

# **Childcare in Camberwell & Peckham: Two Steps Forward One Step Back**



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# Introduction

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When I first became an MP in Camberwell and Peckham in 1982, one of the biggest complaints from mothers bringing up young children on their own was the lack of childcare.

They would tell me about the difficulty of trying to keep a toddler happy and entertained in a high rise flat; how they would dread rainy days because even going to the park would not be an option. Too many felt isolated – with their own parents living in another part of the country.

They wanted their child to be able to go to a nursery – to socialise with other children and benefit from the space to run around in. And so that they could then get further training, or get a job. But at that time, the only way they could get their child into one of the Council-run nurseries was if they were regarded as a “bad mother” who posed a threat to their child. There were no community nurseries – and no help with the cost of the very few private nurseries in the area, or with the cost of childminders.

Their aspirations for their children and for their own working lives – like mothers all around the country – were the inspiration for the work we did when we got into government in 1997.

We believed that parents should have access to childcare which was affordable, accessible and high quality. And we embarked on the National Childcare Strategy which – through childcare tax credits, Sure Start Centres and support for nurseries in the NHS and colleges – led to a massive increase in childcare provision. Between the years 2003 and 2010, the Labour Government’s action led to approximately 2,500 more registered childcare places in Southwark.

Many mothers found the childcare that they needed. But, despite our work in government, childcare still remained a problem for many working parents. Parents on top incomes could pay for the childcare they needed. But too many parents on low and middle incomes still could not get the childcare they wanted.

I have kept a close eye on the provision of childcare in my constituency – for a time, chairing Southwark’s Early Years Partnership.

This report – 3 years in to a Tory/Lib Dem coalition government – shows that the progress that was made on childcare from 1997 to 2010 is slipping back.

Childcare tax credit – which helps parents pay nursery or childminders fees – has been cut. The government grant to Southwark Council for children’s services has been cut.

There are more children under 5 in Southwark, up 2.6% from 20,913 to 21,464, according to the most recent statistics. And mothers are more likely to want to work and, with the squeeze on family budgets, more likely to need to work. But there is now a fall in the number of childcare places, down 3.2%

from 10,121 in 2010 to 9,803 in 2012, as the council has to cut back and private childcare providers find they have to cut back their business.

This report is based on what parents and childcare providers are saying and on statistics from Southwark Council and the Government. It shows that after a decade of progress, we are now moving further away from the aim of affordable, accessible, quality childcare for every child whose parents want it.

As the Government is cutting back, the price is being paid by children and parents. Children are missing out on a good nursery place and parents, especially mothers, are losing out as they limit the work they can do or have to give up work altogether meaning they and their children have to depend on benefits.

## Parents facing rising childcare costs

The average cost of a part-time (25 hours) nursery place for a child under the age of 2 in Camberwell and Peckham is £154 per week. This means that a Camberwell and Peckham mother on average Camberwell and Peckham female earnings, paying for 25 hours nursery provision, is spending 53% of her weekly pay on childcare.

The average cost of a part-time (25 hours) nursery place for a child under 5 is £109.20 per week<sup>1</sup>. This means that a Camberwell and Peckham mother on average Camberwell and Peckham female earnings, paying for 25 hours nursery provision, is spending 38% of her weekly pay on childcare<sup>2</sup>.

The average cost of a part-time (25 hours) place with a childminder is £188 per week<sup>3</sup>. This means that a Camberwell and Peckham mother on average Camberwell and Peckham female earnings, paying for 25 hours of childminder care, is spending 65% of her weekly pay on childcare.

Results from my survey of childcare providers show the highest charge for one hour of childcare provision was £11 and the lowest was £2.

**Table 1. Charge per hour for childcare in Camberwell and Peckham<sup>4</sup>**

| Provider          | Highest | Lowest | Average |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Nursery under 2   | £8.30   | £4     | £6.15   |
| Nursery under 5   | £6.70   | £2     | £4.35   |
| Childminder       | £10     | £5     | £7.50   |
| After school club | £11     | £2     | £6.50   |

*"I just have to make it work but childcare is too expensive. I spend £180 every week in nursery fees. It is the biggest cost of the week. It costs too much to use a childminder. That would cost me £40 a day plus."*

***Mother of 2, Shop Assistant, Peckham***

<sup>1</sup> Survey of childcare providers in Camberwell and Peckham, The Office of Harriet Harman, December 2013

