



Office of the Children's Commissioner

**Child Rights Impact Assessment of the 2013
Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget**

**Identifying and understanding the impact on
children and young people**

**Carol Robinson, Sara Bragg and Jen Colwell
Education Research Centre, University of Brighton**

Contents

About the Office of the Children’s Commissioner.....	3
1. Executive summary.....	5
2. Background.....	16
3. Methodology.....	20
4. Findings.....	23
5. Conclusion.....	48
References.....	57
Appendix 1: Summaries of statements relating to proposed budgetary changes proposed by the 2013 Autumn Statement.....	58
Appendix 2: Summary statements relating to budgetary changes proposed by the 2014 Budget used during Stage 2 of the fieldwork.....	61
Appendix 3: Cards outlining specific Articles of the UNCRC.....	64

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) is a national public sector organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dr Maggie Atkinson. We promote and protect children's rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and, as appropriate, other human rights legislation and conventions.

We do this by listening to what children and young people say about things that affect them and encouraging adults making decisions to take their views and interests into account.

We publish evidence, including that which we collect directly from children and young people, bringing matters that affect their rights to the attention of Parliament, the media, children and young people themselves, and society at large. We also provide advice on children's rights to policy-makers, practitioners and others.

The post of Children's Commissioner for England was established by the Children Act 2004. The Act makes us responsible for working on behalf of all children in England and in particular, those whose voices are least likely to be heard. It says we must speak for wider groups of children on the issues that are not-devolved to regional Governments. These include immigration, for the whole of the UK, and youth justice, for England and Wales.

The Children and Families Act 2014 changed the Children's Commissioner's remit and role. It provided the legal mandate for the Commissioner and those who work in support of her remit at the Office of the Children's Commissioner to promote and protect children's rights. In particular, we are expected to focus on the rights of children within the new section 8A of the Children Act 2004, or other groups of children whom we consider are at particular risk of having their rights infringed. This includes those who are in or leaving care or living away from home, and those receiving social care services. The Bill also allows us to provide advice and assistance to and to represent these children.

Our vision

A society where children and young people's rights are realised, where their views shape decisions made about their lives and they respect the rights of others.

Our mission

We will promote and protect the rights of children in England. We will do this by involving children and young people in our work and ensuring their voices

are heard. We will use our statutory powers to undertake inquiries, and our position to engage, advise and influence those making decisions that affect children and young people.

This report is © The Office of the Children’s Commissioner 2014

Please reference this report as follows:

Robinson, C., Bragg, S. and Colwell, J. (2014) Child Rights Impact Assessment of the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget: Identifying and understanding the impact on children and young people. London: Office of the Children’s Commissioner.

1. Executive summary

This project is based on the commitment given by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) to undertake Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) of major legislative and/or policy developments, as provided for in section 2(3)(d) Children Act 2004: in the discharge of the Commissioner's primary function to protect and promote the rights of children in England, she may 'consider the potential effect on the rights of children of government policy proposals and government proposals for legislation'.

1.1 Project aims

The research aimed to identify and understand:

- how tax/benefit changes and changes in public spending, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014 Budget, have influenced and are likely to influence in the future, the lives of children, young people and their parents/carers
- how such changes are likely to impact on the rights of children and young people.

1.2 Methodology

To address the project aims, findings relating to participants' perspectives of how proposed budgetary changes are likely to impact on the rights of children and young people were divided into three specific categories as follows:

- i. children and young people aged 9–15
- ii. young people aged 16–20
- iii. parents/carers

The research was divided into two stages. Within both stages, focus group discussions were held with participants in each of the three participant categories. Cards featuring specific Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) were used as prompts to generate discussion about which rights of children and young people are likely to be most affected as a result of the proposed budgetary changes (see Appendix 3 for copies of these cards).

Stage 1 of the research was conducted following the 2013 Autumn Statement in December. Cards with short summary statements relating to the proposed budgetary changes initiated by the 2013 Autumn Statement were used to generate discussions about how changes in public spending have influenced, and are likely to influence in the future, the lives of children, young people, and parents/carers (see Appendix 1 for copies of the summary statement cards). This stage aimed to elicit initial understandings about the impact of budgetary changes on the rights of children and young people. It was exploratory in nature, thus, the selection of budgetary statements

discussed during focus group meetings depended on the interests of each focus group.

Stage 2 of the research followed the 2014 Budget announcement on 24 March 2014. Outlines of five specific family ‘cases’ were used to generate discussions around the likely impact of various budgetary proposals, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014 Budget, on the rights of children and young people. Additional discussion prompts relating to some of the broader budgetary proposals, such as the proposal to have fewer policies to encourage businesses to use green energy sources, were also included in this stage of the research (see Appendix 2 for details of the specific family ‘cases’ and prompts used to promote discussion).

This report comes at the end of both stages and is based on findings from visits to: two secondary schools, two primary schools, one special school, two youth groups and a youth council.

The participants included:

- 40 children aged 9–15
- 11 young people aged 16–20
- 19 parents/carers.

1.3 Young People’s Steering Group

A Young People’s Steering Group (YPSG), comprising four young people aged 14–15 was involved in the planning of the research. The YPSG advised upon: which budgetary proposals from the Autumn 2013 Statement to include; details of the five specific family ‘cases’ to promote discussion following the 2014 Budget; and which Articles within the UNCRC to include in this research. They also advised the research team on the final wording of both the budgetary proposals and the UNCRC Articles for use in the research (see Appendix 1 for the summary statements relating to the 2013 Autumn Statement; Appendix 2 for the family cases used; and Appendix 3 for the UNCRC Articles used throughout the research). The YPSG will also be involved in developing a child-friendly version of this report.

1.4 Articles within the UNCRC with particular relevance to this project

The YPSG considered the following 13 Articles (of the 54 Articles in total) of the UNCRC to be the most relevant for use in this project. The following five Articles were considered to underpin all discussions about how budgetary changes might impact on the rights of children and young people:

- **Article 1 (definition of the child)** – everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.
- **Article 2 (without discrimination)** – the Convention applies to everyone: whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. (Due to the

overlaps in the meaning attributed to Articles 1 and 2, for the purpose of this research, these Articles were combined).

- **Article 3 (best interests of the child)** – the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children.
- **Article 7 (registration, name, nationality, care)** – every child has the right to a legal name and nationality, as well as the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.
- **Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)** – every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.

Specific attention was given to the following Articles during discussions about the impact budgetary proposals are likely to have on the rights of children and young people.

- **Article 6 (survival and development)** – every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.
- **Article 16 (right to privacy)** – every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life.
- **Article 18 (parental responsibilities; state assistance)** – both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by giving them the help they need, especially if the child's parents work.
- **Article 23 (children with disability)** – a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and independence, and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to provide support to disabled children.
- **Article 24 (health and health services)** – every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.
- **Article 26 (social security)** – Governments must provide extra money for the children of families in need.
- **Article 27 (adequate standard of living)** – every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social and mental needs. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

- **Article 31 (leisure, play and culture)** – every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.¹

1.5 Responsibility for upholding children’s rights: The role of the Government

This report is set within the context that the UK Government has adopted the UNCRC which provides protection for the rights and freedom of children. As a State Party to the UNCRC, the UK Government is obliged under international law to use the maximum extent of its available resources to fulfil children’s right to an adequate standard of living, to social security, health, education and other economic and social rights (OCC, 2013a).

In general, the research participants expressed surprise at learning of some of the ‘rights’ children and young people were accorded under the UNCRC. Whilst the existence of the UNCRC was in general terms quite well known, the detail was less so. One young person asked with surprise: *‘Are these rights that are actually in place?’* Once some of its clauses had been discussed, however, most participants agreed on the significant role governments had to play in making rights a reality for children whose parents could not manage to do this on their own. *‘When you think about it, it makes sense, ‘cos who else could take on that responsibility if your parents couldn’t afford to support you to live a healthy life’.* At the same time, some participants also argued that what was at issue was not only child rights: *‘It isn’t just children’s rights, it is human rights which are affected’.*

1.6 Findings

Findings relating to participants’ perspectives of the impact of the proposed budgetary changes on the rights of children and young people will be considered in the context of three specific categories: Children and young people aged 9–15; young people aged 16–20; and parents/carers (see Appendices 1 and 2 for the prompts used to promote discussions about budgetary proposals).

It should also be mentioned that the nature of the research, which involved discussing proposed rather than already-implemented budgetary measures, meant that their consequences were as yet far from clear. For instance, the proposal to give free school meals to children in the first three years of schooling was generally greeted with approval, but on the proviso, as one mother argued, that this should not mean taking money from elsewhere in education budgets. Similarly, approving the proposal to increase the number of university places did not mean that participants supported removing the cap on fees.

¹ Taken from UNICEF’s summary of the UNCRC, http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/betterlifeleaflet2012_press.pdf accessed 24 February 2014.

Participants also had much to say about the impact of changes that had already made themselves felt, in particular the 'bedroom tax' and reductions in benefits.

1.6.1 Perspectives of children and young people aged 9–15

i) Budgetary proposals considered to support the rights of children and young people

The rights of children and young people were considered to be supported where budgetary proposals helped young people gain qualifications or skills which will support them to secure paid employment. It was considered that the income earned through employment would make it easier for young people/their families to buy nutritious food, clothing and to pay for recreational activities (impacting positively on rights within Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC). The rights of children and young people were also considered to be supported where budgetary proposals led to improved housing/living conditions for children and young people (impacting positively on Articles 18 and 26 UNCRC).

ii) Budgetary proposals considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people

Budgetary proposals were considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people if they involved benefits paid to families not increasing in line with inflation, thus reducing money available for families to spend on nutritious food, heating, clothing for their children, and on family recreational activities (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 1 /2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC).

In some families, in order to compensate for benefits not rising in line with inflation, parents worked longer hours which reduced the time they had available to spend with their children (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 6 and 31 UNCRC). There was a general consensus that, '*It's the Government's responsibility to put up benefits in line with inflation so that people don't get poorer*'. More generally, any measures that increased parents' stress or anxiety were seen as impacting on their children. As one 15 year old argued: '*The way your parents are feeling affects the way you feel, more than a lot of people realise*'.

Young people were also concerned about budgetary proposals that might increase pollution levels (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 6, 24 and 27 UNCRC); and the reduction in duty on some alcohol, which participants saw as likely to lead to an increase in alcohol consumption amongst young people and/or their parents. Children and young people considered that the Government was '*...missing an opportunity*' to reduce the cost of '*...healthy foods*' (impacting negatively on Articles 6, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC).

iii) Budgetary proposals considered to support the rights of some children and young people but not others

Some budgetary proposals, for example **the introduction of free school meals to children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2** were considered to support the rights of children and young people (impacting positively on rights within Articles 24 and 27). However, the lack of free school meals when children reach Year 3 was seen to be detrimental for children in cases where parents could not afford to pay for school meals (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 24 and 27).

The proposal to **create additional university places** was viewed positively (impacting positively on rights within Article 26 UNCRC). However, some children and young people felt it was pointless when many young people couldn't afford to go to university. Similarly, the proposal that young people must **keep learning GCSE English and Maths until they are 19 years old if they do not pass these at grades A, B or C at school**, was considered beneficial in supporting young people to gain qualifications (impacting positively on rights within Articles 1 and 2, 3 and 12 UNCRC). However, some considered that giving additional time to gain these qualifications was unfair, while others were concerned about forcing some young people to study for qualifications when they do not want to (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 1 and 2, 3 and 12 UNCRC).

