.

In addition, I am in contact with my opposite numbers in other departments, including the Secretary of State for Education, through our attendance at the Social Reform (Home Affairs) sub-Committee and a number of Inter-Ministerial Groups which oversee policy areas relevant to the programme, such as on mental health, gangs, and violence against women and girls.

30 Oct 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 108917

- [Families: Disadvantaged](#)

Asked by: Gwynne, Andrew | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what the average expenditure on a troubled family under the revised system that began in 2015 has been to date.

Answering member: Mr Marcus Jones | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Communities and Local Government

The Troubled Families Programme pays local authorities a maximum of £1,800 for direct work with each family. This is made up of two parts: up-front funding of £1,000 per family and a results-based payment of £800 if a family achieves certain sustained positive outcomes. This amount is unlikely to reflect the total amount spent on a family because local public service partners will invest additional funding depending on their local arrangements and the levels of support a family may require.

20 Oct 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 107534

- [Families: Disadvantaged](#)

Asked by: Lord Farmer | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their estimate of how many councils' Troubled Families programmes help parents work through difficulties in their personal relationships as well as their parenting skills.

Answering member: Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Communities and Local Government

A survey of key workers found that 82 per cent provide support to address parenting difficulties and issues with their clients at least once a week. Much of the work done with families supports the family, as a whole, to function.

20 Mar 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL5929

- [Ministry of Defence: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, to which legislation his Department has applied the Family Test, published in August 2014.

Answering member: Mr Tobias Ellwood | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Ministry of Defence

Our Armed Forces are among the most extraordinarily talented and hard-working people in our society. We recognise the vital role that their families play, and that operational capability relies on recognising the Service person as part of a wider family unit. This is why we launched the first ever UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy in 2016, which focuses and coordinates activity to support Service families. Priorities for this work include childcare, partner employment and accommodation, which have consistently remained areas of interest for both the Service Families' Federations and the Department. In delivering the strategy we work closely with a number of external stakeholders to provide support to spouses and partners, for instance to those who are looking to gain employment, as we recognise that the demands of Service life can impact on the careers of family members.

Welfare support is provided to families via the single Service welfare organisations; additionally there are a significant number of other organisations that can be accessed via welfare referrals. The Covenant Fund has assigned £4 million to projects that support 'Families in Stress', enabling specialist organisations such as Relate to provide immediate or local support to families experiencing episodes of significant strain. To date the Fund has awarded eleven grants, totalling almost £2 million, to specialist and expert charities.

In addition to keeping the range of welfare support under continual review and launching the Families' Strategy, we have expanded the Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022 to incorporate all Defence People, including the families of Service personnel. We have also embarked on a partnership with the Royal Foundation to deal with issues of stigma and the treatment of mental health problems across the defence community. We are developing options for the Future Accommodation Model which recognise the 21st century family and we are developing flexible engagements for those who wish to vary their deployability to better fit their Service career around family life, all of which aims to contribute to increased family stability.

A key component of the Families' Strategy is to ensure that Service families are considered in people policy development, supporting the principles outlined in the Family Test. This is achieved through consideration of the Service family as part of each relevant submission or policy discussion, and through regular engagement with the single Services and the three Families' Federations who represent the needs and views of Service families. The Department also monitors the

development and implementation of policy to assess the impact on families. In the period since August 2014 none of the legislation implemented by the Ministry of Defence has required the application of the Family Test.

20 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119131

- [Service Families](#)

Asked by: Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab) | **Party:** Labour Party

What steps he is taking to improve support for families of deployed service personnel.

Answered by: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood) | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Defence

Personnel deployed on operations must have confidence that their families at home are able to access the support they need. Our welfare support is provided to families before, during and after deployment.

27 Nov 2017 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 902560 | 632 cc15-6

- [Mental Health Services: Armed Forces](#)

Asked by: Lord Touhig | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to guarantee that NHS mental health services are meeting the needs of veterans and Armed Forces families.