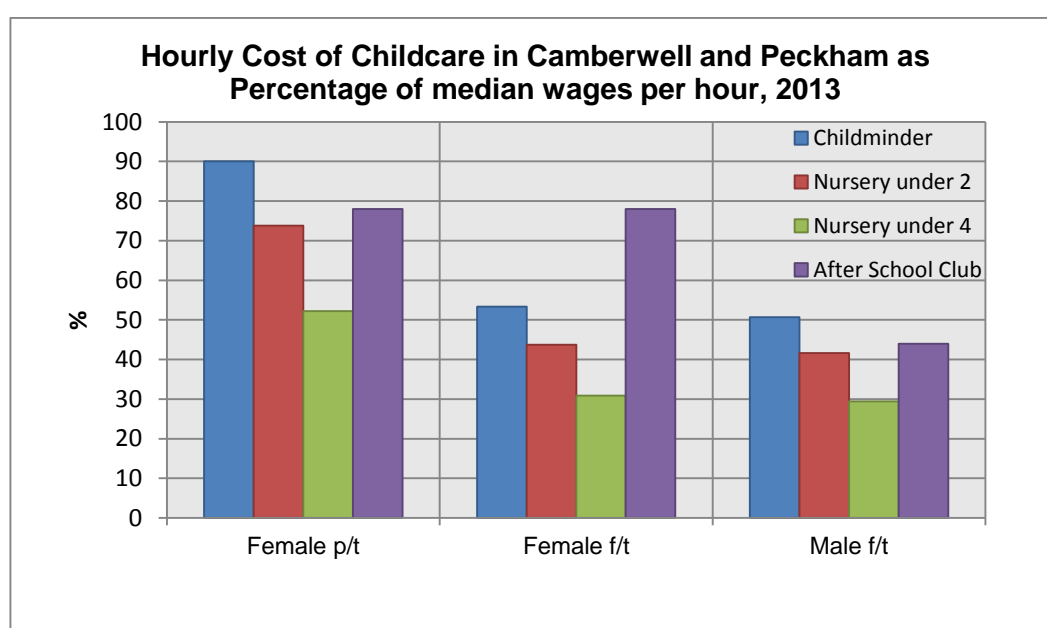
<sup>2</sup> ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Home Parliamentary Constituency Table Weekly Pay, Provisional & Finalised Results, 2009-2013

<sup>3</sup> Survey of childcare providers in Camberwell and Peckham, The Office of Harriet Harman, December 2013

<sup>4</sup> Survey of childcare providers in Camberwell and Peckham, The Office of Harriet Harman, December 2013

**Table 2. Camberwell and Peckham median average hourly earnings  
2009-2013<sup>5</sup>**

|            | 2009   | 2010   | 2011        | 2012   | 2013   |
|------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|
| Female f/t | £13.92 | £14.91 | £13.68      | £15.34 | £14.07 |
| Female p/t | £8.12  | £8.77  | Unavailable | £8.68  | £8.33  |
| Male       | £12.22 | £12.78 | £12.63      | £12.77 | £13.61 |
| Male f/t   | £13.97 | £14.25 | £13.94      | £14.04 | £14.78 |
| Male p/t   | £6.49  | £7.47  | Unavailable | £7.27  | £7.68  |