Proposals which resulted in additional income being available to family households were viewed positively as they were likely to increase the amount of nutritious food, clothing, heating and family recreational activities (impacting positively on rights within Articles 6, 18, 26 and 27 UNCRC). However, increasing income for married couples was considered unfair as such proposals penalise those people who, '*...don't find the right person*' and/or who '*...don't want to get married*'.

1.6.2 Perspectives of young people age 16–20

i) Budgetary proposals considered to support the rights of children and young people

Young people considered that budgetary proposals impacted positively on children's rights where they increased the likelihood of children and young people having adequate nutritious food, heating, clothing, and family recreational activities, either through directly providing these or through ensuring that families had sufficient finances to afford to provide these (impacting positively on rights within Articles 24 and 27 UNCRC).

Other proposals which supported the rights of children and young people were those which resulted in improved housing/living conditions (impacting positively on Articles 18 and 26 UNCRC); increased opportunities for young people to gain qualifications leading to paid employment that would increase their or their family's spending power and lead to families being able to afford essential items including adequate nutritious food, heating and clothing (impacting positively on rights within Articles 6, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC).

ii) Budgetary proposals considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people

Budgetary proposals were considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people if they involved benefits being stopped or not increasing in line with inflation, thus reducing the money available for families to spend on nutritious food, heating, clothing for their children, and family recreational activities (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 6, 18, 23, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC). One young person stated: *'The cost of food and things you NEED are going up so much more than benefits ... so this is like having a reduction in your benefits, what are people supposed to do? ... some families might have to choose between heating their home and buying nutritious food, if you don't get the right food, children will get malnourished and this will have a knock on effect on their health and education'*.

Concern was raised about parents having to work longer hours to compensate for reduced benefits and so having less time available to spend with their children. In the case where the non-working parent had a disability there was concern that children and young people would need to act as a carer towards this parent while the other parent worked. Some commented on existing proposals about the 'Bedroom tax' as affecting the rights to privacy: *'14 or 15 [years old] is too old to be sharing a bedroom, you really need some privacy by that age'*.

There was also concern expressed about young people being unable to find employment, *'There's so much unemployment, how are we supposed to get jobs? We can't afford to move out of living with our parents, so we can only really apply for jobs locally and there aren't that many'*.

Other budgetary proposals considered to impact negatively on children and young people's rights were those which might increase pollution levels, *'...the Government should do all they can to encourage businesses and families to use green energy sources so that there is less pollution and we can all live in a safer and clearer environment'*. Similarly, the proposal to reduce the tax on most alcoholic drinks was seen to impact negatively on rights within Article 6 UNCRC, by potentially encouraging alcohol consumption amongst young people or their parents.

In sum it was argued that: *'For a lot of families, Articles 6 and 26, which give people the right to help from the Government if they require it, aren't being met. So if families aren't getting enough money from the government to buy nutritious food, to heat their homes and to look after their families properly, then these rights are being violated'*.

iii) Budgetary proposals considered to have little impact on the rights of children and young people

Some budgetary proposals were considered to have little impact on the rights of children and young people. For example, the proposal to **increase the number of university places** was not considered beneficial as the general feeling amongst young people was that university fees were too costly, *'Not many people want to go to university ... It's just too expensive'*.

In relation to the proposal **Married working couples, where one earns less**

than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year', young people considered that the relatively low amount of money that was involved meant that this would make negligible difference to the rights of children and young people. There were, however, mixed views on the extent to which the proposal, **'The Help-to buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020'** would benefit children and young people. While this scheme *'... would give people an incentive to buy a house... [and] be a long term gain for them ... people might borrow money which they will then struggle to repay and this would reduce the income available for their day-to-day living'*.

1.6.3 Perspectives of parents/carers

i) Budgetary proposals considered to support the rights of children and young people

Parents/carers considered that measures taken to introduce apprenticeships and which encouraged young people to start their own business would support young people to gain qualifications/paid employment (impacting positively on rights within Article 6 UNCRC).

ii) Budgetary proposals considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people

Proposals were considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people where they resulted in benefits being cut or not increasing in line with inflation, thus reducing money available for families to spend on adequate nutritious food, heating, clothing for their children, and family recreational activities (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 1 and 2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 31 UNCRC). One parent/carer stated, *'You get the same amount of money but everything else gets more expensive, how are you supposed to make ends meet? ... sometimes you have to choose, do I buy gas and electricity or food?'*

A particular concern was the high cost of transport and whether this would continue to be affordable if benefits rose at a lower rate than the cost of living. Echoing the view of the 15 year old cited above, a mother observed that without income rising in line with inflation: *'I will find it hard to meet my children's needs, and happy parents are more likely to have happy children'*.

iii) Budgetary proposals considered to support the rights of some children and young people but not others

The budgetary proposal to **introduce free school meals to children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2** was considered beneficial (impacting positively on rights within Articles 24 and 27 UNCRC). However, several parents/carers acknowledged that the proposal would be of no added benefit to those families who are already entitled to free school meals and concern was raised about families having to start paying for school meals when children reached Year 3, as this would lead to additional expense for these families (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 1 and 2, 24 and 27 UNCRC).

The proposal that **young people up to the age of 19 should continue studying GCSE English and Maths if they do not pass these at grades A, B or C at school** was viewed positively (impacting positively on rights within Article 6 UNCRC). However, this proposal would mean that some young people would have to continue studying even if they no longer wanted to do so (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 12 and 31 UNCRC). One parent who was also a teacher explained to others the impact that failing to get a C grade or above is already having on young people's chances of being offered the courses they want to follow at college. There was considerable discussion amongst parents/carers – and indeed younger people – about the constrained, pressured, exam-focused school lives young people were seen to be experiencing, with a general sense that this was unfair and diminishing young people's happiness.

Similarly, the proposal to **increase the number of university places** was considered to encourage and support young people to '*...do a proper course and then get a good job*', (impacting positively on rights within Articles 1 and 2 and 6 UNCRC). However, the proposal was considered to be of little benefit for those young people who could not afford or did not want to go to university (impacting negatively on rights within Articles 1 and 2, 6 and 26 UNCRC).

The proposal to **support people renting social housing to buy their home** was considered beneficial as home ownership might help families feel more stable (impacting positively on rights within Articles 18 and 6 UNCRC), however, several parents/carers argued that they felt a sense of stability in their (social) housing and that they would prefer renting (social housing and not the private sector).

1.6.4 Participants' views on other budgetary measures

During discussion about the various budgetary proposals, participants from all three age groups considered the proposal, '**There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries**', was a positive move. They considered that previous increases in the cost of fuel had already impacted negatively on the money families had for buying essential items (impacting negatively on Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC) and that this proposal, rather than impacting positively on the rights of children and young people, has '*...just stopped the rights of children and young people being impacted on even more negatively*' (young person aged 16–20).

A further area of discussion raised by participants was the reduction in housing benefit for social tenants with 'spare' bedrooms (according to the government criteria for the allocation and sharing of bedrooms by siblings), often referred to as the 'Bedroom tax'. This had resulted in reduced levels of privacy due to having to share their bedroom (impacting negatively on Article 16 UNCRC), '*I share my room and they [younger sibling] keep me awake all night*' (young person aged 16). In some cases, where families had a spare bedroom and smaller homes could not be found locally, families moved area, causing disruption for children and young people who moved school as well as home. One mother of four children, however, expressed the hope that the

'Bedroom tax' might encourage people to move out of larger properties where these were not needed. Parents/carers did, however, identify inconsistencies, such as that the 'Bedroom Tax' did not apply to older people who might be more likely, than younger families, to have spare rooms.

1.6.5 Participants' perceptions on how the Government might improve the rights of children and young people

Perceptions of children and young people age 9–15:

- funding for local leisure centres
- measures to prevent people from being homeless
- measures to make the local community a safe place to be.

Perceptions of young people age 16–20:

- resources and facilities within local communities, such as libraries, parks, leisure facilities and community centres.
- sufficient income for families, in the form of benefits if need be, to enable them to buy essential items.

Perceptions of parents/carers:

- 'good teachers' and resources in schools
- after-school enrichment clubs
- raise the minimum wage for those in work to enable people to earn 'a decent living wage'
- affordable leisure facilities for children and young people
- cheaper travel.

1.7 Conclusion

Budgetary proposals were considered to impact in both positive and negative ways on the rights of children and young people. During discussions, participants emphasised that proposals relating to the payment of benefits would reduce family income in real terms, and lead to families having less money to spend on adequate nutritious food, clothes, heating, and recreational activities. In some cases parents had to work longer hours to earn additional income '*...to make ends meet*'. Such proposals, therefore, tended to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27, and 31 UNCRRC.

There was a strong sense that, given that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that Articles within the UNCRRC are met, there is an urgent need to re-consider some of the budgetary proposals which leave families struggling to afford essential items.

Proposals relating to acquiring qualification/skills and support for the employment of young people also featured heavily in discussions. Generally, these proposals were considered to impact positively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRRC. However, where participants did not want to take advantage of opportunities for undertaking

training/qualifications, these rights would not apply. Where proposals result in young people being 'forced' to study, this was considered to impact negatively on their rights.

Proposals leading to improved living and housing conditions for children and young people were seen to support their rights within Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC. However, where the proposals could potentially leave families with less disposable income, they were considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 24 and 27 UNCRC. There was a strong feeling amongst participants that the Government should initiate the building of lower-cost housing so parents could afford to pay for housing without this reducing their ability to provide essential items for their families.

2. Background

2.1 Child Rights Impact Assessment

This project is based on the commitment given by the OCC to undertake Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) on major legislative and/or policy developments. It follows the success of the *CRIA of budget decisions: Including the 2013 Budget, and the cumulative impact of tax-benefit reforms and reductions in spending on public services 2010-2015* (OCC, 2013).

Findings from this report demonstrated that, overall, the reforms had a significant impact on families with children. Given the significance of the cumulative impact of budgetary changes (CRIA, 2013), there is a pressing need to determine the impact of recent and forthcoming changes in public spending. The overall CRIA will include both quantitative and qualitative evidence, as well as legal analysis. The findings reported here relate to the qualitative aspect of the analysis and are based on qualitative data collected through discussions with children, young people and parents/carers.

2.2 Purpose and aims of the project

The research aimed to identify and understand how changes to tax and benefits and in public spending, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014 Budget, have influenced and are likely to influence in the future the lives of children, young people and their parents/carers. Specifically, the project focused on understanding:

i) The perspectives and experiences of a) children and young people under the age of 16, and b) young people over the age of 16² on how tax/benefit changes and changes to spending on public services and facilities have influenced, and are likely in the future to impact on the life experiences and on the rights of children and young people. The perspectives of children and young people relating to ways in which the government could spend money in order to improve the rights of children and young people were also sought.

ii) The perspectives and experiences of parents/carers on how changes in family income as a result of tax/benefit changes, and changes to spending on public services and facilities have impacted, and are likely in the future to impact on decisions they make in relation to housing, employment and spending patterns. Their perspectives of the impact of these changes on the life experiences of themselves and on the rights of the children and young people for whom they care were also sought. Parents/carers were also asked to consider ways in which the government could spend money in order to improve the rights of children and young people.

