



Child Poverty in Barnsley Central

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1. Introduction

Child poverty in Barnsley is a serious problem. Statistics in this report demonstrate that 22.8% of children (aged 16 years or younger) in the **Barnsley Central constituency** are living in poverty. This places the constituency 157th out of 650 constituencies in the UK (where 1=highest).

I have compiled this report because I do not believe it is acceptable that over a fifth of the children who grow up in my constituency do so in poverty.

The aim of this report is to highlight the serious nature of this problem. It will also look at the ways in which the efforts to address this problem have been coordinated by other organisations, both locally and nationally. This report will not solve the issue of child poverty by itself, but its intention is to make a contribution to the work aimed at reducing the levels of child poverty in Barnsley and across the country.

2. What is child poverty?

The measure of child poverty, also known as the ‘Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure’ is defined as the proportion of children living in families in receipt of out of work (means-tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income (before housing costs) is less than 60% of median income. Having less than 60% of the median income is a common measure of poverty.

2.1 Why child poverty matters

The **Child Poverty Action Group** (a national charity committed to campaigning on this issue) summaries succinctly why child poverty matters:

- **It damages childhoods.** Growing up in poverty means being cold, going hungry, not owning belongings that others consider essential and not being able to join in activities with friends. It also impacts on health, educational outcomes and the overall experience of childhood.
- **It destroys life chances.** Leaving school with few qualifications translates into lower earnings over the course of a working life. Poorer childhood health results in more complicated health histories over the course of a lifetime, again influencing earnings as well as overall life quality.
- **It imposes costs on broader society.** Governments forgo prospective revenues and commit themselves to providing services in the future if they fail to address child poverty now.

3. Government approaches to Child Poverty

In March 1999, the Labour Government announced a commitment to “eradicate” child poverty in the UK by 2020. Six years later, the **Child Poverty Act 2010** enshrined this child poverty target in law, and introduced a requirement that government publishes a regular child poverty strategy.

The Coalition Government’s **Child Poverty Strategy**, published in **June 2014** to cover the period 2014-2017, set out measures to tackle the “root causes” of child poverty and break the cycle of disadvantage.

I completely agree with their assertion that “where you start in life should not determine where you end up.” Their goals of supporting families to increase their household income, improving living standards and educational attainment are all key areas that need to be tackled. But the reality is that the current Conservative-led Government’s endless programme of cuts and reform of the Welfare State are plunging increasing numbers of families into hardship. Their emphasis has been on pushing people into jobs, whatever the quality or security of those jobs. They also believe that more affordable homes will come from selling off our current social housing – a position I strongly dispute.

In October 2013, the **Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission**, chaired by Alan Milburn, warned that the 2020 child poverty target was likely to be missed by a considerable margin, and that progress on social mobility could be undermined by the twin problems of **youth unemployment** and **falling living standards**. The Government needs to heed this warning if they are to meet the 2020 target.

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4. Child Poverty in Barnsley

With 22.8% of children in **Barnsley Central** living in poverty, this is higher than both the average for the **Yorkshire and the Humber** region (19.8%) and the **United Kingdom** as a whole (18.2%)¹.

In 2007, prior to the onset of the global recession, only 20% of children in Barnsley were living in poverty.²

The most recent statistics regarding child poverty are from 2013 and are broken down by each local authority ward. The wards for the **Barnsley Central** constituency are presented in the table below, along with their position among all the wards in the **Barnsley Metropolitan Borough** area and their position among all wards in **England**.

Ward	% of children in poverty	Numbers of children in poverty	Ranking among all BMBC Wards (out of 21)	Rank out of 7,663 wards in England (1=highest)
St Helen's	36	935	2	228
Monk Bretton	31	700	4	522
Kingstone	29	695	5	694
Central	22	470	12	1,554
Royston	22	525	13	1,568
Old Town	15	350	16	2,811
Darton East	13	270	17	3,555
Darton West	12	260	18	3,686

Table 1: Figures are a snapshot as of August 2013 showing by local authority ward in Barnsley local authority the estimated numbers of children living in families in receipt of Child Tax Credit whose reported income is less than 60% of median income or living in families in receipt of median income or living in families in receipt of Income Support or (income-based) Jobseeker's Allowance.