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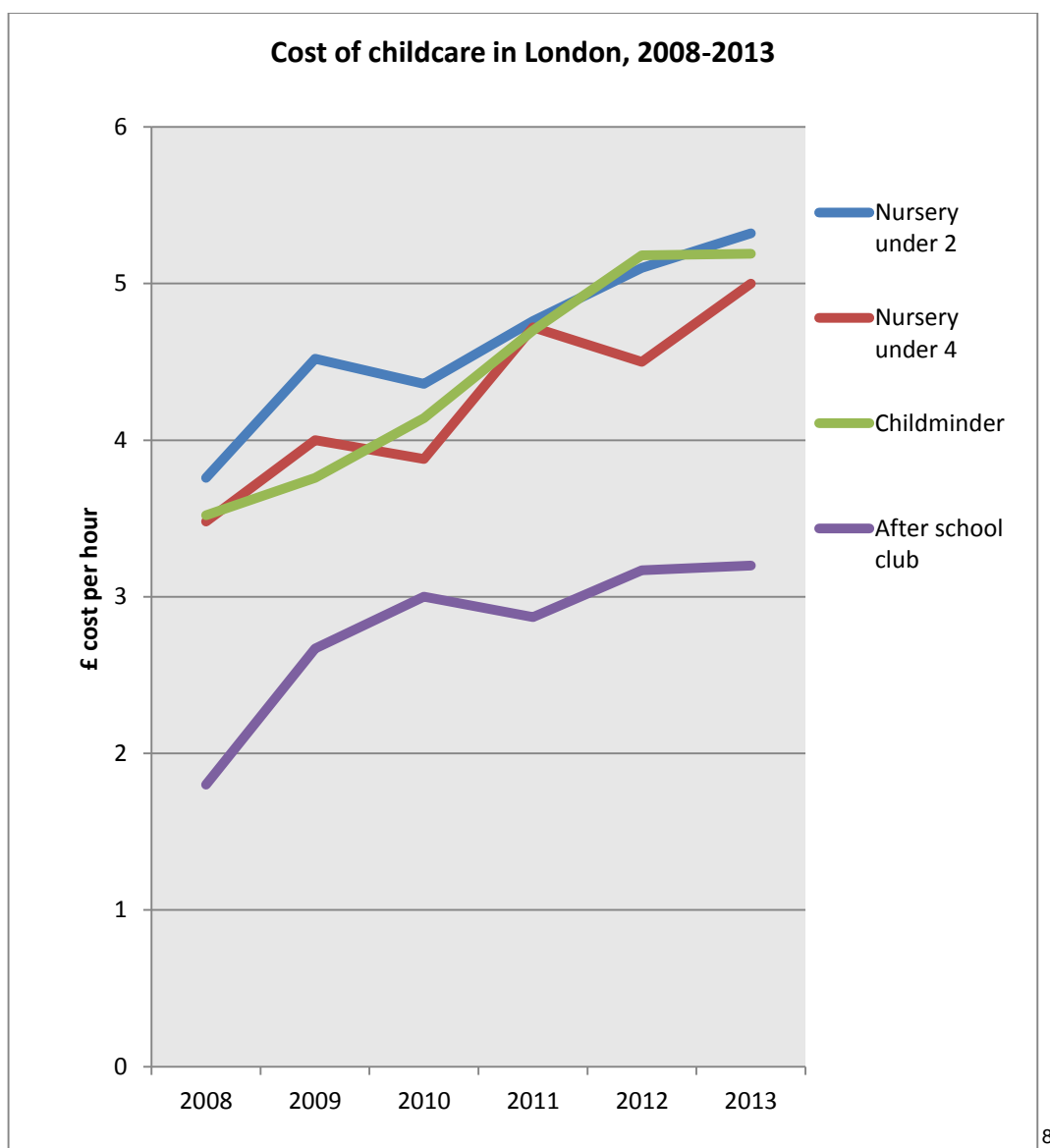
### Childcare costs rising – while pay stagnates

In London, the cost of childcare has risen by 34.9% since 2008, rising 4.2% in just the last 12 months<sup>7</sup>. With stagnant wages this is a real financial burden for working parents. Many parents have to make difficult choices between working fewer hours or changing their jobs to cope with rising childcare costs. The increase in charges by many childcare providers reflects the fact that fewer parents are topping up with extra hours and paying for full-time provision. This means childcare providers have to increase their charges to pay for rent, staff, food and learning resources.

<sup>5</sup> ONS, Annual Survey of House and Earnings Home Parliamentary Constituency Table Hourly Pay, Provisional & Finalised Results, 2009-2013

<sup>6</sup> ONS, Annual Survey of House and Earnings Home Parliamentary Constituency Table Hourly Pay, Datasets, 2009-2013 & Survey of childcare providers in Camberwell and Peckham, The Office of Harriet Harman, December 2013

<sup>7</sup> The Family and Childcare Trust, Childcare Costs Survey 2008-2013



*"We are currently reviewing our prices to increase our fees in 2014."*

***Jackie, Regional Development Manager, The Playshelter, Peckham***

### **15 hours free early education not enough for working parents**

In Southwark, 714 (61%) of the most disadvantaged two years olds and 6,970 (88%) of children aged three or four use a free nursery place that entitles them to 15 hours of free registered childcare per week<sup>9</sup>. While free childcare is in high demand in Camberwell and Peckham, 15 hours does not offer parents the flexibility they need to make important choices around work.

<sup>8</sup> The Family and Childcare Trust, Childcare Costs Survey 2008-2013

<sup>9</sup> Southwark 2 year old up-take (December 2013) *Southwark Council Family Information Service*



*"If I'm looking for work, I can't work for fifteen hours per week. You can't get work for three hours in a day. If you increased the hours that would be helpful but if you work you end up paying more for childcare and that means what's the point in working? That's why I'm not looking for work. It needs to be more flexible. Six or seven hours per day and we can manage. If my child goes full-time, I'll look for part-time work."*

**Mother of 3. Peckham**

### **Parents paying extra charges to top up free early education hours**

In Southwark, childcare providers are paid by the council a set rate of £4.10 per hour for each child eligible for free early education that they look after. But this does not cover the costs and providers are becoming increasingly reliant on parents purchasing extra hours to guarantee their child's nursery place. This puts pressure on parents to pay for extra hours while nurseries are struggling to afford rents, bills and early learning resources. Some nursery staff jobs are at risk because many parents cannot afford to top up with extra hours.