2.3 Theoretical standpoint

An integral aspect of the research was the decision to include the perspectives of children and young people. The approach adopted was that of 'speaking with' the participants (Fielding, 1998) which provided participants with opportunities to voice their perspectives and, thus, enabled the research team to develop an understanding of the views and experiences of children, young people and their parents/carers.

The standpoint taken is that children and young people are viewed as active participants and complete beings in the present, and as competent and knowledgeable actors in society (Mayall, 2000). This is the view of childhood sociologists who argue that the child is no longer seen as a 'becoming', rather the child is regard as a 'being' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Lee 2005; Prout, 2011). Lee (1998, 2005) argues that in pronouncing the child as 'being'

² For the purpose of this research, the term 'children and young people' will be used as defined in the Office of the Children's Commissioner's (OCC) Invitation to tender document relating to this project, that is, it is used to describe children under 18 in England and young people aged 18–20 who are care leavers or have a learning disability (in accordance with section 9 Children Act 2004 as at October 2013 (prior to amendment by the Children and Families Act 2014).

rather than ‘becoming’ infers childhood as ‘the complete’, thereby accepting the privilege of the mature and the finished. Children and young people are, therefore, viewed as having full human value in the present (Mayall, 2000). As Mayall (2003) emphasises, children participate in social relations and have knowledge and views that are derived from experiences of relationships, milieus and events. This line of reasoning is important from a children’s rights perspective as it helps to theoretically justify that children have the same human status as adults.

2.4 The role of the Government in upholding children’s rights

Children and young people rely on others to fulfil their basic needs of food and shelter, health care, housing, social assistance, basic education and family protection. In 1950 the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was developed; core civic rights and freedoms for children and young people are set out in the ECHR and these were enshrined in UK law through the Human Rights Act 1988. In 1989, the UK Government has also ratified the UNCRC which provides additional protection for the rights and freedoms of children.

Together these Conventions provide for the rights and freedoms of children and young people and affirm that children are equally legitimate holders of human rights as adults. As a State Party to the UNCRC, the UK Government is obliged under international law to use the maximum extent of its available resources to fulfil children’s right to an adequate standard of living, to social security, health, education and other economic and social rights (OCC, June 2013, 5).

Thus, the UK Government has a duty when making budgetary decisions to consider children’s rights in relation to Articles within the UNCRC. This is in line with the ministerial commitment given by the then Minister of State for Children and Families in a Written Ministerial Statement in 2010 to ‘give due consideration to the UNCRC Articles when making new policy and legislation’.³ It is worth noting that the Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), which is concerned with protecting the human rights of children in England, has identified a number of Articles within the UNCRC which are far from being met within England. CRAE (2013) concluded that there are 118 recommendations from the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child which apply to children’s rights in England and, of these, at least 88 continue to be unmet. The unmet recommendations those that are of particular relevance to this project include:

- **Recommendation 7** – allocate the maximum extent of available resources for the implementation of the UNCRC, with a particular focus on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality (CRAE, 2013, 10).
- **Recommendation 43** – render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities

³ *Publication of the independent review of the Children’s Commissioner*, archived at www.education.gov.uk

(Ibid. 42).

- **Recommendation 65** – provide additional resources and support for children with mental health difficulties, including a focus on children deprived of parental care, children affected by conflict, those living in poverty and those in conflict with the law (Ibid. 71).
- **Recommendation 76** – in such measures, prioritise children and families in most need of support (Ibid. 82).
- **Recommendation 77** – extend material assistance and support programmes for children living in poverty, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing (Ibid. 83).

2.5 Articles within the UNCRC with particular relevance to this project

The UNCRC sets out 54 Articles relating to the rights of children and young people. Advice was sought from the project's Young People's Steering Group as to which Articles were the most relevant for use in this project. It was considered that participants should be made aware of the following Articles and that these should underpin all discussions about how budgetary changes might impact on the rights of children and young people.

Article 1 (definition of the child) – everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

Article 2 (without discrimination) – the Convention applies to everyone: whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from.

Article 3 (best interests of the child) – the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children.

Article 7 (registration, name, nationality, care) – every child has the right to a legal name and nationality, as well as the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.

Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) – every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.

(Due to the overlaps in the meaning attributed to Articles 1 and 2, for the purpose of this research, these Articles were combined into one card).

It was considered that specific attention should be given to the following Articles when discussing the impact budgetary proposals are likely to have on the rights of children and young people.

Article 6 (survival and development) – every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop

to their full potential.

Article 16 (right to privacy) – every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child’s private, family and home life.

Article 18 (parental responsibilities; state assistance) – both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by giving them the help they need, especially if the child’s parents work.

Article 23 (children with disability) – a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and independence, and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to provide support to disabled children.

Article 24 (health and health services) – every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 26 (social security) – Governments must provide extra money for the children of families in need.

Article 27 (adequate standard of living) – every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social and mental needs. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) – every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.⁴

⁴ Taken from UNICEF’s summary of the UNCRC (see footnote 1 for details).

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach to data collection

The project aimed to identify and understand how tax/benefit changes and changes in public spending, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014 Budget, have influenced and are likely to influence in the future, the lives of children, young people and their parents/carers. This aim was addressed through considering findings relating to participants' perspectives within three specific categories as follows:

- i) Children and young people under the age of 16
- ii) Young people aged 16–20
- iii) Parents/carers

3.2 Research participants

Research participants were recruited through contact made with five schools, two youth groups and a youth council as follows:

- Two primary schools (one in inner London and one in Brighton & Hove/Sussex), one of which was visited twice
- Two secondary schools (one in inner London and one in Brighton & Hove/Sussex, both of which were visited twice
- One secondary special school (in inner London), visited twice
- Two youth groups in Brighton & Hove/Sussex (in one of the youth groups we spoke only to parents)
- One Youth Council in Brighton & Hove/Sussex

The schools, youth groups and youth council were selected from two regions of England: i) Brighton & Hove / Sussex and ii) one inner London borough.

Taken together, these areas represent rural, urban, coastal and inner city locations, as well as participants from a wide spectrum of socio-economic status. According to the English Indices of Deprivation 2010, which measures relative levels of deprivation in small areas of England, called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), the London borough included in the research is considered to be one of the local authorities with the highest proportion of LSOAs and amongst the most deprived local authorities in England.⁵

⁵ For more information, see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf and Appendix 4 for contextual information relating to the schools involved in the research.

The fieldwork was divided into two stages. Stage 1 of the fieldwork was conducted following the 2013 Autumn Statement, and Stage 2 was conducted following the 2014 Budget announcement.

Research participants in Stage 1 of the fieldwork comprised:

- 37 children and young people aged 9–15 (18 male and 19 female)
- 2 young people aged 16–20 (1 male and 1 female)
- 19 parents/carers (17 female and 2 male).

Research participants in Stage 2 of the fieldwork comprised:

- 16 children and young people aged 9–15 (8 male and 8 female; 13 of whom were also involved in Stage 1)
- 11 young people aged 16–20 (4 male and 7 female, 2 of whom were involved in Stage 1)
- 6 parents/carers (5 female and 1 male, all of whom were involved in Stage 1).

In total 40 children and young people age 9–15; 11 young people age 16–20; and 19 parents/carers participated in the research.

3.3. Data collected

Within both Stages 1 and 2 of the fieldwork focus group discussions were held with participants in each of the three identified categories. Cards featuring specific Articles from the UNCRC were used as prompts to generate discussion about which rights of children and young people are likely to be affected as a result of the proposed budgetary changes (See Appendix 3). All discussions were audio-recorded using digital recorders.

3.3.1 Data collected during Stage 1 of the fieldwork

Stage 1 of the fieldwork was conducted in January and February 2014, following the Autumn Statement in December 2013. The fieldwork involved one visit to each of the five schools and one youth group. During these visits data was collected through focus group discussions with children and young people (aged 9–15), young people (aged 16–20), and parents/carers.

Cards with short summary statements relating to the proposed budgetary changes initiated by the 2013 Autumn Statement were used to generate discussions about how tax and benefit changes, and changes in public spending, have influenced, and are likely in the future to influence, the lives of children, young people and parents/carers (see Appendix 1 for details of the summary statement cards). Specifically, discussions focused on how the budgetary proposals within the 2014 Autumn Statement are likely to impact on the rights of children and young people.

3.3.2 Data collected during Stage 2 of the fieldwork

Stage 2 of the fieldwork was conducted during March –April 2014, following the 2014 Budget announcement in March 2014. Outlines of five specific family ‘cases’ were used to generate discussions around the likely impact of various budgetary proposals, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014

Budget, on the rights of children and young people. Additional discussion prompts relating to some of the broader budgetary proposals, such as the proposal to have fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources, were included in this stage of the research. Participants were also asked to consider ways in which the Government could spend money in order to improve the rights of children and young people (see Appendices 1 and 2 for details of the specific family 'cases' and prompts used to promote discussion amongst participants).

3.4 Young People's Steering Group

A Young People's Steering Group (YPSG), comprising four young people aged 14–15 years was involved in the planning of the research. The YPSG and research team together decided upon which budgetary proposals from the 2013 Autumn Statements to include; details of the five specific family 'cases' to promote discussion following the 2014 Budget; and which Articles within the UNCRC to include in this research. The YPSG also advised the research team on the final wording of both the budgetary proposals and the UNCRC Articles for use in the research (see Appendix 1 for details of the summary statements relating to the 2013 Autumn Statement; Appendix 2 for details of the family cases used; and Appendix 3 for details of the UNCRC Articles used in throughout the research). The YPSG will also be involved in developing a child-friendly version of this report.

3.5 Ethical considerations

British Educational Research Association (BERA), University of Brighton Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research, and the OCC's Safeguarding Policy and Participation Strategy were followed throughout the research. Ethical approval was sought from the University of Brighton. All potential participants and the parents/carers of participants aged 15 or under, received an information sheet about the project and a consent form. The information sheet outlined the purpose of the research, the data collection methods to be used, details of participants' involvement, and planned outputs.

4. Findings

Findings from the project are considered within the three specific categories as follows:

- i) Perspectives of children and young people aged 9–15
- ii) Perspectives of young people over the age of 16–20
- iii) Perspectives of parents/carers.

4.1 Findings relating to the perspectives of children and young people aged 9–15

4.1.1 Understandings around money and budgetary changes

Most children and young people had a clear understanding of how some specific budgetary proposals would impact in a general way on their lives and the lives of others. However, they were less sure about what it would mean in real terms, for example, if a family's income increased by £200.00 per year. In some cases, children and young people talked of family discussions about money, particularly where participants had experienced their families having to cut back on spending.

During focus groups discussions children and young people discussed notions of 'rich' and 'poor'. They identified 'rich' people as those on particularly high incomes, such as footballers, Formula 1 drivers and individuals in the media, such as Simon Cowell. 'Poor' people, however, were identified as those living in Africa or Syria, and those who are homeless, '*You're poor if you are on the streets and you can't afford a house*', or those who have '*...a home without electricity, sofa or TV*', or '*no water or food*'.