Figures include all dependent children under the age of 20 and are based on household income before housing costs are deducted.

Data are rounded to the nearest five.

Source: HMRC, Children in low-income families local measure: 2013

To take an example from the table above, **St Helen's** ward has the second highest rate of child poverty in **Barnsley**, and the highest of any ward in the **Barnsley Central** constituency. This remains the case whether you measure of child poverty in raw numbers (the physical number of children in poverty), or by the proportion of children in poverty relative to the overall population.

St Helen's has the 228th highest rate of child poverty in England, out of 7,663 wards. This places it in the top 3%.

¹ This data is from official government statistics and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-tax-credits-children-in-low-income-families-local-measure-2013-snapshot-as-at-31-august-2013>

² This can be found at: <https://www2.barnsley.gov.uk/media/Chief%20Executive%20-%20Performance%20and%20Delivery/CentralResearchTeam/Barnsley%20Key%20Fact%20sheet%202012.pdf>

4.1 Barnsley Poverty Needs Assessment 2014 – Key Findings³

This report was drawn up by Barnsley Council to assess poverty across the whole of the Barnsley borough. It provides a useful insight into child poverty and the factors which cause it.

4.1.1 Children Affected by Poverty

There are wide inequalities in the levels of child poverty, not only across the country but within the **Barnsley Metropolitan Borough** area as well. In some areas of **Barnsley**, children are eight times more likely to live in a household with one parent out of work than in others. Similarly, the likelihood of child poverty is six times greater in some areas than in others.

4.1.2 Education

Poverty has a profound effect on children's educational success and their future prospects. Significant numbers of children who receive free school meals do worse in their education. These children are more likely to end up in low skilled, insecure jobs and continue the cycle of poverty in their families.

4.1.3 Worklessness

Younger children are more likely than older children to live in families where nobody works. However, children in working families can also experience child poverty, and just over half of the families receiving child tax credits are working families. Childcare is a key barrier to parents entering employment, with childcare costs escalating and outstripping the average mortgage. 25 hours of childcare in **Barnsley** costs on average £85 per week or £4,500 per year.

4.1.4 Family Size and Stability

Single parents are at a high risk of living in persistent poverty, with the highest entry rates into poverty and the lowest exit rates. Single parents in **Barnsley** are twice as likely as parents who are in couples to live in the most deprived wards, with a higher chance of living in poverty as a result.

4.1.5 Health and Lifestyle

Rates of teenage pregnancy are higher in **Barnsley** than the regional and national average, but are reducing over time. Rates of smoking in pregnancy and low birth weights are lower in **Barnsley** than they are regionally. This leads to poorer health outcomes for children.

4.2 Child Health Profile: Barnsley

According to the most recent Public Health England report⁴, the health and wellbeing of children in **Barnsley** is generally worse than the **England** average.

In terms of childhood obesity, the percentage of children aged 4-5 who are obese in **Barnsley** is lower than the **England** average, while the percentage of children aged 10-11 who are obese in **Barnsley** is higher than the **England** average. In terms of all weight categories, the figures for **Barnsley** are very similar to those for **England** as a whole.

There have been some improvements in the number of young people under 18 being admitted to hospital because they have a condition wholly related to alcohol, such as alcohol poisoning.

³ Barnsley Poverty Needs Assessment 2014 Key Findings, Edited by Research & Business Intelligence Team, Available at: https://www2.barnsley.gov.uk/media/3774175/pnakey_findings.pdf

⁴ Child Health Profile (June 2015) Barnsley, Public Health England, Available at: <http://www.chimat.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=152708>

Although the level is still slightly higher in **Barnsley** than the **England** average, it has fallen substantially between the 2006/7-2008/9 period and the 2011/12-2013/14 period.

There is a greater level of self-harm among young people compared to the rest of **England** however. The rate of admission to hospital as a result of self-harm in the 10-24 age bracket is around 400 in 100,000 people in **Barnsley**.