### **Parents using a patchwork of arrangements**

*"Parents and carers are making additional alternative provision, for example a playgroup or a childminder that they pay for. This concerns us as it means very young children are not having real consistency in their day, and experiencing several transitions of care. I would prefer to continue to offer full-time nursery provision to match our school hours, which until recently our Local Authority funded. This meant a reduction in transitions, improved continuity, and the assurances of a hot, healthy meal in the day. I find it sad that with the emphasis on the prime areas of learning, we are currently unable to offer this due to lack of funding."*

**Fiona, Assistant Head Early Years Foundation Stage, Brunswick Park Primary School**

Childcare costs are high, many families have more than one child of different ages, free childcare is only for 15 hours for children aged three and four and many parents find they can't get a job for fewer than 15 hours or they need to work longer to earn more. So, many parents use a patchwork of arrangements to care for the children in their family. One family can, at any



one time, rely on a combination of friends, family childminder, nursery and after-school club. This is very difficult for parents to manage on a daily and weekly basis.

But, more importantly, it means a lack of continuity of care for the child. I have heard of children who are dropped off at school by a different person each day. There are children who are collected from nursery by a different person each day. And some children will go to nursery two days a week and have three different arrangements for care the remaining three days. Both parents and childcare providers are worried about the patchwork of care that children experience. And this is a major concern arising out of the lack of affordable quality childcare.

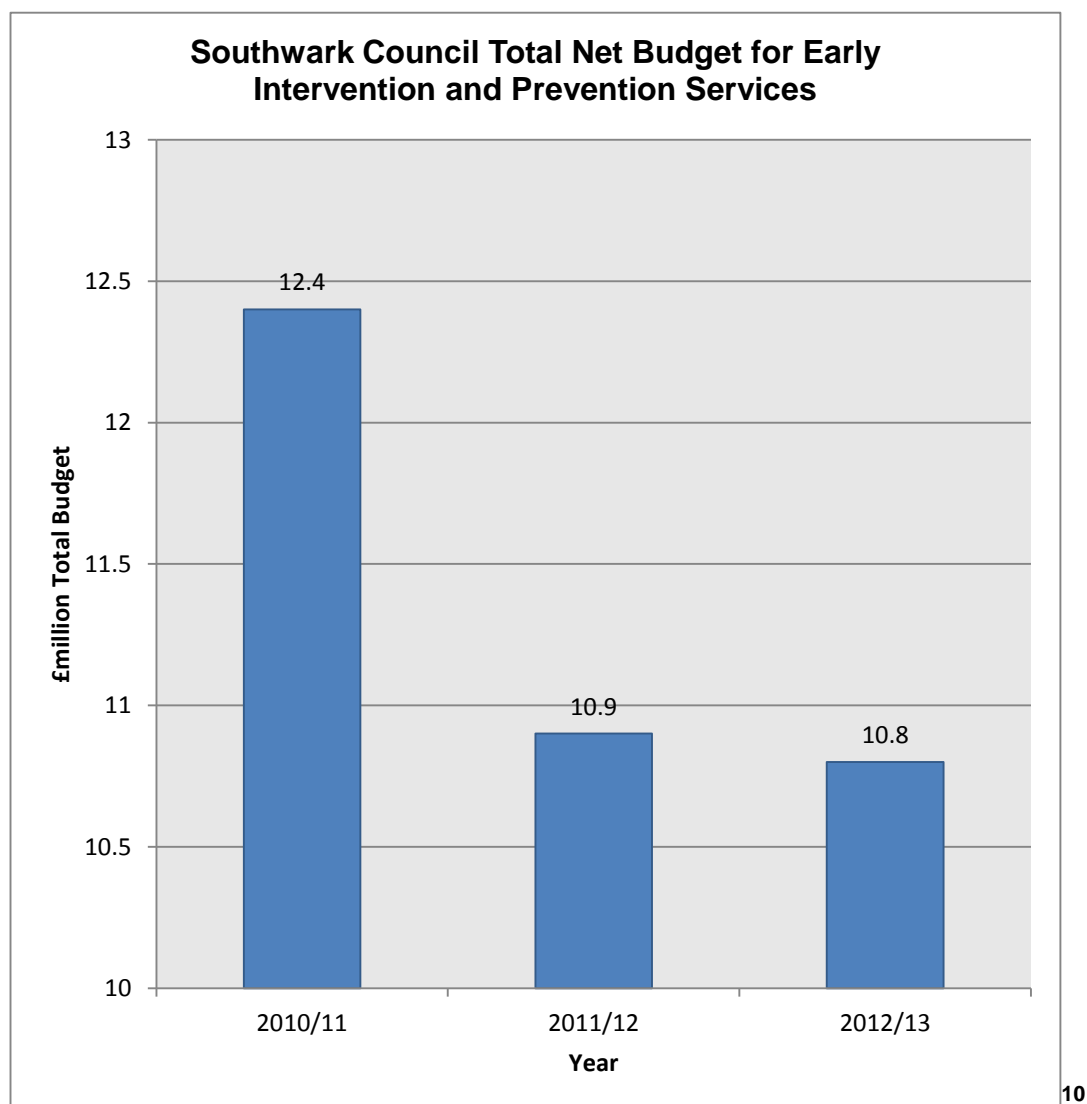
*"I've had three kids, the nursery is lovely but the hours (free early education) have changed to two and a half days per week. This helps me get some part-time work but it has a negative effect on the kids who lose their continuity at the nursery. Finding the balance between their opening hours and work is what they need to do. I pay for childcare for more hours than I work."*