4.1.2 Understandings around sources of government income and government spending

Some children and young people were unsure about how the Government received income, however, when asked about what the Government spent money on most identified areas relating to healthcare, education and housing, and some also mentioned '*community things*' and '*facilities*'. Some children and young people identified specific areas of government spending which were of significance to their lives or the lives of their families and friends, for example, Job Seeker's Allowance, Tax Credits, Caregivers Allowance, Child Benefit, and Mobility Benefit.

4.1.3. Understandings around human and children's rights

Most children and young people knew they had rights relating to privacy, and the right to be listened to. At one of the primary schools in particular, children had expectations that their views would be taken seriously by adults in the school. However, not all of the children and young people involved in the research had heard of the UNCRC, and when hearing about specific Articles within the UNCRC, one young person asked, '*Are these rights that are*

actually in place?

4.1.4 Findings relating to children and young peoples' (aged 9–15) perceptions of the likely impact of proposed budgetary changes

Within this section, consideration is given to children's and young peoples' perspectives on how specific budgetary proposals, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget, are likely to impact on their rights and life experiences. The budgetary proposals are grouped within three broad areas as follows: family income and the ability of families to buy essential items; the acquisition of qualification/skills and support for the employment of young people and their families; and housing conditions and the environment in which children and young people live.

Budgetary proposals broadly relating to family income/ the ability of families to buy essential items:

i) Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation-either measured by the Customer Price Index or the Retail Price Index).

Great concern was expressed over this proposal. If spending on benefits, such as housing, disability and child benefit, was not increased in line with increases in the cost of living, it was considered that this would have a direct negative impact on children's rights:

That's not right. ...they are taking away our rights if people can't afford a home.... It isn't just children's rights; it is human rights which are affected.

One young person whose mother cared for her grandmother and claimed Carer's Allowance commented, '*My mum doesn't work anymore, she might not get so much money just to live on*'; another young person commented:

I don't understand, they [the Government] are making the taxes higher but they are paying us less money. So some people are getting more money than others. So that's not fair.

One young person expressed the view that in the absence of sufficient benefits, in order for his parents to earn sufficient money, it was necessary for them to work and be away from home for long hours. This was seen as negatively impacting on the quality of family life, '*...people have to work so much...they burn themselves out...and this stops them spending time with their families*'. Another young person remarked that for those claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, it was difficult to apply for several jobs each week, especially in the area in which they lived as there were not many jobs available. She commented that her mother found it hard to find a job and felt pressured by having to:

...do all the paperwork that goes with applying for jobs...it puts a lot of stress on young people that's not needed. If your mum's really upset and stressed, that's obviously going to affect you and you maybe won't be thinking about other important things that are happening in your life...the way your parents are feeling affects the way you feel, more than a lot of people realise.

Reducing or stopping the payment of Child Benefit to some families was considered to be detrimental to the well-being of the children within these families: '*...for some families it will mean that they have less money to spend on food*'; '*food prices are always going up, sometimes it can be hard to afford food*'.

Particular concerns were raised about how children with disabilities, or those from families whose parents or siblings have disabilities, would manage in the future if Disability Living Allowance (DLA) did not increase in line with inflation as families may no longer be able to afford to pay for the care needed by the disabled person:

If a parent is disabled and their benefit is reduced, then the children in the family might end up doing more of the care for them if they can't afford to pay someone, this will affect their right to relax and play.

Children and young people also commented that a reduction in DLA might lead to one of the parents having to work longer hours to earn the money they need to live on, and this would result '*...in the family having less time together, less time as a family*'. One member of staff at one of the schools commented that several of the families from the school had been '*...living hand to mouth*' since they no longer received DLA for their children. Each of these families had been in situations where their children had reached secondary school age and, as a result, the measures for DLA became inappropriate and the families lost this benefit.

There was a general consensus amongst children and young people that '*...it's the Government's responsibility to put up benefits in line with inflation so that people don't get poorer*'. One group of children expressed concern over dangers associated with being short of money and borrowing from others, with one child commenting, '*If you can't afford to pay them back they start chasing you*'.

Overall, children and young people considered that this proposal, which was likely to lead to a reduction in real terms in the spending power of many families, would impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 1 and 2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 31 UNCRC.

During discussions with children and young people, concerns around the reduction in Housing Benefit for social tenants with extra bedrooms (according to the Government criteria for the allocation and sharing of bedrooms by siblings) and often referred to as the 'Bedroom tax', were raised. While

reference to 'Bedroom tax' was not part of the 2013 Autumn Statement or 2014 budget, participants' perspectives relating to this are outlined within this report due to the significance that some of the participants placed on the introduction of this 'tax'. The 'Bedroom tax' was viewed as grossly unfair by many children and young people. However, some considered that families receiving Housing Benefit for properties where they did not need all of the bedrooms should move to homes with fewer bedrooms. They also considered that it was acceptable for young children to share a bedroom, '*but not beyond the age of 10*'. They considered that if families moved into smaller properties with lower rent, they would have more available income to spend on other items and this would impact positively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 24 and 27. It must be acknowledged, however, that these were opinions expressed by those who had not experienced the impact of the introduction of the 'Bedroom tax'.

Several children and young people, who had experienced the impact of this reduction were of the opinion that it had impacted negatively on their lives and the lives of other family members. One girl spoke of how her mother now pays 'Bedroom tax', and commented:

She's been really affected by that... we wouldn't loan the room to anyone because my sister always comes back and stays, so it's a bit ridiculous that she has to pay tax on a room that she does use but not all the time...she was really stressed and upset about it... it's definitely a loss, she can't pay for as many things as we had before. She was grinding her teeth in her sleep because she was so stressed about the money.

Staff in one school also told us of children affected by the payment of the 'Bedroom tax' and how this had led to some families having less money to spend on food, clothes and transport for their children. In some cases it had forced families to migrate from areas where families and friends lived. They talked about one child, in particular, who stated that she '*...dreams that they will get rid of the 'Bedroom tax'*'. The introduction of the 'Bedroom tax' was considered to have impacted negatively on children and young people's rights under Article 16 UNCRC.

ii) School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after six months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement

This proposal was considered to be reasonably fair, although there was concern about whether six months allowed school leavers sufficient time to find work, with most young people considering that one year or 18 months would be a more reasonable length of time. Several young people considered that undertaking a training course or work placement would be beneficial in helping people to gain experiences which might then help them to secure employment. This proposal was considered to support the rights of young people within Articles 18, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

iii) Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year

Children and young people considered this proposal to be unfair as it implied that the Government was '*...forcing people to get married*' and such a proposal would penalise those people who '*...don't find the right person*' or who '*...don't want to get married*'. For those families who would benefit from this proposal, however, it was considered that the increased income would impact positively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 6, 18, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

iv) There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries

Some children and young people expressed concerns about previous increases in the cost of fuel and the difference this had made to their family life as less money is now available to spend on other items. One girl commented that the increased cost of both her parents travelling to work has resulted in the family '*...having had to cut back on food*'.

The proposal not to increase tax paid on fuel was, therefore, seen as beneficial; however, the previous increases in the cost of fuel had reduced money families had to spend on other items and was considered to have already negatively impacted on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 18, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

v) Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will not have to pay for their school dinners any more

Children and young people welcomed this proposal. However, there was a strong feeling that all children '*...should be treated the same*' and the introduction of school meals to only those in the very youngest years at school would be unfair on older children whose families would have to pay for their meals. One child commented, '*I don't really get the difference, we're all children*'. Some children also expressed the view that as younger children '*...eat less than older children*' so it would be more beneficial to families if older children were offered school meals for which they didn't have to pay.

The implications of this budgetary proposal were seen to support children's rights relating to Articles 24 and 27 UNCRC. The was concern, however, that the lack of free school meals for children as they move into Year 3 and beyond would impact negatively on the rights of children in relation to these two Articles.

v) Less tax will be paid on most alcoholic drinks

Children and young people were unanimously against this proposal:

...if it's cheaper, more people will buy it and drink it and they might get addicted... it's a terrible idea... no one needs alcohol in thier lives.

They considered that rather than reducing the tax on alcoholic drinks, the Government should '*...focus on good health and reduce the cost of food people need to stay healthy ... instead of dropping wine prices they should*

drop the price of things we actually need...so you can stay healthy'.

Children did not relate this proposal to any specific Articles but considered the Government was '*missing an opportunity*' to '*reduce the cost of healthy foods*', which would have impacted positively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 6, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

Proposals broadly relating to the acquisition of qualifications/skills and support for the employment of young people and their families

vii) If school pupils do not pass GCSE English and Maths at grades A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old

For some children and young people, this proposal was considered to be a positive move as it supported young people to gain qualifications and impacted positively on the rights of children and young people within Article 6 UNCRC. For others, however, it was considered unfair that some people will be given additional time to gain these qualifications: '*It's not fair on those who pass straight away*'.

One young person expressed the view that '*...people from families without much money*' should be able to '*...apply for jobs without having to study GCSE English and Maths, even if they didn't attain an A, B, or C grade whilst at school*'. There was also concern that some young people may not want to study for these qualifications after the age of 16, and that the proposal would, therefore, impact negatively on the rights of young people within Articles 1 and 2, 3 and 12 UNCRC.

viii) There will be more spaces for people to go to university - 30,000 more in 2014-15

Many children and young people considered it was important for them and others to have a university education '*if they wanted to get a good job*'. One young person commented that as there were a lot of people who were '*smarter*' than he was, the additional university places would give him more of a chance to get into university. This proposal was considered to impact positively on children and young people's rights relating to Article 26 UNCRC; however, some children and young people were of the opinion that there was little point in opening up additional university places if young people couldn't afford to go to university.

ix) An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years

The majority of children and young people were in favour of this proposal as they considered that it would open up opportunities for young people to gain skills which could help them to gain employment, however, many were not able to relate this to their lives or to the lives of people they knew. They considered that this proposal supported the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 6 UNCRC.

Proposals broadly relating to housing conditions and environment in

which young people live

x) People paying rent to live in a home owned by the a council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs

There was some concern about whether this proposal meant that people ‘had’ to buy their council-owned home, as some young people considered that their parents/carers would not be able to afford to do this:

...my mum wouldn't be able to buy her house, because she doesn't have enough money to be able to buy it, she would have to save up loads.

Children and young people also commented that ‘*they [the Government] ought to build more affordable housing*’.

Overall, however, the proposal was considered to be favourable for those who were interested in buying their council-owned home as it may result in children and young people living in ‘*...a better house of a better area*’, and supported the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 18 and 26 UNCRC.

xi) More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities

Children and young people welcomed this proposal as they considered some housing was so run down it verged on being dangerous to live in. Some young people expressed the view that it would be more financially viable for the Government to pay to repair existing housing than to build new housing, and that this would save people having the additional expense of moving home. This proposal was considered to support children and young people’s rights relating to Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

xii) There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use ‘green’ energy sources (rather than gas, oil or coal)

Children and young people were concerned that the lack of encouragement to ‘*go green*’ would lead to increased pollution and this would impact negatively on their rights within Articles 6, 24 and 27 UNCRC. Conversely, children and young people tended to be in favour of the lack of increase in duty paid on fuel for cars, as this had a positive and immediate impact on the finances of their families.