In 2013/4, 2.2% of women giving birth in the **Barnsley** area were aged under 18 years. This is higher than the regional average, national average, and European average that stands at 0.9%.

Barnsley's 2014/15 breastfeeding initiation rate of 64.0% is lower than the regional and national rates of 69.9% and 74.3% respectively. Barnsley's 2014/15 rate of 28.3% for prevalence of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks is lower than the regional and national rates of 42.2% and 43.8% respectively.

Smoking during pregnancy is high and A&E attendees have a noticeable but slight likelihood of being a child than in England at large.

Barnsley does particularly badly in STI's, low birthweight and tooth decay.

4.3 Entrance into poverty

A concerning aspect of the child poverty statistics is the fact that 20% of households in Barnsley are "one step away" from child poverty⁵. These are households that can currently cope, but are one big payment or bill away from being in poverty. There are no savings, no equity in their homes, and they will often already be behind on their rent or mortgage payments.

4.4 Child Benefit Statistics

Child Benefit payments are a significant amount of money for families on low incomes. It is currently £20.70 per week for the first child and £13.70 for subsequent children. This will remain the same until April 2016.

Proposed changes, put forward by the Conservatives at the general election and reaffirmed in the recent Budget, would see Child Benefit reduced to £13.70 for the first and second child, and then no further assistance. Therefore, someone with one child would lose a third of their support and someone with four children will lose over half.

The changes to Child Benefit, along with the decrease in the benefit cap, will push people further into poverty, particularly the 20% that are "one step away" from poverty highlighted previously.

4.5 Food Bank Use

There are no national, official statistics on the use of food banks. However, the Trussel Trust, who run the majority of food banks in this country, do keep statistics on their usage⁶.

In 2011-12, food banks were used by 3,011 people in **Yorkshire and the Humber**, including 1,040 children. In 2014-15, however, there was a huge increase, with 60,186 users, of which 21,197 were children. Increasingly, these are children with working parents, but whose parents can no longer afford to feed their families properly.

⁵ Almost a Quarter in Poverty, Shocking Figures Reveal, We Are Barnsley, Available at: <http://www.wearebarnsley.com/news/article/3870/almost-a-quarter-in-poverty-shocking-figures-reveal>

⁶ These statistics can be found at: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>

According to the Barnsley Foodbank Partnership, 3,783 people were given food parcels in 2013-14, of which 1,411 of those were children.

The top reasons for a person going to a food bank were low incomes and debt, which differs from the national picture that cites benefit delays, benefit sanctions, and low income.

Area of Barnsley	Local Authority Wards	No. of people fed by food banks
Central	Central, Dodworth, Kingstone, Stairfoot, Worsborough	873
North	Darton East, Darton West, Old Town, St Helen's	279
North East	Cudworth, Monk Bretton, North East, Royston	453

Table 2: Figures from Barnsley Foodbank Partnership from each geographical area of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough. It shows the number of referrals to a food bank for each year in the year up to September 2014. Note that a referral may be more than one person, depending on the family composition.

Source: Barnsley Foodbank Partnership, a project set up by the Trussel Trust⁷

4.6 Social Mobility

Child poverty does not have to prevent children from achieving at school; children are often able to increase their prospects, particularly if they get access to university courses.

The Sutton Trust⁸ has ranked the 533 parliamentary constituencies of **England** by performance of disadvantaged children from early years to professional life, and have used the data to create a social mobility index for each constituency⁹. **Barnsley Central** ranked 532nd, higher than only **Derbyshire South**. The performance indicators were as follows:

- Performance of disadvantaged pupils in early years tests: 507/533
- Performance of disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 tests: 399/533
- Performance of disadvantaged pupils at GCSE level: 498/533
- Progress of non-privileged graduates to professional occupations: 433/533.

The data shows that in many of the key indicators of social mobility, **Barnsley Central** ranks below most other constituencies in England.

⁷ Available at: <http://barnsley.foodbank.org.uk/resources/documents/key-stats/Key-Stats---Sep-14.pdf>

⁸ The Sutton Trust, Mobility Map: How Does Your Constituency Compare? Available at: <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/interactive-mobility-map/>

⁹ The exact nature of the five measures used can be found at: <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/mobility-map-background/>

5. Local Initiatives to Tackle Child Poverty

There are a range of local initiatives and the ones listed below are just a snapshot of some of the good work being undertaken in the borough.