**Mother of 3, Analyst  
Camberwell**



## Government cuts funding for early years provision

The total spending for children and family services in Southwark has fallen by approximately 14% since 2010. These services include many forms of support for young people up to the age of 19. But the Government has also cut vital early years provision for children under the age of 5. This includes money for Sure Start Children Centre's and many other services for vulnerable families with young children, such as parenting classes and health visitors. Even taking into account the Government scheme of fifteen hours free early education for disadvantaged two year olds, the total funding for early years services has continued to fall.



<sup>10</sup> Southwark Council Family Information Service, Child and Adult Services Budget Books 2009-2014

## Cuts to Sure Start

The Coalition Government has removed the ring-fence around funding for Sure Start children's centres.

In 2011, Southwark Council lost its exemplary 'at home' health and childcare service as a result of Government cuts<sup>11</sup>. In the same year, the Government introduced a new funding stream called the Early Intervention Grant (EIG) for local authorities to pay for free early education and Sure Start children's centres. However in the year before the Government introduced the EIG, money spent on Sure Start was 3% higher than the total funds allocated to Southwark Council through the EIG<sup>12</sup>. To make matters worse, in 2014, the Business Rates Retention Grant will replace the EIG. As a result, £0.9bn worth of funding for Sure Start provision is likely to be cut<sup>13</sup>.

## Cuts to Child Tax Credits

In April 2011 the Government cut the childcare element of working tax credits. Parents who could previously claim 80% of their childcare costs can now claim only 70% of the total cost of registered childcare. And the amount per week which can be claimed – up to £175 for one child and £300 for two – has not been increased since 2005, penalising London families who pay 24% higher childcare costs than other regions in the country.<sup>14</sup>



In Camberwell and Peckham, parents claiming the childcare element of working tax credit received on average £110.17 per week in 2009. This amount decreased to £90.83 in 2012<sup>15</sup> despite an 11% rise in the cost of a nursery place. A family with two children in Camberwell and Peckham paying an average of £160 per week in childcare costs has lost up to £830 per year in tax credit cuts.

Since the Government cut the childcare element of working tax credit, the number of families across Southwark receiving childcare tax credit has fallen

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<sup>11</sup> The Family and Childcare Trust *2012 London Childcare Report* p.34

<sup>12</sup> Southwark Council Family Information Service, Child and Adult Services Budget Books 2009-2014

<sup>13</sup> Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres (July 2013)

<http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/cffc42fe-49eb-43e2-b330-a1fd00b8077b/Best-Practice-for-a-Sure-Start.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Family and Childcare Trust <http://www.Childcaretrust.org.uk/news.php?id=89>

<sup>15</sup> HMRC Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics Finalised Annual Awards 2011-12 Geographical Analysis

by 19%. The drop in claimants may well be a result of the increase in part-time and insecure temporary work. This is because fewer parents on low incomes are working the 16 hours per week that entitles them to this financial support for childcare. This is especially relevant for couples where both must work 16 hours per week to receive childcare tax credits. Also, given the 10% cut to the childcare element of working tax credit, parents may feel they will be better off receiving employer support childcare vouchers.

So, the number of families receiving both working and child tax credits – other than the childcare element – has increased 21% since 2009<sup>16</sup>. This is because of the Government failure to help parents with secure, well-paid jobs, they end up paying more to subsidise parents' payments for childcare<sup>17</sup>.