Answering member: Lord O'Shaughnessy | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department of Health

In 2016, NHS England completed an audit of the current veterans' mental health services that were put in place following the Fighting Fit report by Dr Andrew Murrison MP. This included an extensive consultation exercise which sought the views and experiences of veterans, family members, service charities and commissioners and explored the reasons why some had not engaged or received support and treatment.

The findings of the audit have fed into the veterans' mental health service procurement NHS England are currently undertaking. From April 2017, these services will offer evidence-based and consistent support across England that best meets the needs of veterans', family members and serving personnel leaving the forces.

Members of the armed forces community are also able to make full use of the range of mental health services that NHS England offer, including Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, and will benefit from the commitments made in the Mental Health Five Year Forward View.

Services in the rest of the United Kingdom are a matter for the devolved administrations.

03 Feb 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL4885

- [Treasury: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Elizabeth Truss | **Party:** Conservative Party |

Department: HM Treasury

At the Autumn Budget the government announced that it will continue to provide funding for DWP's relationship support work, to help keep families together and reduce parental conflict. The government will also be investing around £6 billion every year by 2020 in childcare support - more than ever before.

The government applies the Family Test to all its policies, to ensure that potential impacts on family relationships are recognised in the process of developing new policy.

20 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119124

- [Department for Education: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps her Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Mr Robert Goodwill | **Party:** Conservative Party |

Department: Department for Education

The Department for Education is pursuing a range of policies aimed at supporting and strengthening families.

On 14 December the Secretary of State published, Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plan-to-boost-social-mobility-through-education>

The government is funding a £5 million trial of evidence-based home learning environment support programmes in the north of England, to improve the support available to parents to enable them to ensure their children are ready to thrive when they start school.

The cost of childcare is a big issue for many families. The government offers 15 hours of free childcare to disadvantaged two year olds and all three and four year olds, up to 30 hours' free childcare for working parents of three and four year olds, tax-free childcare and the childcare element of Universal Credit. The Evaluation of Early Implementation and the Evaluation of Rollout of 30 hours Free Childcare showed evidence of positive benefits. From the evaluation survey of parents taking up 30 hours in early implementer areas, some 78 percent reported that the extended hours had given them greater flexibility in their work choices. The case studies showed that increased work flexibility helped parents to obtain more secure employment, enhanced career opportunities and

improved their work-life balance and 84 percent reported that they had slightly or much more money to spend:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/30-hours-free-childcare-early-implementation-evaluation>

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642007/Evaluation_of_early_rollout_of_30-hours_free_childcare.pdf

We want to ensure that all pupils are taught about healthy and respectful relationships and have the knowledge required to prepare for adult life, which includes family life. The Children and Social Work Act has required Relationships Education to be made compulsory in all primary schools, and Relationships and Sex Education compulsory in all secondary schools through regulations. The subject content will cover the core, age-appropriate knowledge that all children need to form safe, positive relationships based on respect.

We are also taking steps to ensure that all children can develop into confident adults. On 4 December, in our Green Paper, Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-proposals-on-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health> the Department of Education and the Department of Health set out new proposals on children's mental health. These include commissioning further research into interventions that support parents and carers to build and/or improve the quality of attachment relationships with their babies.

20 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119107

- [Families: Counselling](#)

Asked by: Zeichner, Daniel | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve support for early intervention family counselling.

Answering member: Mr Robert Goodwill | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Education

The government's statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, is clear about the importance that we attach to preventative services. Providing help early, before issues and problems escalate, is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. *Working Together* sets out that local agencies should work together to assess local needs for early help support and should design and deliver services to meet these needs. This includes delivering family counselling services where appropriate. It is right that decisions about the provision of services, including preventative, early help services, are taken locally by agencies that are best placed to plan provision, taking account of local needs and circumstances.

The Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme was launched in October 2013 to catalyse the development of more effective ways of supporting vulnerable children to build

evidence of what works. The Innovation Programme is supporting projects that deliver family group conferencing involving the family and extended family members to help make decisions about the best way to support the family and take care of their child. Leeds City Council has been funded through the Innovation Programme to embed restorative practice across children's services, including introducing an entitlement to family group conferences. Over 600 family group conferences, led by trained co-ordinators were held in 2016, bringing extended family and friends together to find solutions to issues that affect young people and support them in implementing these solutions. The use of family group conferencing has led to savings of c£755 per family resulting from reduced average time spent in the social care system.

14 Oct 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 105655

- [Department for Work and Pensions: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Caroline Dinenage | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families announced our commitment to tackle the damaging levels of parental conflict in workless families. This in response to recent evidence which shows that children exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict can suffer a decline in their mental health and experience poorer long term outcomes. Our new Reducing Parental Conflict Programme will provide workless families in a number of local areas across England with face-to-face, evidence based interventions to reduce parental conflict. This provision will be available to workless parents, whether they are together or separated, as when it comes to the critical issue of improving children's outcomes, the evidence shows that the quality of relationships within a family are more important than family structure. Alongside these face-to-face interventions, we will be working closely with local authorities to raise awareness of the negative impacts of parental conflict on children and families, and to help them embed proven parental conflict support into existing services for families.

19 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119126

- [Families: Disadvantaged](#)

Asked by: Lord Farmer | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether, in support of their policy objectives to strengthen families, they intend to make available funds for projects other than those specified in the Budget Statement.

Answering member: Baroness Buscombe | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

We published Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families in April 2017 where we announced a spend of up to £30m to launch the new Reducing Parental Conflict Programme.

Planned spend in 17/18 is £5.91m. Funding allocations to projects/business areas in future years are decided on an annual basis and are subject to internal prioritisation – the funding that was announced as part of the 2017 Autumn Budget safeguards £15m pa investment on relationship support/parental conflict in 18/19 and 19/20.

DWP has no plans to fund other projects than those mentioned in the budget statement, however, strengthening families is a cross-government objective and other government departments will be able to confirm their own plans in this area.

30 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL3579

- [Families: Counselling](#)

Asked by: Zeichner, Daniel | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what financial provision there is for people in need of family counselling services who are unable to pay for such services.

Answering member: Caroline Dinenage | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

Every local authority must protect and promote the welfare of children in need in its area. To do this it must work with the family to provide support services that will enable children to be brought up within their own families. The local authority can provide a range of services for children in need, which can include advice, guidance and counselling. These services are normally provided free of charge. In addition, DWP funds the provision of relationship support services - this includes couple counselling delivered by a range of voluntary sector providers including Relate, Marriage Care and Tavistock Relationships.

12 Oct 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 105654

- [Department of Health: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Jackie Doyle-Price | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department of Health

The Department undertakes and supports a range of programmes and initiatives which seek to strengthen families.

For example, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme was introduced to England a decade ago as a key part of government early years policy. The FNP is a programme of intensive home visiting by

specially trained nurses which aims to support young mothers expecting their first child to improve outcomes.

The Friends and Family Test (FFT) is a feedback tool used to improve services for patients. Since its launch in 2013, the FFT has been rolled out in phases to most National Health Service-funded services in England, giving all patients the opportunity to leave feedback on their care and treatment. The FFT has produced well over 30 million pieces of feedback so far – and the total rises by over a million a month – making it the biggest source of patient opinion in the world.

We want better support for families with children and young people who are at risk of developing mental health problems. A Green Paper on children and young people’s mental health published on 4 December 2017 seeks to build on the progress already made. This ranges from setting up the first ever waiting times for mental health to supporting the recommendations of the 2015 Future in Mind strategy, through investing £1.4 billion to bring together all services working with children and young people to improve mental health services.