5.1 Barnsley Council Anti-Poverty Delivery Group (APDG)

The APDG was recently established by the council to drive the local response to the agenda set out by its anti-poverty strategy. It was formerly known as the Anti-Poverty Board but changed its governance to take on a more task focused role.

It aims to ‘check and challenge’ the work of partners and their activity. It reports to the Stronger Communities Partnership Board, which sits underneath the Health and Wellbeing Board in the council.

The council published its Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2013, which covers the period from 2013 to 2016 and focuses on three specific aims: promote employment; foster (economic) independence; and protect the vulnerable.

An Anti-Poverty Action Plan is currently being drafted to cover 2015-2018 and aims to take account of the widening gap in income and living standards, and the disproportionate effects of welfare reform and austerity, which impact negatively upon the health, wellbeing and prosperity of affected residents.

It has identified four specific challenge areas for their joint action with their partners:

1. Increasing financial inclusion and capability.
2. Reducing child poverty in households.
3. Improving employment prospects and skills.
4. Building healthier communities.

I greatly welcome their emphasis on child poverty as a distinct area to target.

5.2 Children’s and Family Centres

These centres are a vital tool in helping to support and educate families, so they can find routes out of poverty. Barnsley Council recently had to restructure these services because of the drastic cuts in their funding from central government. They have tried to retain as many of the services as possible and find innovative ways to provide them. This has meant that some centres have more scheduled, rather than drop-in services, but the intent has very much been to keep what works, even if at a less frequent level of service.

5.3 Barnsley Children’s and Young People’s Trust

This is a local partnership that brings together interested people and groups in order to improve the wellbeing and life chances of every child in the borough.

The Trust has encouraged young people and children to have a say in what its priorities should be. After its consultation, it adopted the following priorities for 2013-16:

- Keeping children and young people safe.
- Improving education, achievement, and employability.
- Tackling child poverty and improving family life.
- Supporting all children, young people, and families to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Encouraging positive relationships and strengthening emotional health.
- Improving staff skills to deliver quality services.

5.4 Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

This is a council body that gives loans to people facing difficult circumstances: an unexpected bill or other problem that hurts them financially. It is intended to prevent people from turning to alternative measures, like sleeping rough, loan sharks or not eating.

5.5 Barnsley Church Action on Poverty

This is a local branch of the charity, Church Action on Poverty, chaired by Reverend Mick Neal. The group is primarily engaged in helping to run the local foodbank, and a local starter packs scheme. A starter pack is a parcel given to homeless people starting out in new accommodation, full of useful items like pillows, duvets, toasters, crockery, utensils, and cleaning products.

5.6 Conclusion

As can be seen from the many examples listed above, there are a number of organisations working hard to combat child poverty in Barnsley. The main challenge is how to ensure their efforts are effectively co-ordinated – something that Barnsley Council is attempted to tackle.

6. Regional, National and International Initiatives to Tackle Child Poverty

6.1 Save the Children

Save the Children have several reports¹⁰ regarding the need to tackle child poverty. Contained within these reports are a greater number of useful statistics about the factors that cause child poverty and what effect child poverty has on achievement in school, life chances and health outcomes.

6.1.1 Children's Zones

An innovative idea that has developed in recent years is "Children's Zones". These are areas that take a rounded approach to child poverty and take all the causes of child poverty as opposed to just focussing on one specific aspect. This means that child poverty is attacked on a broad spectrum.

In 2013, Save the Children argued that England needed these in order to tackle child poverty effectively. They wrote,

"If such zones were to marshal a range of powerful interventions, there is every reason to believe that they would offer a comprehensive strategy for addressing all of the disadvantages experienced by children and young people in highly disadvantaged areas."

This wide-spectrum approach appears to have greater effects on child poverty than one single intervention on a specific issue. While a single-strand intervention, such as Preventative Programmes can be useful and effective, multi-strand approaches are much more because they tackle several problems at once.