4.1.5 Children and young people’s perceptions on what resources/activities the Government should spend money if they are to improve the rights of children and young people

Children and young people commented that there was ‘*not much to do*’ in the area in which they lived and suggested the following measures could be taken to improve the rights of children and young people:

- **Funding for local leisure centres** – children and young people would like swimming and other sports facilities at leisure centres in their area to be free of charge. They considered the availability of a leisure centre

was a way of staying fit and healthy and contributed towards their rights within Article 31 UNCRC.

- **The availability of benefits to prevent people from being homeless** – children and young people expressed concern over the number of homeless people, *‘They [the Government] should spend money on the homeless and stop them from being homeless.’*
- **Improving safety within local community** – during the discussion about the locality in which they lived, some children and young people expressed concern about the possibility of being stabbed, kidnapped and attacked by gangs, and many commented that they did not feel safe about going out alone. They suggested that: *‘...the Government should spend money on catching fraudsters and burglars. You are not safe and relaxed where you live if you think you might get burgled. We acknowledge that our sample was small: however, findings showed that black young males were afraid of being stabbed or attacked by gangs, whilst young females noted that it was not safe for them to walk home alone in the evening or to go to some areas any time of the day.’*

4.2 Findings relating to the perceptions of young people aged 16–20

4.2.1 Understandings around money and budgetary changes

Similar to children and young people age 9-15, young people aged 16-20 had a clear understanding of how some specific budgetary proposals would impact on their lives and the lives of others; however, they were unsure about how proposals likely to result in an increase in family income of, for example £200 per year, would impact in real terms on these families. Prior to being given any prompts about the budgetary proposals, young people commented on the recent increase in university fees and on the *‘significant increases in the cost of food and fuel’* which had *‘impacted on the spending power of families’*.

4.2.2 Understandings around sources of government income and government spending

Most young people understood that the Government received income from taxes, and they were able to state several ways in which the Government spent money, including on schools, hospitals, emergency services, roads and various benefits. They also acknowledged that some money was spent locally to maintain libraries and leisure centres. Young people demonstrated an awareness that *‘...the Government’s expenditure must be huge’*.

4.2.3. Understandings around human and children’s rights

In most cases, young people were aware of the UNCRC and some of the Articles within it. Specifically, they knew that they had the right to be listened to and for their opinion to be taken into consideration in matters affecting them; a right to privacy; a right not to be harmed; and a right to receive the support they need to live a healthy life. When discussing the UNCRC, none of the young people knew that it comprised 54 Articles, and some were surprised to learn that the government has a responsibility towards providing

for these rights *'although when you think about it, it makes sense, cause who else could take on that responsibility if your parents couldn't afford to support you to live a healthy life'*.

4.2.4 Findings relating young people's (aged 16–20) perceptions of the likely impact of proposed budgetary changes

In this section consideration is given to the perspectives of young people in relation to how specific budgetary proposals outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget (from those outlined in Appendices 1 and 2) were considered to be significant in impacting on the rights of children and young people. The budgetary proposals are grouped within three broad areas as follows: family income and the ability of families to buy essential items; the acquisition of qualification/skills to support employment of young people and their families; and housing conditions and the environment in which children and young people live.

Budgetary proposals broadly relating to family income/ the ability of families to buy essential items:

i) Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seekers' Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation -either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index)

Great concern was expressed over the impact of this proposal, *'The cost of food and things you NEED are going up so much more than benefits are, so this it is like having a reduction in your benefits, what are people supposed to do?'* Similarly, another young person commented:

A family relying on benefits isn't going to be able to get the money they need just to buy the same amount of food and other things with their money; it's not fair what the Government's doing to these families.

There was a general concern that where families were facing a reduction in real terms in the money received through benefits, this may lead to difficulties in buying essential food items and in heating their homes:

Some families might have to choose between heating their home and buying nutritious food, if you don't get the right food, children will get malnourished and this will have a knock on effect on their health and education.

Young people considered that the relative low increase in benefits, compared to the increase in the cost of living, would impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

Young people raised concerns about how lack of available money might impact on children's uptake of leisure activities, *'If families have only just got enough money to live on then they won't be able to afford to pay for their*

children to go to any clubs or do other leisure activities so their freedom to choose what they do will be taken away.' Concern was also expressed about the fact that, due to the increasing cost of food and fuel, parents may need to work longer hours in order to maintain their standard of living and this may result in them having less time to spend with their family. *'Some parents will have to work longer hours just to make ends meet, so they won't be around so much to spend time with their children'*. One young person commented:

I know some people where their parents are having to take on more than one job cos they need to, to just live, but that means they're out of the house for a longer time so they don't see as much of their kids, it's not right, parents shouldn't be put in that position, it's not like they've got a life of luxury, this is just so they can afford to eat and buy things they need.

In such cases, young people considered there would be a negative impact on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6 and 31 UNCRC.

During discussions about benefits paid to families, young people were particularly concerned about the impact of the low rate of increase in Child Benefit when compared with inflation:

Where families have young children, the fact that this benefit isn't going up very much will affect families for a long time, it might mean they struggle to buy the things that they used to rely on that money for. I know some families who use their Child Benefit to buy the children's clothes but if they don't have this, they will need to find that money from somewhere else...

Particular concern was raised about families who relied on income from DLA, as a reduction of income in real terms for these families this may lead to young people *'...needing to leave education early in order to work to bring money into the family household, and this would limit their chances to go into higher education'*. One young person also commented, *'There is a chance that a teenager might have to be a young carer for a parent; if one of the parents is disabled, then the other parent might have to work longer hours to bring more money in, so if teenagers end up caring for one of their parents, they will end up with less and less free time'*.

Overall, young people considered that the proposal to increase benefits by a lower rate than inflation, would impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 1 and 2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 31 UNCRC.

During discussions about benefits, young people expressed their views relating to the impact of the introduction of the 'Bedroom tax'. Concern was raised about families who find themselves in a position where they have to either pay 'Bedroom tax' or have the *'disruption and expense of moving home'*. Some young people talked about how they now share bedrooms with their siblings, which has resulted in them having disturbed sleep: *'I share my*

room and they [younger sibling] are keeping me awake all night'. Young people also mentioned how sharing a room resulted in them not having any privacy, 'If two teenage girls or boys had to share the same room, this would take away their right to privacy ... 14 or 15 is too old to be sharing a bedroom, you really need some privacy by that age'. The introduction of the 'Bedroom tax' was considered to impact negatively on children and young peoples' rights within Article 16 UNCRC.

ii) School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement

This proposal prompted discussion about concerns over lack of job opportunities for young people: *'...there's so much unemployment, how are we supposed to get jobs? ...We can't afford to move out of living with our parents, so we can only really apply for jobs locally and there aren't that many, or at least not many that we can apply for with the qualifications we have, and we can't afford to do more qualifications, it's like we're in a no-win situation'.*

Young people considered this proposal to be unfair due to the lack of job opportunities and commented *'it's not that we don't want to work, it's just there aren't enough jobs to go around'*. The proposal was considered to impact negatively on the rights of young people within Articles 26 and 27 UNCRC.

iii) Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year

Young people were in favour of this proposal but thought that it should apply to all couples who are co-habiting and not be limited to married couples. They also acknowledged that, *'...in reality, this won't make much difference to many families as £200 won't go very far, especially given the increasing cost of food and things like heating a house'*. They considered that due to the relatively low amount of money that was involved, this would make negligible difference to the rights of children and young people.

iv) There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries

Young people welcomed this proposal and acknowledged that it had an impact on the cost of all goods, as transportation costs are an *'...inbuilt part of everything we buy'*. They also acknowledged that:

...the less people use their cars, the better it is for the environment, but for a lot of people, they need to drive to get to work because there are no jobs locally and they can't afford to move house to live near where they work, so often you've got no choice about driving.

There was a general consensus, however, that the already high cost of fuel meant that this proposal did not impact positively on the rights of children and young people, *'...it's just stopped the rights of children and young people being impacted on even more negatively as the money families have available isn't being reduced even further by more increases in the cost of fuel'*.

v) *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners any more*

This proposal was considered to be a positive move as '*...it would mean that these children would have at least one nutritious meal per day*'. The implications of this budgetary proposal were seen to support rights relating to Articles 24 and 27 UNCRC.

vi) *Less tax will be paid on most alcoholic drinks*

Young people raised several concerns about this proposal, in particular, they were concerned that, '*It will be easier for young people to purchase alcoholic drinks at a lower price and this may encourage them to drink more, and they may get addicted to alcohol at an earlier age*'.

Young people also raised concerns about families in which one or more of the parents have a '*drink problem*':

If you've got a parent who has got troubles with alcohol then if the prices go down they will find it easier to buy alcohol and buy more, and this would have a knock on effect on the children. If you have a problem with alcohol you're going to buy more, not spend less money on it, so I don't see the point in what the government is doing here.

They considered that this proposal could impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 6 UNCRC.

Proposals broadly relating to the acquisition of qualification/skills and support for the employment of young people and their families

vii) *If school pupils don't pass GCSE English and Maths at grades A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old*

Most young people considered this to be a positive move, as they considered '*...it would make people work harder at school, instead of messing about ... 'If people know that they've got to go on studying after they leave school if they don't pass these exams [Maths and English GCSE] ... then more people would work harder at them.*'

Young people considered that this proposal supported the rights of children and young people within Article 6 UNCRC.

viii) *There will be more spaces for people to go to university - 30,000 more in 2014-15*

Young people did not see any real advantages in this proposal as they considered that fewer people would not consider university education as an option due to the high cost of university fees, '*Not many people want to go to university now, it's just too expensive ... I know you get a loan but how will you ever pay that back? You'll be paying it 'til you're, like 40 or something.*' This led to discussions about whether young people from families '*who rely on benefits, or who struggle to afford to buy what they need*', would be able to afford to go to university:

If parents can't actually support their children, they [their children] might have to start work early so that they can help their parents to pay for food and general living, and this will mean that they can't go to university or college'.

Another young person commented:

'University fees are now stopping so many people from going to university, they're afraid of the big debt, and if their families can't afford to help them then it puts you off going. If you go to university you'll have a massive debt, then when you have children, you'll have less money to spend on them'.

ix) An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years

Young people were in favour of this proposal, although they knew very little about it; they commented *'it would be good to know more about this, because that might help us, but no-one tells you, and I wouldn't know who to go to, to find out more'*. Young people considered that this proposal would support the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

Budgetary proposals broadly relating to housing conditions and the environment in which children and young people live.

x) People paying rent to live in a home owned by the a council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs

Young people expressed the view that if families were supported to buy their own home, this is likely to impact positively on rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 18 and 26. However, there were strong feelings amongst many young people that the Government should initiate the building of lower cost housing, *'...that more families can afford, because it's just impossible for some families, especially in some parts of the country where the cost of property is out of people's reach'*.

xi) The help-to buy loan scheme is being extend to 2020

A minority of young people were in favour of this scheme as, *'It would give people an incentive to buy a house, rather than rent one, so it would be a long term gain for them'*. The majority of young people, however, considered that this proposal would not be of great benefit to children and young people as:

although the scheme may help parents buy their own home, people might borrow money which they will then struggle to repay, and this would reduce the income available for their day-to-day living.