*Roundtable at the House of Commons, listening to childcare providers*

*"Parents require full-time places. Local Authority funds part-time only"*

***Head of Primary School, Peckham***

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/268141/131219\\_Main\\_Provisional\\_Publication\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268141/131219_Main_Provisional_Publication_PDF.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-and-working-tax-credits-statistics-provisional-awards-geographical-analyses-december-2013>

# Families struggling to pay for childcare

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The combination of Government cuts and high childcare costs has hit many different types of families throughout Camberwell and Peckham. Two parent families with both parents working or one parent in work, single parent families, young mothers studying at college or university and unemployed parents looking to get work, have all face childcare problems.

## Squeeze on household budgets

Childcare needs vary for different children but what is constant is the need for parents to be able to get affordable childcare. In many cases, the cost of childcare is deterring parents, especially women, from working. Families are already under considerable financial pressure as they struggle to pay rent, travel, bills and other household costs. It is important to help families with children stay in work but the number of working households with children in Southwark has decreased by almost 5,000 since 2010, from 26,000 to 21,000<sup>18</sup>.

Rhian is a married mother of two young children and a paediatric nurse. She works 23 hours per week and her husband works full-time as a teacher. Although her youngest child is eligible for 15 hours free childcare, the nursery cannot afford to provide the place without her topping up an extra £2.96 per hour. She pays approximately £100 per week in childcare, £70 of which is used to pay for her mother to travel down from the north of England to provide childcare. Rhian wants to develop her career but the cost and availability of childcare makes this difficult.

**Rhian, mother of 2, Part-time nurse, Camberwell**

Because of the cost-of-living crisis and squeeze on living standards, the need for both parents to work is greater than in previous years. Many mothers are unable to return to their jobs because of the costs of childcare while some are postponing their return to work or moving away from London where there are lower childcare costs. This often means that essential public services like hospitals and schools risk losing valuable members of staff.

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<sup>18</sup> Children living in households in Southwark by combined economic activity status of household members, April to June 2009-2012 *Annual Population Survey household datasets*, ONS

Alison worked in a senior role for a national charity for eight years before childcare costs forced her to become a childminder. She was paying on average £90 per day in nursery and childminding fees for her two children. She became a childminder to look after her own children at the same time as caring for others. Alison intends to use the free childcare provision with her third child to gain some experience back in the workplace but she worries 15 hours will be insufficient to comply with the demands of future employers.

**Alison, mother of 3, Full-time childminder, Camberwell**

### **Restricts employment choices**

It is very important for a family with young children that there is someone in work in the household, but the current cost of childcare restricts the job prospects of parents. In Southwark, there are many households with children where only one parent works. The number of households in which there is no employed adult has increased 6.5%<sup>19</sup>. Many parents have to change careers, restrict themselves to working locally or work fewer hours to manage their childcare needs. Some parents in low paid, part-time or temporary work are better off on benefits than in work, with the cost of childcare deterring parents from working altogether and giving them no choice but to depend on benefits. This risks the financial security of families and the employability of parents in the longer term as they stay at home.

Rylan works full-time earning £951 per month with a total household annual income of £14,572. He lives with his partner and their 2 year old son. He receives £175 working tax credits per month and £80 child tax credit for childcare. His partner wants to work but she cannot risk spending over half her expected salary on childcare. Rylan and his partner use Tykes Corner on the Aylesbury Estate that charges £1.50 per day to ensure early play and interaction for their son.

**Rylan and partner, Aylesbury Estate**

### **Parents unable to make work pay**

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<sup>19</sup> Children living in households in Southwark by combined economic activity status of household members, April to June 2009-2012 *Annual Population Survey household datasets*, ONS



Camberwell and Peckham is one of the most deprived areas in London. With 3,733 households with children under the age of 15 where no-one works<sup>20</sup>, there is a great need for affordable childcare to help parents work.

- 30% of children in Southwark live in workless households<sup>21</sup>
- 9,960 (32.7%) children in Camberwell and Peckham live in poverty<sup>22</sup>

To help tackle child poverty, mothers must be able to get affordable childcare. This not only helps increase family income but also helps the local economy, which has a female unemployment rate of 11.2%, which is above the national average<sup>23</sup>.

Marika is a single mother of 3. She cannot find work that will cover childcare costs. She drops off her eldest son at primary school at 8:30am and then takes her youngest daughter to nursery, returning to pick her up at 11:45am. Without more free childcare hours she cannot make work pay, so she helps her sister by looking after her children while she works 12 hours per day.