6.1.2 FAST

Families and Schools Together is an initiative run by Save the Children. It looks to bring parents, children, and teachers together to ensure the best support for young people in education.

FAST works by building bonds between parents, pupils, and schools in order to make sure children get the support they need for a good education.

FAST supports families by:

- Helping children improve their skills in reading, writing, and maths – as well as encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school and learning.
- Helping parents to become more involved in their child's education, so that they can support learning and development at home.
- Encouraging stronger bonds between parents and their child, their school's school, other parents, and the wider community.

A large number of families have already been supported by FAST, and they aim to increase that number to 50,000 by 2017¹¹.

¹⁰ Details of these can be found on the Save the Children UK website, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/child-poverty/uk>

¹¹ This information can be found at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/united-kingdom/fast>

6.2 Regional collaboration

With proposals for regional devolution on the agenda, it is worth considering how regional collaboration could support efforts to tackle child poverty.

An anonymous case study from a report published by The Local Government Group on *Local Authority Progress in Tackling Child Poverty*¹², highlighted how Labour controlled local authorities with similar levels of deprivation and poor employment prospects – and therefore a common aspiration to tackle child poverty – collaborated to improve their work in this area.

One of the contributors said: ‘We wouldn’t have been so advanced without this model.’

Each local authority had established its own partnership, focusing on the local-level context and priorities, but lead officers from each local partnership also met on a monthly basis to share ideas and good practice on, for example, approaches to data collection and governance. The partnership lead reported that this minimised duplication of effort within each local authority. The regional collaboration has produced a ‘city-wide skeleton’, or template, for the strategy, which each member local authority would adapt for its own area. A regional strategy was also being developed, drawing together the priorities of the region as a whole.

6.3 Conclusions

It is very important that we learn from the experiences of national and international organisations. There have been considerable successes in tackling the symptoms and causes of child poverty in some areas. Although any model from elsewhere would need to be adapted to suit the needs of the Barnsley community, it is clear that an innovative and experimental approach, that focuses on the importance of education, has delivered some impressive results.

¹² Nelson, J., O'Donnell, L., Filmer-Sankey, C. (2011), *Local Authority Progress in Tackling Child Poverty*, Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LGCP01/LGCP01.pdf>

7. My response to tackling child poverty

Child poverty is a complex issue. But what is very clear is that on both a national and a local level, the number of children living in poverty in the UK is unacceptably high.

The last Labour government was committed to tackling child poverty and made significant progress in this area. We introduced Sure Start, increased financial support for childcare and significantly increased spending on education, to name just three of the ways we tried to give all children the best start in life, no matter what their background.¹³ While there is more that we could, and would, have done, we understood that in order for children to thrive, they needed to have four basic needs met: to have somewhere safe and warm to live, to be healthy, to learn, and perhaps most importantly, to feel supported.



7.1. What does a child growing up in Barnsley Central need?

7.1.1 Home

There are few things more essential for families in Barnsley and across the country than a safe and stable living environment. But for many, securing a warm, safe home is increasingly difficult. Parents in low-income families are facing significant hardship due to cuts in benefits and inadequate access to well-paid, full-time work. This, coupled with the significant shortage of social housing and the poor regulation of the private rented market, means that many children live in precarious homes on the brink of homelessness.

This is a very real problem in Barnsley. Over the last few months, my office has dealt with an increasing number of cases of families who have been affected by the introduction of the benefit cap. Many can no longer afford their private rented properties, but are struggling to find cheaper alternatives as the demand for social housing far out-strips supply (figures for this financial year show that an average of 27 applicants are bidding on every property advertised to let by Berneslai Homes.)

Even if they can afford to rent privately, I receive many complaints from constituents about irresponsible landlords, either failing to take action against tenants who subject their neighbours to persistent anti-social behaviour, or failing to ensure their properties are maintained at an acceptable standard.

¹³ Labour's record on poverty and inequality (June 2013), Robert Joyce and Luke Sibeta, available at www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6738

In order to effectively tackle child poverty, the issue of housing must be at the forefront. There needs to be greater work done to reduce the insecurity associated with private renting, and to drive up standards in both private rented and social housing.