One young person commented:

People might have to put more money aside to pay off the loan, so if they borrow money through this scheme it may make them worse off in

the long run as they might have less money to spend on food and clothes, and children's clubs and things like that.

Young people were unsure as to what extent this proposal would impact on the rights of children and young people.

xii) There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources (rather than gas, oil or coal)

Young people were strongly against this proposal as they considered that *'...the Government should do all they can to encourage businesses and families to use green energy sources so that there is less pollution and we can all live in a safer and cleaner environment'*.

Young people expressed concern about the detrimental impact this policy could have on the planet generally:

It's going to be us who will have to deal with it [the detrimental effect on the planet of not using 'green' energy sources] when we're older... We'll be dealing with the damage caused and have to find a way of trying to reverse it. And we'll have to be more restrictive than previous generations as it will be getting closer to having a catastrophic damage.

Comments made by two of the young people summed up their overall perspectives of the budgetary proposal that had been discussed:

Most of these changes will violate the rights of children in some ways, particularly in relation to Articles 6, 18, 24 and 27, as well as, for a lot of families in relation to Articles 18 and 31. For a lot of families, Articles 6 and 26, which gives people the right to help from the government if they require it, aren't being met. So if families aren't getting enough money from the government to buy nutritious food, to heat their homes and to look after their families properly, then these rights are being violated'.

What's not fair is that none of the increases really affect people in the government, people who make these changes, 'cos they've got so much money, it's like they don't understand what all of this does to families.

4.2.5 Young people's perceptions of the resources/activities on which the government should spend money if they are to improve the rights of children and young people

- **Resources and facilities within local communities, such as libraries, parks, leisure facilities and community centres.** *'They should spend more money on libraries as this would help with children's education'*. One young person stated, *'If sporting and leisure*

facilities were more affordable and children were encouraged to take part, this might keep some children out of trouble'. Another commented, '...the Government should encourage people to keep active as this will help young people to develop interests and to stay healthy, so money should be spent on making sports facilities available at more affordable prices.' During discussions around government spending at a local level, there was great concern about the number of community centres which were being closed down and the lack of facilities for youth groups. *'Places like community centres and youth centres aren't getting enough money and they're closing down so there's not a place for young people to head towards, they need somewhere where they don't have to pay for but can relax and just go to... when Community Centres close down...it affects nursery groups, guides, youth groups; young people need centres to go to with clubs that they can afford'*. Young people were of the opinion that lack of facilities for teenagers was likely to lead to an increase in the number of young people *'getting into trouble... if people don't have a youth club to go to that they can afford, they might end up walking around the streets and that's not always safe and that's how people start getting into trouble' ... 'The Government wants to cut youth crime but then they cut back on youth services, that means that people have nowhere to go so it will actually increase youth crime.'*

- **Sufficient income for families, in the form of benefits if need be, to enable them to buy essential items.** This would prevent young people being put under pressure by their families to leave school to find paid work in order to support the family's finances, *'The Government should increase benefits where families need them to make sure that children of 17 or 18 don't have to leave education early to earn money for their families'*. Another young person commented, *'If we need to work to support our families, it will be like capping our education at a certain level because our families won't be able to afford for us to stay on at school or to go to university as we'll need to work to help the family out. My family can't afford for me to go to university 'cos they say the loan for students will never cover everything, so my education will be capped after I'm 18'*.

4.3 Findings relating to the perceptions of parents/carers

4.3.1 Understandings around money and budgetary changes

Most of the parents/carers expressed concerns in terms of the increasing cost of food and heating. Many had detailed knowledge of available benefits and were interested in discussing how proposals in the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget would impact on their lives and the lives of other families.

4.3.2 Understandings around sources of government income and

government spending

Parents/carers understood how the Government received income and had knowledge of government spending. Some parents had detailed knowledge on available benefits and for various family circumstances, for example, some spoke of how much money families could earn before Child Benefit would be reduced and many had detailed knowledge of the Tax Credit system.

4.3.3 Understandings around human and children's rights

Most parents/carers were aware of the UNCRC in a general sense, but were not familiar with specific Articles within it. Parents/carers talked about children having the '*right to play*', and expressed concern that not all children knew how to play. They considered that '*play was lacking in schools*', and one parent/carer stated, '*Schools are so focused on results and number-crunching – this is six hours when you can do [play] as well, because they don't get it at home*'.

At one of the schools, when parents/carers read Articles relating to Children's Rights (see Appendix 3), they were surprised that some Articles outlined responsibilities of the government in relation to the care of children (For example, *Article 6 – Governments should do all they can to make sure that children survive and develop as well as possible*). Some parents/carers considered that the Government did not fulfil their obligation to provide support to the families of children; one parent/carer stated, '*the Government are the ones that have made what it's like today, so it's a bit hypocritical*'. Parents/carers also talked about how actions such as '*looked-after children being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation should be illegal and against the UNCRC*'.

4.3.4 Findings relating to parents/carers perceptions of the likely impact of proposed budgetary changes

In this section consideration is given to the perspectives of parents/carers in relation to how specific budgetary proposals in the Autumn 2013 Statement and 2014 Budget (from the proposals outlined in Appendices 1 and 2) were considered to be significant in impacting on the rights of children and young people. The budgetary proposals are grouped within three broad areas as follows: family income and the ability of families to buy essential items; the acquisition of qualification/skills and support for the employment of young people and their families; and housing conditions and the environment in which children and young people live.

Budgetary proposals broadly relating to family income and the ability of families to buy essential items

i) Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index)

Parents/carers expressed great concern for themselves and for others they

knew, about whether people would be able to afford to pay for essential items, including food, clothes and housing costs, if benefits were not increased in line with inflation:

Even if you're working, our wages have been stagnant for the last three or four years, we haven't had a pay increase, so the cost of living has gone up every year, but it's the same as benefits ... you get the same amount of money but everything else gets more expensive, how are you supposed to make ends meet?

In some cases, parents/carers struggled to pay for activities such as their children's school swimming: *'It's a real struggle to find the extra £2 here and there for things like that'*. Another commented, *'[if benefits are not increased in line with inflation] I will find it hard to meet my children's needs, and happy parents are more likely to have happy children'*.

Some parents/carers raised concerns about the rising cost of food. One commented:

I'm paying out more, in the last year, than what's coming in. Prices everywhere have been going up, not by 2 or 3 pence, up by 20 pence, and you're doing that on so many items... You're having to shop around, it used to be a weekly shop at one supermarket, now it's gone to daily and I have to go all over... wherever's the cheapest...

They talked about visiting a food bank, with one commenting, *'I never thought in my lifetime I'd see a food bank'*, while another talked about a friend she took to a food bank as she'd fallen into debt between two jobs:

'It seems to be going back... with food banks, it's getting tougher. Even in [a local area, considered to be relatively affluent], they say that more and more people are using food banks, and yet these poor people are working! ... They are working their socks off, but for what – peanuts. I know people who are using them... but they can only use them three times, then what happens to those poor kids?'

Some parents/carers spoke of the high cost of housing within the area in which they lived and how they needed help with paying rent, and if benefits did not rise in line with inflation, they would *'... be short for shopping, food, clothing and uniform'*. Other parents/carers raised concerns about the cost of gas and electricity, and the fact that the utility companies will not install different, cheaper types of meters because if you receive Income Support *'... you are considered risky... even though I've never been in debt in my life'*. One parent/carer remarked, *'Sometimes you have to choose... do I buy gas and electricity or food? ... You just have to put a duvet over them'*.

A discussion about gas key meters raised issues about how expensive and how depressing and worrying it is to have this sort of meter: *'Where you have to worry about juggling with cooking or heating ... or about what happens if you run out during the weekend when you have to pay a charge to put credit'*

on the key'. Metered water bills were also considered to be very high and one parent/carer commented that in order to save money on the cost of water '*...we share a bath now, I know it sounds really bad but that's the reality*'.

A further concern for some parents/carers was the high cost of public transport and whether this would still be affordable if benefits did not rise in line with the increasing cost of transport. In one area along the south coast of England where wages were considered to be low and travel costs relatively high, problems relating to the cost of transport were exacerbated by the fact that there were three different bus companies operating in the area, each of which do not accept each other's tickets. Within this particular area, there was no integrated local transport which allowed tickets to be used on buses and trains, thus it was not possible to buy a season ticket to cover all local travel expenses. Parents/carers in this area commented that the cost for child fares '*...weren't particularly low*', and costs for their children's transport to college was a concern for them.

They also raised concerns about difficulties faced when young people managed to get a job after leaving school which involved them travelling to work, as it was likely that their wage would be too low to make it worthwhile working. One parent/carer commented, '*...it doesn't pay to travel, the minimum wage is far too low*'. Staff at one school told us of a family who could not afford to buy a £10.00 replacement broken travel card for their child, even though funding would be put onto the card through the benefits system once it had been purchased. This meant that the child and their mother had to walk for a long distance, often in bad weather, so their child could attend school.

Some parents/carers discussed the differences in the cost of travel between London and areas of the South East in relation to children and young people's '*rights to leisure activities*'. One parent/carer who had moved from London to an area in the South East of England commented that her older children '*...had been able to travel all around London because the fares were much cheaper than in [the area in which they now lived along the south coast where] 'fares are phenomenal' [and] 'there are no pre-paid reduced tickets*'.

A number of parents/carers commented on how the reduction in Child Benefit in recent months had made a significant difference to their lives and the lives of their families. One commented that she had previously used Child Benefit money to buy her children's clothes, and she struggled to do this now that this benefit had been reduced. Other parents/carers feared their Child Benefit being reduced as they relied on this as a stable source of income:

I would hate to lose my child benefit, because, I've always had it when I've had children and it would just feel wrong not to have it any more. ...it makes a big difference, £184 a month, I know exactly how much it is... when I was a single parent I used to get it weekly and it was a safe bit of money'.

One parent/carer stated, '*It's like the nest isn't it, if all else fails I've got my family allowance to get the kids' shoes... It's the mum that gets it too, it's the*

independence, in some cases'. Another parent/carer commented, 'It's money at the end of the day, and when you're counting the pennies, kids miss out...what goes are the extras, the days out, the fun things, you have to see them as extras because other things come first.' This was considered to relate directly to, and impact negatively on, children and young peoples' rights within Article 31 UNCRC.

Parents/carers also spoke about the '*unfairness*' of the benefit system and about how '*single parents are losing out*'. In relation to Child Benefit, one parent/carer commented:

It needs to be a total income figure...it makes no sense that you can earn that amount [the maximum a married couple are able to earn and still receive Child Benefit] and still keep it but be on less than that as a single parent and lose it.

Housing Benefit was another source of concern, especially in the case of single parents/carers. They considered that Housing Benefit should be calculated per household, not per parent/carer:

I get help with Housing Benefit, but my friend who's a single parent, who's working, she's got a job and that, and they're taking more off of her in Housing Benefit than me and my husband...but I'm married, we're both working, we're bringing in more money, it doesn't seem fair.

Parents/carers considered that the proposal to increase benefits by only 1%, rather than in line with inflation, would impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 1 and 2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 31 UNCRC. Concern was also raised about instances where individuals had been overpaid in benefits and how the repayment of these overpayments resulted in them being short of money.