**Marika, unemployed mother of 3, Peckham**

Managing the family finances can be a real struggle, especially for single parents and low income families. In Camberwell and Peckham there are 7,010 children living in single parent households who depend on Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance<sup>24</sup>.

Chloe is a young single mother who has started a business as a mobile hairdresser. Her oldest child gets fifteen hours free childcare but she is finding it hard to pay for childcare for her youngest son – who is under two. The free hours do not offer enough flexibility and prevent her from expanding her business. When she was training, she was in debt to a childminder and she couldn't afford to get to college. Her mother had to reduce her working hours to look after the children.

**Chloe, single mother of 2, Peckham**

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<sup>20</sup> Census data for Parliamentary constituencies in England & Wales, 2011 – House of Commons Library Research Paper RP13/20

<sup>21</sup> Children living in households in Southwark by combined economic activity status of household members, April to June 2009-2012 *Annual Population Survey household datasets*, ONS

<sup>22</sup> Department of Work and Pensions Households Below Average Income

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-work-pensions/series/households-below-average-income-hbai-2>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431870/printable.aspx> - 11.2% refers to all economically active women over 16 in Southwark

<sup>24</sup> HMRC Personal Tax Credits: related stats – Children in Low Income Families Local Measure



Camberwell and Peckham is home to a vibrant population of approximately 13,500 students<sup>25</sup>. For many young mothers it can be very difficult to start a career after studying. The Care to Learn scheme gives London students £175 per week childcare and transport costs. Mothers studying at university can receive a Childcare Grant of up to £255 per week. While student grants help mothers during their studies, many students are concerned about how they will pay for childcare after the completion of their course.

Rowan benefits from the Care to Learn scheme. She is completing her college placement two days per week at Little Winners nursery in Peckham. She has one child who is thirteen months old. Next year she hopes to be a qualified childcare practitioner and expects to earn £210 per week. She estimates that if she is to work full time then she will pay £135 per week – 65% of her wages – in nursery fees.

**Rowan, mother of 1, Student, Peckham**

*“Parents find it challenging to put their children in nursery because they cannot afford the cost. As a result they stay at home to look after them. The support they receive from the Government is limited.”*

***Helen, Manager at Little Winners Nursery, Peckham***

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<sup>25</sup> Census data for Parliamentary constituencies in England & Wales, 2011 – *House of Commons Library Research Paper RP13/20*

# Cuts hitting childcare providers

## Providers unable to offer parents flexibility

In Camberwell and Peckham the typical hours for a childcare provider is 8 hours per day. From the childcare providers who responded to our survey, the earliest opening time was 6:00am and the latest closing time was 8:00pm.

Many parents in Camberwell and Peckham who undertake shift-work in restaurants, hospitals or in the transport industry struggle to find a childcare provider available in the early mornings or evenings. Parents have to rely upon friends and relatives for childcare. In some cases children no more than ten or eleven years old have to care for their younger siblings. As extended family is less likely to live nearby, children are acting as part-time carers while grandparents are traveling long distances to provide care.<sup>26</sup>

- 71% of childcare providers are not open before 8:00am
- 68% of providers don't open before 9:00am
- 37% of providers close before 4:00pm

*"Childcare is very difficult to get at the moment. I travel from Somerset to London to look after my grandchildren two days a week. If I didn't, then three quarters of my daughter's salary would be spent on childcare."*

**Elizabeth Baxter,  
Grandmother,  
Somerset**

Childcare after school is a concern for parents of young primary and secondary school children who worry about their child traveling home alone in the evenings. High costs of childcare for children older than five is a common concern for working parents. Larger families with low wages are particularly affected as childminders are either unavailable or too expensive, and holiday play schemes are in short supply.

*"I have three children. For the older two (13 and 9), it's very hard to find after-school clubs or breakfast clubs. They go to a place on Nunhead Grove that costs 20p to get in. That's all I can afford. My dad can't help because he's working six days a week on the buses."*

**Single mother of 3, Peckham**

Many families using breakfast clubs or after school care have to pay for several weeks of childcare in advance. It is often difficult for parents to pay fees in advance, as it is for those required to pay deposits with nurseries. Many providers suggested that advance payments are essential for sustaining their business.

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<sup>26</sup> Southwark Council Family Information Service

“I am forced to work part-time on top of running the nursery in order to pay some of our bills...Unless one is willing to run the nursery like a charity, it is inevitable that a pre-school like ours will be forced to close down in the near future, thus leaving less provision within the local community and at the same time making nursery staff unemployed.”