7.1.2 Health

Any plan to tackle both the **symptoms** and **causes** of child poverty must have improving the health and wellbeing of children at its core.

This must start before the child is even born. As we have seen, Barnsley continues to have unacceptably high levels of drinking and smoking during pregnancy and therefore too many babies are born with a low birthweight, and associated health problems. This, coupled with low-breastfeeding rates in Barnsley, means that many of our babies are not being given the best start in life. Targeting high risk groups is vital to support expectant mothers to make the right choices.

Once they reach school age, we need to make sure that all children have access to regular and healthy meals. The link between inadequate nutrition and poor educational attainment is well established. We must provide support given to those families that are struggling to meet this need.

As well as healthy eating, we need to make sure all children access regular physical activity. Whilst all children access PE via the curriculum, many parents can't afford the extra-curricular opportunities offered by after-school and sports clubs. There needs to be support in place for those children whose parents cannot afford these costs.

All of the above are essential if children are to live healthy and happy lives. But when things are not going well, it is crucial that children have swift access to appropriate mental health services, a key area of challenge both nationally and here in Barnsley, due to the acute pressure on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

7.1.3 Learning

There is no doubt that a good education is the most important route out of poverty for many children. Any approach to tackling child poverty will need to ensure that children have access to an exceptional standard of formal education and the extra-curricular activities that provide experience and inspiration to aim high.

Our young people must have the **opportunity** to attend a good school and to gain useful work experience placements in sectors that genuinely appeal to them. The latter will allow them to develop both the experience and the contacts necessary to progress in their chosen career paths or, for those not certain of their future plans yet, provide them with an awareness of the many different career paths available.

There is also the need for **inspiration**. Children must have the opportunity to meet people from Barnsley who have gone on to achieve great things. If we are to break the cycle of poverty that is the reality for many families, it is necessary for children to understand that there are no barriers to what they can achieve. Allowing them to meet and be inspired by those who have gone before them could go a long way to ensuring that they do not set unnecessary limits on themselves.

7.1.4 Support

As mentioned under 'Health', **emotional wellbeing** is paramount if children are to grow into healthy, successful adults. There needs to be clear mechanisms in place to support children

through the difficult process of growing up. Even with the other three requirements in place, there will still be times when children need additional **guidance** to help with the challenges they face. Children need to know what services are available to them and where and how they can access them. They need to learn that it is ok to ask for help and where to go if they need a place of safety. We need to safeguard our children, and ensure robust procedures are in place to deal swiftly with child protection issues.

7.2 What have I done so far?

7.2.1 On housing:

On a local level, I have raised the need to better **regulate the private rented sector** with Barnsley Council. I am pleased that the Council Cabinet has just approved the appointment of a project officer to work through the statutory stages of designing, consulting and potentially implementing a private rented property licensing scheme. The aim of the scheme will be to require and encourage private landlords to improve the management, amenity and safety standards of their properties and to tackle anti-social behaviour and other related problems in the area.

On a national level, I will be **opposing the government's proposals to extend the Right to Buy scheme to include the housing association sector**. At a time when demand for social housing is so clearly outstripping supply, we should be bolstering the social housing sector, not selling it off.

7.2.2 On health:

Having read about the significant impact that the **Barnsley Maternity Stop Smoking Service** had on reducing the numbers of mothers smoking at the time of delivery, I was very dismayed to learn that this service has lost its funding. I have therefore raised this issue urgently with Barnsley Clinical Commissioning Group, as cutting this service seems an extremely retrograde step.

I am also currently working closely with the Director of Public Health, who is leading on the development of a strategic, multi-agency plan to reduce **Excess Winter Deaths (EWD)** in Barnsley.

On a national level, I continue to **challenge the Secretary of State for Health** on this Government's record on the NHS, recently challenging him on funding for CAMHS, resources for local authorities to tackle EWD and vision screening for children.

7.2.3 On learning:

I work closely with head teachers of both **secondary and primary schools**, supporting their plans to improve their schools and lobbying on their behalf whenever it is useful and appropriate.