The 'Bedroom tax' was another source of great concern for several parents/carers. Many recounted their own negative experiences or those of others they knew who had been affected by the introduction of this tax. Some families experienced difficulty in finding social housing with fewer bedrooms, which meant that they had no choice but to pay the 'Bedroom tax' as they could not afford to move out of the area in which they lived. One parent/carer talked about a family she knew who had to move area in order to find a house where the family would no longer have to pay 'Bedroom tax'. This family has a child who is identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the upheaval of both a house and school move was extremely disruptive for the child.

Another parent/carer talked of the difficulties involved in expecting children to share a bedroom, especially where one of them has a statement of Special Educational Needs:

I've got a friend who has a triple bunk bed in one room, for girls of 8, 6 and 3. She's got five children, two boys of 12 and 10, one of whom has

severe autism, they all have to share, they wouldn't give her any more'.

The introduction of the 'Bedroom tax' was considered to have impacted quite significantly in a negative way on the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 16 UNCRC.

One of the parents/carers, however, considered the introduction of this tax to be a positive move and to impact positively on the rights on children and young people in relation to Articles 6 and 26 UNCRC, as she considered the introduction of this tax would encourage families to move from larger houses where these were not needed and this may free up a house for her family who were currently *'living in crowded conditions'*.

ii) School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement

Parents/carers considered that it was reasonable to expect people to undertake training or a work placement if they could not find employment, and such experiences would be likely to help young people secure a job. However, there was concern that if people undertook work placements this could reduce the overall number of jobs available and be a threat to those in employment, especially those who relied on overtime to *'stay above the breadline'*. One parent/carer gave an example of how very low-paid work experience placements had at one time replaced night shift workers in a local supermarket. There was also a general concern raised about the situation families will be in when a child reaches 18 and is not able to find paid work but their Child Benefit and Tax credits are stopped, *'...they still need to eat and have the same needs but with no support'*. If the benefits paid to school leavers are stopped, and family incomes reduced as a result, it was considered that that this would negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 1 /2, 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

iii) Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year

This proposal was considered not to be relevant for several parents/carers, namely those who are single and those who do not earn over £10,000 a year. Some parents/carers were in favour of this proposal, however, due to the relatively small amount of additional income, they were unsure as to whether the proposal would impact on the rights of children and young people.

iv) There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries

Some parents/carers did not drive so they did not see this proposal as being of great significance to them. Others however, considered the proposal to be a *'...bit of a bonus'* as it meant that no more of their available money would be taken up with the cost of fuel. The already high cost of fuel, however, meant that some parents already had less money to spend than previously on many items, including food, clothing and heating. Thus the previous increases in the price of fuel were considered to have had a negative impact on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC.

v) *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners any more*

Parents/carers welcomed this proposal and considered that it would support the rights of children within Articles 24 and 27 UNCRC. *'If things are so difficult at home, it might be the only hot meal, vegetables and that, that they get... it's a safety measure, if parents aren't sending food in'*. Some parents/carers, however, were of the opinion that it would be far more beneficial for all primary school children to be offered free school meals, providing the meals offered were *'good'*, as this would ensure all children have at least one nutritious meal a day. Many parents/carers acknowledged that for those families who are already entitled to Free School Meals, this proposal would be of no added benefit.

Parents/carers commented that where families can afford to pay for school meals, they should do so and free school meals should only be available for those who cannot afford to pay. There was a general concern that if free school meals were introduced for some children, funding for this would result in the Government having less money available for other benefits and this may have a detrimental effect on the money available to some families. Many parents/carers were of the opinion that if school meals were introduced to only those children in the early years of school, this would result in additional expenditure for families as their children entered Year 3, leading to a financial struggle for some parents/carers. It would be *'...one of those things that's handed out and then snatched back again'*. Parents/carers considered that the introduction of free school meals for the early years of primary school would *'...hit working parents harder'* as they would have to start paying for school meals when their children reached Year 3. This may be difficult *'...especially where there is little room for additional expenses'*. It was considered that for the children of these families, this proposal would impact negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 1 and 2, 24 and 27 UNCRC.

Proposals broadly relating to the acquisition of qualification/skills to support for the employment of young people and their families

vi) *If school pupils don't pass GCSE English and Maths at grades A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old*

Parents/carers expressed an interest in this proposal and raised questions in relation to whether young people would still be expected to study even if they had secured employment, and whether the Government would continue to 'track' these people to ensure they did not become NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Parents/carers in favour of the proposal were of the opinion, *'...at least you know you WILL eventually have them grades before you leave school'*. They considered that this proposal would support the rights of young people within Article 6 UNCRC.

Some parents/carers, however, were sceptical about the proposal and considered that by Year 10, many pupils had *'done school'* and were no

longer interested in studying for qualifications. They considered schools to be at fault and blamed teaching methods for turning young people off school '*...it's push, push, push ... they're being pushed to be like mini little adults*'.

Parents/carers also raised concerns about young people who were '*practical*' and are '*not academic*', and the fact that they may not be able to achieve such grades in these subjects. One parent/carer commented:

I do feel for those who are dyslexic [like my daughter]... what happens to those kids with dyslexia if after three years they still haven't got it?

For some parents/carers, this proposal was considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 12 and 31 UNCRC.

vii) There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014–15

Some parents/carers welcomed this proposal as they considered it was crucial for young people to be given the opportunity to go to university and '*...do a proper course and then get a good job*'. For these people this proposal was considered to support the rights of young people within Articles 1 and 2, and 6. Other parents/carers, however, considered that the additional university places would not be helpful to their families, as their children could not afford to go to university. For these families, it was considered that this proposal would impact negatively on the rights of young people in relation to Articles 1 /2, 6 and 26 UNCRC.

viii) An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years

Parents/carers had a particular interest in this proposal as they considered it may have a direct and positive impact, and create opportunities for their own children. The proposal was considered to impact positively on children and young peoples' rights in relation to Article 6 UNCRC.

ix) Money will be provided for people who want to start their own business (StartUp loans). This money will need to be paid back

Parents/carers expressed an interest in the StartUp loans as they considered this was something that may be of benefit to their children, and some considered that such a scheme may '*...create employment and boost the economy*'. One parent/carer was particularly interested as her son was looking to set up a media company but could not secure a loan to buy the equipment needed. The introduction of StartUp loans was considered to support the rights of young people within Article 26 UNCRC.

Proposals broadly relating to housing conditions and the environment in which children and young people live

x) People paying rent to live in a home owned by the a council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs

Many parents/carers commented that they would prefer to continue renting

their social housing rather than buy their home. They considered that renting social housing was a cheaper option than having a mortgage or renting through the private sector, *'I could never afford a bigger house on the open market'*. Another parent/carer commented, *'I feel more stable in a council house... it does feel like your own home when you're renting with the council'*. However, for families wanting to take advantage of this proposal, it was considered that this would support the rights of children and young people in relation to Articles 18 and 26 UNCRC. There was, however, a general concern raised about the high cost of housing and a fear about whether their children would be able to afford somewhere to live in the future.

Some parents/carers expressed concern about there being insufficient houses locally and about the high cost of housing, *'They've [the Government] gotta do something about the housing crisis ...because there's nowhere else to go'. 'If houses cost three times your income, then we need 35k houses round here... I couldn't buy a house anywhere on the south coast unless I had an inheritance of around 200k'*. There was a sense of some people being 'stuck' and not being able to afford to relocate in order to find employment as they feared losing their current social housing and not being eligible for, or able to find, social housing in another area. Some of the parents/carers who lived within one particular area on the south coast queried whether this proposal applied to Housing Association properties, as *'[this local council] has sold ALL their houses to the Housing Association'*.

4.3.5 Parents/carers perceptions of the resources/activities on which the government should spend money if they are to improve the rights of children and young people

- **Affordable leisure facilities for children and young people.** Parents/carers mentioned some activities which were available for children and young people in their local area, including youth clubs, army cadets and a fishing club; however, overall, parents/carers considered there were too few facilities for children and young people, in particular girls, and commented, *'...what exists is either run down or very expensive'*. They spoke of a lack of all-weather facilities and of *'local fields being used as 'dogs' toilets' and kids would come back either muddy or covered in dog poo or both'*. In relation to this, parents/carers raised concerns about the implications for laundry costs: *'...how do clothes dry in the middle of winter?'* They suggested money should be spent on leisure facilities. This view was summed up by one parent/carer who stated they would like:

Somewhere for kids to go...cheaper leisure facilities...supervised ones where you know your child is safe and active and socialising with their own age group. These days you can't just happily let kids out of the front door to go to the park, because you don't know who they might meet there, not like our days...they need things to do in a safe and secure place... we have the skater park down the road that is very run down now, and anyone can go in it, so you've got 12-13 year

olds with 18–19 year olds who are drinking beer.

- **After school enrichment clubs.** Some parents/carers commented on how schools were cutting the number of after school enrichment activities, and how large schools often had little space for outdoor play and activities, and considered that children and young peoples' opportunity to play and have leisure time and facilities was being eroded.
- **'Good teachers' and resources in schools.** Several parents/carers considered that more should be spent on teaching staff and resources in schools. Parents/carers expressed concern relating to cuts in school budgets and how these were impacting negatively on the education of their children. There was concern that there has been a reduction in school support staff and that schools are now employing relatively large numbers of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) as they are cheaper to employ than more experienced teachers. Such moves were considered to impact directly and negatively on the rights of children as *'...children are not getting the support they needed in school'*. There was also concern about the fact that reduced school budgets have led to an increase in teachers' workload and that, *'The more experienced teachers are just being asked to do more and more...'*. The impact of this was considered to be that children *'are not getting a good equal education'* as teachers *'concentrate on the people who are disruptive'*. Some parents/carers considered it was *'the children the in middle [who were] suffering the most as there was no time to support them, or resources to give them any individual or small group attention'*. There were particular concerns around school budget cuts affecting the needs of specific groups of children and young people, for example those with disabilities or Special Education Needs (SEN). One parent/carer expressed concern that her child was in need of one to one attention in school, as well as additional practical equipment such as a hoist and ramps, but that insufficient money was available to fund these needs. A further concern raised by parents/carers in relation to cuts in schools budgets, was the reduction in resources allocated to the teaching of some subjects, including Drama.
- **Raising the minimum wage for those in work** to enable people to earn *'...a decent living wage in line with what it actually costs to live'*. One working parent/carer stated, *'...I'm not bothered with really massive, high pay, but ...with food...I like having nice stuff in, and that used to be the one thing – but now, I'm having to budget, work out menus, I'm not poverty line but I don't like having to watch it especially with food'*. Another parent/carer commented, *'...It's the people who can least afford it who are being hit hardest, there should be a family or household threshold [not independent tax allowance]...but there is not the political will to do that. And children are some of the biggest losers, and there's little they can do!'*

- **The availability of cheaper travel for children and young people, ‘to make it easier and cheaper for children to travel to school and to visit other places’.**

5. Conclusion

Throughout the research, focus group discussions were held and participants’ perceptions of how budgetary proposals within the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget were likely to impact on the rights of children and young people were sought. Participant’s perspectives were considered in relation to three specific categories: children and young people aged 9–15; young people aged 16–20; and parents/carers of children and young people.