All of NHS England’s work programmes have input from family/carer experts by experience and true collaborative partnership working with stakeholders where families are strongly represented. The Transforming Care Programme recognises that when children and young people have a learning disability, autism or both and behaviours that challenge and/or a mental health condition, the impact on the family as a whole can be significant. One of the key principles of our Transforming Care Service Model is that families are provided with the right support to help children and young people live in the community. In March 2017, NHS England introduced a Care, Education, and treatment review policy for children reflecting the vital role the parents and extended family play in the lives of people including children and young people with learning disabilities, autism or both. In September, NHS England published guidance to supplement the service model which was specific to children and young people “with learning disabilities, autism or both”. This guidance – focused at commissioners, details the support and services they should be commissioning to ensure that children and families are supported from point of identification, through to short break provision, and specialist provision for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Public Health England encourages healthy living amongst families with young children through its Start4Life social marketing campaign. This is aimed at parents-to-be and parents of children up to the age of five. The Start4Life website has a range of advice and resources which can help mothers continue breastfeeding and leaflets and resources are available which professionals can order for free.

19 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119115

- [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Margot James | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Government is committed to supporting working families and will introduce 30 hours of free childcare a week for working families with 3 and 4-year-old children. This builds on other family friendly policies which are already in place including the extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees with 26 weeks qualifying service and the introduction of shared parental leave and pay, which enables working parents to share responsibility for caring for their children in the first year.

18 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119094

- [Department for Exiting the European Union: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Mr Robin Walker | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Exiting the European Union

The Government is committed to supporting families. To achieve this, in 2014 the Department for Work and Pensions introduced the Family Test, which aims to ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning are recognised early on during the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions made by ministers.

The Prime Minister has also been clear that the process of exiting the European Union should not affect the ability of families to stay together. In the Joint Report on progress regarding the UK's exit from the European Union, published on 8th December, it was announced that for EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU, who are captured by the Withdrawal Agreement, close family members will be able to join after exit on the basis of current EU rules, where the relationship existed at the point of the UK's withdrawal. All family members lawfully resident with an EU citizen at the point of the UK's withdrawal will also be protected and children born, before or after exit, to parents protected by the Withdrawal Agreement are entitled to join them.

21 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119112

- [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: George Eustice | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The government is committed to supporting families. To achieve this, in 2014 we introduced the Family Test, which aims to ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning are recognised early on during the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions made by Ministers. The Family Test was not designed to be a 'tick-box' exercise, and as such there is no requirement for departments to publish the results of assessments made under the Family Test.

21 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119111

- [Scotland Office: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: David Mundell | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Scotland Office

This week the UK Government announced that Tax-Free Childcare is now available to around 120,000 families in Scotland whose youngest child is under six.

Parents, including the self-employed, can apply online for Tax-Free Childcare – part of the government's Childcare Choices offer – for children who were aged under six on 24 November 2017. It will cut childcare costs for working families by up to £2,000 per child per year, or £4,000 for disabled children.

This is a good example of how the UK Government is delivering for people in Scotland. By helping Scottish households keep more of what they earn and supporting them with the cost of living we are building a stronger economy and fairer society that improves lives and creates opportunity.

20 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119122

- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Families](#)

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2017 to Question HL3576, what steps his Department is taking to strengthen families.

Answering member: Mark Field | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Her Majesty's Government recognises the important role played by families within society. Accordingly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has supported initiatives at the UN which positively seek to recognise this, such as resolutions at the UN General Assembly that

celebrated and subsequently followed-up on the twentieth anniversary of the international year of the family. The government is committed to ensuring that individual freedom, rights and diversity are protected and promoted, including with respect to families, as per the relevant articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

20 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119113

2.2 Debates

- [Marriage in Government Policy](#) (HC debate 30 Jan 2018, 635 cc337-288WH)
- [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#) (HL debate 02 Nov 2017, 785 cc1511-1543)
- [Farmer Review](#) (HL debate 11 Oct 2017, 785 cc261-284)
- [Marriage Week](#) (HC debate 01 Feb 2017, 620 cc380-9WH)
- [Armed Forces Covenant](#) (HL debate 09 Jan 2017, 777 cc1819-1833)

3. Press articles and notices

[Theresa May to consider 'family hubs' to reset her home agenda](#)

The Telegraph, 3 February 2018 [available via Nexis News]

- A report suggesting that the Prime Minister is considering proposals to help set up family hubs.