I am delighted that **Proud of Barnsley** is still going strong. Every year, a prize is awarded to a Young Superstar. This award recognises the many achievements of children and young people in our borough, aiming to challenge stereotypes and highlight the young role models who positively influence their peers.

I am also extremely proud to be Patron of **Barnsley Youth Choir**. This fantastic organisation brings together over 200 young people from a variety of backgrounds, encourages them to be the best that they can be and gives them a brilliant opportunity to be part of one of the top youth choirs in the UK. Their recent success in both the European and World Choir Games gave many of their singers their first trip outside of the UK. To make this happen, and to ensure that every chosen singer had the opportunity to take part, I helped support their fundraising activities.

7.2.4 On support:

Over the last couple of years, many constituents have contacted me to raise their concerns about the waiting times for assessment and treatment with **CAMHS**. I have raised these concerns directly with the South Yorkshire Partnership Foundation Trust, who have carried out a review on this services over the last 6 months. I am currently waiting to see the report from this review.

In the meantime, I was pleased to learn that **Therapies for Anxiety, Depression and Stress (TADS)**, a voluntary group, has won Big Lottery funding for a project working to support people aged 11 to 18 with their mental wellbeing.

I continue to work closely with Barnsley Council and South Yorkshire Police to tackle the issue of **'legal highs'**. Currently I am supporting the Police and Crime Commissioner with his legal highs social media campaign. Working with local sporting personalities, the campaign is raising awareness of the dangers of legal highs, sending out the message to young people that these substances can have a devastating impact on their lives.

On a national level, I have been pushing the government to move forward with legislation to ban 'legal highs', and am pleased that the **Psychoactive Substances Bill** should result in a blanket ban coming into effect on 1 April 2016.

Whilst I acknowledge that use of legal highs is often a symptom of other underlying problems, I believe it is vital that we stop the sale of these substances to children – which is currently allowed under law. Local people have witnessed users fitting and vomiting after taking these unregulated substances and there are reports from across the UK, and Barnsley itself, of people dying after consuming them. They are a clear threat to our young people, who often believe they are 'safe' because they are 'legal'.

7.3 Next steps

It is clear that there needs to be a serious and concerted effort to tackle the issue of child poverty. This will require action at both a **national** level and a **local** level, which focuses on all four of the areas highlighted in the previous section.

As the MP for **Barnsley Central**, I intend to make this one of my leading campaigns for 2016, both here in Barnsley and in Westminster.

Below is a list of actions I propose to take. It is not intended to be exhaustive but rather a thought provoking contribution to one of the key challenges we face here in Barnsley.

7.3.1 Housing: next steps

- I will continue to work alongside BMBC as they move towards a comprehensive strategy to regulate the private rented housing sector.
- I will campaign with my colleagues in the national Labour Party for more funding for social housing and against the sell-off of existing stock.

7.3.2 Health: next steps

- I will formally raise in Parliament what this Government is doing to promote healthy choices in pregnancies and to promote breast feeding. This will include requesting information on the funding allocated to both these areas.
 - I will continue to challenge the Government on the £1.6 billion NHS deficit.
-

7.3.3 Learning: next steps

- I will consult with Team Activ on the work they are doing to develop self-confidence, self-belief, leadership and team-working with young people through their physical activity programmes.
- I will investigate whether a bursary scheme could be set up to support children who would otherwise be excluded from extra curricular activities, eg. Scouts and Guides.

7.3.4 Support: next steps

- I will follow up on the CAMHS review with SWYPFT.
- I will offer my support to the new project to support young people being run by TADS (Therapies for Anxiety, Depression and Stress) in Barnsley.

7.3.5 Overall strategy: next steps

- I will offer my support to the Anti-Poverty Delivery Group in Barnsley and other stakeholders who are working hard to tackle the causes and symptoms of child poverty.
- I will seek a debate on Child Poverty in the House of Commons.

7.4 How can we harness the efforts of people locally?

We have a range of talents, skills and experience locally, so it would be good to find a way to harness contributions from people who want to make a difference on this important subject.

7.5 This is how you can help

I am keen to involve as many people as possible and would welcome your input. If you have any ideas you wish to contribute, please contact me:

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