**Nursery Manager, East Dulwich**

### **Fewer childcare places – but more children under 5**

During the years of the Labour government from 1997 to 2010 we increased the number of childcare places in Southwark. Between 2003 and 2010 the number of childcare places in Southwark rose 32% from 7,674 to 10,121.

But, since the Coalition Government came to office the number of childcare places has fallen to 9,803. And that is despite the fact that there are more children under 5 in Southwark whose parents want a childcare place.

*“We can only offer part-time nursery places. There is a high demand for full-time places. We have been able to offer top-up, charging families an additional £25 per session.”*

**Lynne Cooper, Deputy Head,  
Nell Gwynn Nursery, Peckham**

The cuts in financial support for the cost of childcare to parents and the cuts in support to Southwark Council for childcare mean that fewer parents can afford childcare and then childcare providers cut places.

The lack of childcare is holding back parents who want and need to work extra hours or who want to go from unemployment - and dependence on benefits - into work.

**Table 4. Total number of registered childcare places and number of children under 5 in Southwark, 2003-2012<sup>27</sup>**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Registered places</b> | <b>Number of children under 5</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>2003</b> | 7,674                    | 17,534                            |
| <b>2004</b> | 8,628                    | 17,750                            |
| <b>2005</b> | 9,022                    | 18,195                            |
| <b>2006</b> | 9,600                    | 18,950                            |
| <b>2007</b> | 9,696                    | 19,606                            |
| <b>2008</b> | 9,371                    | 20,116                            |
| <b>2009</b> | 9,503                    | 20,586                            |
| <b>2010</b> | 10,121                   | 20,496                            |
| <b>2011</b> | 9,796                    | 20,913                            |
| <b>2012</b> | 9,803                    | 21,464                            |

**Table 5. Number of childcare providers (including childminders) opened and closed in Camberwell and Peckham 2009-2013<sup>28</sup>**

| <b>Year</b>  | <b>Total Providers Opened</b> | <b>Total Providers Closed</b> |
|--------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2009         | 44                            | 17                            |
| 2010         | 46                            | 35                            |
| 2011         | 30                            | 47                            |
| 2012         | 31                            | 63                            |
| 2013         | 18                            | 20                            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>169</b>                    | <b>182</b>                    |

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<sup>27</sup> Southwark Council Family Information Service

<sup>28</sup> Southwark Council Family Information Service

# Appendices

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30 JAN 2014

**DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**TUESDAY 28 JANUARY 2014**

**WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY 2014**

**HARRIET HARMAN (CAMBERWELL AND PECKHAM):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he takes to ensure that local authorities fully implement their responsibilities as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and the Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities produced in 2013.

**(184886)**

**ELIZABETH TRUSS:**

Local authorities are accountable to their local electorate for the delivery of their duties under the Act. The Department for Education publishes national datasets to enable local authorities to benchmark their performance against geographical or statistical neighbours, and to enable parents and communities to hold them to account. The benchmarking tables are available online<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/b00211546/foundation-years-benchmarking-tool>

House of Commons<sup>29</sup>

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Oral Answers to Questions

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked –

19 Nov 2013: Column 1073

**Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab):** There is widespread recognition now about the importance of child care, but it needs to be high quality, accessible and affordable for working parents. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that since he became Deputy Prime Minister, the cost of child care has gone up five times faster than wages, and that for every week that he has been Deputy Prime Minister, three Sure Start children's centres have closed?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** On both counts wrong, and I strongly urge the right hon. and learned Lady not—*[Interruption.]* No, categorically wrong: 45 Sure Start centres have closed since 2010, which is 1.2% of all Sure Start centres. She must stop peddling these misleading statistics about the closure of Sure Start centres. She is also wrong about costs. In fact, the dataset used by Labour shows that child care costs increased by 46% between 2002 and 2010.

**Ms Harman:** The right hon. Gentleman's answer is not even consistent with the Government's own figures on Sure Start children's centres. More importantly, it is not consistent with the experience of people in their own communities and of hard-working parents who have seen not only children's centres close, but those remaining having their hours cut, their staff cut and their services cut. Nobody is going to be impressed by his posing as the champion of child care. The truth is that after all the progress on child care when we were in government, working parents are now finding it even harder to get the child care they need.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** There are more parents using Sure Start children's centres than ever before. This Government are providing a new entitlement for two-year-olds from the poorest families, which did not happen under 13 years of Labour. I have to say that so many of these difficult decisions are related to the fact that Opposition Members crashed the economy in the first place, for which they have taken no responsibility. Even the mayor of Toronto is admitting past mistakes.

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<sup>29</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131119/debtext/131119-0001.htm>

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This report was researched by Jamie Morgan Evans.