



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
 Chancellor of the Exchequer
 11 Downing Street
 Westminster
 London, SW1A 2AB

23 November 2020

Dear Chancellor,

We are writing to urge you to ensure that this week's Spending Review allocates vital funding for the youngest children.

The pandemic has resulted in worrying numbers of babies and young children being exposed to stress, trauma and adversity which, if not addressed, could have a significant impact on their wellbeing and development:

- The Chief Inspector of Ofsted¹ has reported that between April and October, there was a 20% rise in serious incidents of harm to babies compared to the same period last year.
- Recent research² has shown that almost 7 in 10 (68%) parents felt the changes brought about by COVID-19 were affecting their unborn baby, baby or young child. Many families with lower incomes, from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and young parents were harder hit by the pandemic.
- When parents experience stress and trauma it can have an impact on their babies too. A range of emerging evidence³ suggests that the pandemic and lockdown has had a negative impact on parental mental health, due to the traumatic experience of experiencing labour and birth alone, the pressures of lockdown and a lack of support for families.

¹ Amanda Spielman speech at NCASC 2020

² Best Beginnings, Home-Start UK and the Parent-Infant Foundation - *Babies in Lockdown report: listening to parents to build back better (2020)*

³For example, see written evidence to the Parliamentary inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave [here](#)

The Government's response to COVID-19 has included support for many vulnerable groups in our society, but not the youngest. There is a narrowing window of opportunity now to address the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable young children.

Earlier this year Government announced £1bn new funding for schools to close gaps in achievement caused by COVID-19. This equates to around £112 per pupil. A Baby Boost could provide the same amount of funding for the babies of 2020. This would equate to £68m. It would enable local commissioners to fund interventions such as targeted support from health visitors, specialist services and charities, to help babies and families recover from the harms caused by the pandemic.

Alongside action as part of the COVID response, there is a need for more substantial investment in early life. We welcome Government's longer-term commitments to this agenda, including the Leadsom Review, the refresh of the Healthy Child Programme and the increase in the value of healthy start vouchers. Decisions made about the restructure of Public Health England must also keep the needs of the youngest child in sharp focus. Any new policy commitments must be supported by substantial and sustained investment to rebuild our Health Visiting workforce and enable effective, whole-system action to give every baby the best start in life.

Babies can't wait. Therefore we urge you to take action now to include babies in the COVID recovery, alongside committing to longer term strategic investment in the three-year spending review.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Hughes, Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health



Jeff Banks, Director, A Better Start Southend



Neil Leitch, Chief Executive Officer, Early Years Alliance



Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau



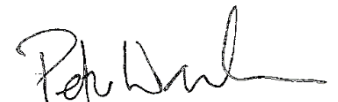
Melanie Armstrong, Chief Executive, Action for Children



Alison Baum, Chief Executive, Best Beginnings



Peter Grigg, Chief Executive, Home-Start UK



Peter Wanless, Chief Executive Officer, NPSCC



Dr Cheryl Adams CBE, Executive Director, Institute of Health Visiting



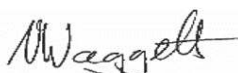
Angela McConville, Chief Executive, National Childbirth Trust



Dr Beckie Lang, Chief Executive, Parent-Infant Foundation



Mark Hodgkinson, Chief Executive, Scope



Dr Nick Waggett, Chief Executive, The Association of Child Psychotherapists