[New resources launched to highlight impact of maternal imprisonment on 17,000 children a year](#)

Prison Reform Trust, 30 January 2018

[Exporting the Troubled Families Programme to America – on flawed evidence](#)

London School of Economics blog, 24 January 2018

- A critique of the Troubled Families Programme, and a [Harvard Kennedy School policy brief](#) which has praised it.

[Most children in UK's poorest areas now growing up in poverty](#)

The Guardian, 24 January 2018

[Mayor launches early years hubs to boost childcare for disadvantaged families](#)

Nursery World, 9 January 2018

- Report on the launching of new Early Years Hubs by the Mayor of London in Newham, Wandsworth & Merton, and Barnet.

[Thousands of UK families miss out on free childcare provision](#)

The Financial Times, 19 December 2017

[Plan to boost social mobility through education](#)

Department for Education, 14 December 2017

- On the then Education Secretary's plan to focus on communities across the country "that feel they have been 'left behind'".

[Family Matters: Act now to prevent divorce and give children stability at home, ministers urged](#)

The Times, 18 November 2017 [via parliamentary subscription]

- Report on the Centre for Social Justice's call for the Government to do more to prevent families from breaking up.

[Ideas for the Budget 3\) Fiona Bruce: It should start to reduce the huge costs of family breakdown](#)

Conservative Home, 8 November 2017

- As well as describing the Families Manifesto, Fiona Bruce MP suggests two policies in the Autumn Budget which could help families:
 - a. “an increase in the value of the government’s Marriage Allowance on low-income married couples and civil partners with children” and;
 - b. encourage “local authorities to deliver Family Hubs to strengthen families in difficulty and improve family stability” .

[Austerity policy blamed for record numbers of children taken into care](#)

The Guardian, 11 October 2017

[The Conservative Party needs to be the party of family once again,](#)

The Spectator, 8 September 2017

- This suggests that the MPs responsible for developing the Families Manifesto have “given the prime minister a much needed policy platform to help families growing up in our poorest areas.”

[Derek Thomas: Better support for fathers would reduce family breakdown and improve children’s life chances](#)

Conservative Home, 7 September 2017

[Powerful group of Tory MPs led by Iain Duncan Smith call on Theresa May to do more to support marriage including offering bigger tax breaks](#)

The Daily Mail, 6 September 2017

[Tories' 30-hour free childcare plan fails to target poor families, says expert](#)

The Guardian, 21 June 2017

4. Further reading

- Commons Library CDP-2018-0025, [Marriage and Government policy](#), 29 January 2018
- Lord Library briefing LLN-2017-0075, [Debate on the impact of the 'A Manifesto for Families'](#), 27 December 2017
- Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto for Families](#), September 2017
- Lord Farmer, [The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime](#), August 2017
- Commons Library briefing CBP-7714, [Family Test](#), 1 February 2017
- Commons Library briefing, CBP-7585, [Troubled Families Programme \(England\)](#), 5 April 2017
- Commons Library briefing CBP-8051, [Childcare: "30 hours" of free childcare – eligibility, access codes and charges \(England\)](#), 10 January 2018
- Commons Library briefing CBP-7196, [Children and young people's mental health – policy, CAMHS services, funding and education](#), 19 December 2017
- Commons Library briefing CBP-7647, [Early intervention](#), 19 December 2017
- Lords Library briefing LBP-2017-0076, [The Farmer Review on Impact of Family on Reducing Reoffending](#), 3 October 2017
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres, [Family Hubs: The Future of Children's Centres](#), July 2016
- Clinks, [Briefing on the final report of the Farmer Review](#), September 2017
- Children's Commissioner, [Family Hubs: a discussion paper](#), October 2016
- Department for Work and Pensions, [Family Test: Guidance for Government Departments](#), 31 October 2014

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