5.1 Participants’ perspectives of how budgetary changes, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget, are likely to support or impact negatively upon specific Articles within the UNCRC

Specific Articles within the UNCRC were identified by the Young People’s Steering Group and the research team as being particularly relevant for this

project (see Appendix 3 for details of these Articles). The main findings in relation to how changes in budgetary proposals are considered to impact on the rights of children and young people are outlined below.

Article 6 – Governments should do all they can to make sure that children survive and develop as well as possible

i) Budgetary proposals likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *If school pupils don't pass GCSE English and Maths at grade A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people age 16–20, and parents/carers).* Participants considered that this proposal would extend the opportunity for young people to attain 'pass' grades in GCSE English and Maths.
- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people age 9–15).* Children and young people considered that some housing was extremely run down and unpleasant to live in, and any improvement in this would be beneficial.
- *An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, and parents/carers).* Participants considered that the funding of apprenticeships would provide additional opportunities for young people to learn skills which may help them to gain future employment.
- *There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014-15 (identified by children and young people 9–15, and parents/carers).* Participants considered that this would create opportunities for more people to go to university.
- *Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).* Children and young people considered that this proposal would be beneficial for those families who qualify for this; however, they acknowledged that there were many families for whom this proposal would not be beneficial.
- *The help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people age 9–15).* Children and young people aged 9–15 considered that if parents/carers were in a position to take advantage of this scheme, this was likely to result in children and young people living in 'a better house or a better area'.

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by parents/carers).* Parents/carers voiced concerns over the financial difficulties families may experience if a young person reaches 18 and Child Benefits and Tax credits for this person are stopped and they cannot secure a job, '...they still need to eat and will have the same needs but with no support'.

- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20, and parents/carers).* Participant's expressed concern that families may not be able to afford to buy essential items if benefits did not increase in line with inflation. Particular concern was expressed about the livelihood of families which relied on disability benefit and, due to their disability or the need to care for someone in their family with a disability, they may not have the opportunity to work to earn additional income to compensate for the 'real term' reduction in benefits.
- *There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014–15 (identified by parents/carers).* Parents/carers considered this proposal was not helpful to those young people who cannot afford to go to university.
- *There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people 16–20, and parents/carers).* Participants considered that, although this proposal was beneficial, the previous increases in the cost of fuel had already reduced the amount of household income available to spend on items including food, clothes and heating.
- *There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources (rather than gas, oil or coal) (identified by children and young people age 9–15, and young people age 16–20).* Concern was raised in relation to the increased pollution which was likely to be an outcome of this proposal.

Article 16 – Children have the right to privacy, the law should protect the child's private family and home life.

i) No participants considered that any of the budgetary proposals (as outlined on the prompt cards see Appendices 1 and 2) are likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 16 UNCRC.

ii) No participants considered that any of the budgetary proposals (as outlined on the prompt cards see Appendices 1 and 2) are likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article. However, children and young people age 9-15, young people aged 16-20, and parents/carers all identified the 'bedroom tax' as having impacted negatively on this Article. Participants voiced concern about how the introduction of the 'Bedroom tax' had resulted many children and young people having to share a bedroom with a sibling where they had not done so previously; some young people cited instances of when this had resulted in their sibling keeping them awake.

Article 18 – Children have the right to be raised by their parent(s) if possible. Governments should support parents by giving them the help

they need, especially if they work.

i) Budgetary proposals likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people aged 9–15). Children and young people considered that this proposal would improve the living conditions for children and young people.*
- *People paying rent to live in a home owned by the council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15, young people age 16–20, and parents/carers). Participants considered that this proposal would provide some families with an opportunity to buy a home of their own and this may benefit the families long-term.*
- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after six months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by children and young people aged 9–15). Children and young people were of the opinion that undertaking a training course or work placement would be beneficial in helping people to gain experiences which might help them secure employment.*
- *The help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people age 9–15). Participants considered that this may support families to be able to move away from areas which are not well looked after.*
- *Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15). Children and young people considered that families who benefited from this would have more money available to spend on their families.*

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by parents/carers). Parents/carers were concerned that they may struggle financially if they are required to support their teenage child, for whom they no longer receive Child Tax Credit and/or Child Benefit, but who is unable to find a job so they can earn money.*
- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20, and parents/carers).*
- *There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15, and parents/carers). Participants voiced concerns about previous increases*

in tax on fuel and how, in some households, this had led to a reduction in income available.

Article 23 – Children with any disability should have special care and support. Governments should do all they can to provide support to disabled children.

i) No participants considered that any of the budgetary proposals (as outlined on the prompt cards – see Appendices 1 and 2) are likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 23 UNCRC.

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20, and parents/carers). Particular concerns were raised about how families which relied on Disability Living Allowance would manage financially if this benefit did not rise in line with cost of living increases.*

Article 24 – Children have the right to the best health possible. Governments should provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment.

i) Budgetary proposals which are likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners any more (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15, young people age 16–20, and parents/carers). Many participants welcomed this proposal, especially if it meant that these children would receive a nutritious meal most days of the week.*
- *An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years (identified by young people age 16–20).*
- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15).*

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners and more (identified by children and young people, aged 9–15, and parents/carers). Children and young people, and parents/carers, were of the opinion that it would be more beneficial for all children in primary schools to be offered free school meals. They considered that once children reached Year 3, and families have to start paying for their school meals, this would cause some families to struggle financially.*

- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by parents/carers).*
- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Consumer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20, and parents/carers).*
- *There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries (identified by parents/carers). Parents/carers considered that previous increases in fuel tax had led to some parents/carers having less available income to spend on essential items for their children.*
- *There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources (rather than gas, oil or coal) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, and young people age 16–20). Children and young people were concerned that this proposal would lead to increased pollution.*
- *The help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people age 9–15). Children and young people age 9–15 considered that if parents/carers subscribed to this scheme, once they needed to pay the loan back, this may leave them short of money for essential items.*

Article 26 – Every child has the right to help from the Government if they are poor or in need.

i) Budgetary proposals likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*
- *People paying rent to live in a home owned by the council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20, and parents/carers).*
- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after six months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by children and young people aged 9–15). Children and young people, aged 9–15 considered this proposal was a positive move as they considered that undertaking a training course or work placement would be beneficial in helping them to gain employment.*
- *There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014–15 (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*
- *An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years (identified by young people age 16–20)*

- *Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year (Identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*
- *Money will be provided for people who want to start their own business (StartUp loans). This money will need to be paid back (identified by parents/carers).*
- *The help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people aged 9–15). Children and young people aged 9–15 considered that if parents/carers were in a position to advantage of this scheme, then their families may be able to afford to live in ‘a better house’.*

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by young people age 16–20, and parents/carers). Some young people, age 16–20 and some parents/carers considered this proposal to be unfair due to the lack of job opportunities available.*
- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker’s Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation -either measured by the Customer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people aged 16–20 and parents/carers).*
- *There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014–15 (identified by parents/carers).*
- *There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries (Identified by children and young people aged 9–15, and parents/carers). This proposal was welcomed, however, previous increases in the cost of fuel were considered to already have impacted negatively on the rights of children and young people within this Article.*

Article 27 – Every child has the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have their basic needs met, Governments should help families who cannot afford to do this.

i) Budgetary proposals likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won’t have to pay for their school dinners and more (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people age 16–20, and parents/carers). Participants welcomed this proposal, with the expectation it would lead to these children receiving at least one nutritious meal most days.*
- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*

- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after six months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*
- *An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years (identified by young people aged 16–20).*
- *The help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people aged 9-15). Children and young people age 9-15 considered that this may support families to be able to afford to live in 'a better house'.*
- *Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year (identified by children and young people aged 9–15).*

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners and more (identified by children and young people aged 9-15 and parents/carers). Some participants were considered that this proposal may lead to parents facing difficulty in affording to continue to pay for school meals once their children reach Year 3; it was also thought that spending money on school meals where many families could afford to buy these, would not be an effective use of government money.*
- *More money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities (identified by children and young people aged 9-15).*
- *School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement (identified by young people age 16-20, and parents/carers).*
- *Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year (identified by children and young people aged 9-15).*
- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seekers' Allowance (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation -either measured by the Customer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9-15, young people aged 16-20, and parents/carers). There was concern expressed about the fact that parents may need to work longer hours in order to earn extra income in order to compensate for benefits not increasing in line with inflation, resulting in parents spending less time with their children.*
- *There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources (rather than gas, oil or coal) (identified by children and young people age 9-15, and young people age 16-20).*
- *The Help-to-buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020 (identified by children and young people age 9-15). Children and young people age*

9-15 were concerned that repaying the loan could leave their families short of money on a day-to-day basis.

- *There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries (Identified by children and young people aged 9-15).* This proposal was welcomed, however, previous increases in the cost of fuel were considered to already have impacted negatively on the rights of children and young people within this Article.

Article 31 – Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in activities like Sport, Art, Music and Drama

i) No participants considered any of the budgetary proposals (as outlined on the prompt cards – see Appendices 1 and 2) are likely to support the rights of children and young people in relation to Article 31.

ii) Budgetary proposals likely to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people in relation to this Article:

- *If school pupils don't pass GCSE English and Maths at grade A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old (identified by parents/carers).*
- *Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seeker's (this was explained in terms of there being a proposed increase in benefits of 1% until the year 2016, but such an increase is not keeping pace with inflation – either measured by the Customer Price Index or the Retail Price Index) (identified by children and young people aged 9–15, young people age 16–20).* Children and young people considered that if benefits did not increase in line with cost of living increases, then it was likely that their parents would need to work longer hours and would not be at home as much to spend time with them, and that their families may not be able to afford to pay for clubs and activities they would like to undertake.

Budgetary proposals were considered to impact in both positive and negative ways on the rights of children and young people. During discussions, participants placed emphasis on discussing how proposals relating to the payment of benefits resulted in a reduction in family income in real terms, which led to families having less money to spend on adequate nutritious food, clothes and heating, and families having less to spend on social activities. In some cases parents had to work longer hours to earn additional income '*... to make ends meet*', such proposals, therefore, tended to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27, and 31 UNCRF.

There was a strong sense that, given that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that Articles within the UNCRF are met, there is an urgent need to reconsider some of the budgetary proposals which leave families struggling to be able to afford to buy essential items.

Proposals relating to the acquisition of qualification/skills and support for the

employment of young people also featured heavily in discussions. Generally, these proposals were considered to impact positively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC. However, where participants did not want to take advantage of opportunities for undertaking training/qualifications, these rights would not apply, and where proposals result in young people being 'forced' to study, this was considered to impact negatively on their rights.

Proposals leading to improved living and housing conditions for children and young people were seen to support their rights within Articles 6, 18, 24, 26 and 27 UNCRC. However, the outcome of these proposals could potentially leave families with less disposable income, they were considered to impact negatively on the rights of children and young people within Articles 6, 24 and 27 UNCRC. There was a strong feeling amongst participants that the government should initiate the building of lower cost housing so parents could afford to pay for housing without this impacting negatively on their ability to finance the provision of essential items for their families.

References

Council of Europe (1950) European Convention on Human Rights, November 1950. Rome: Council of Europe.

Children's Rights Alliance for England (2013) State of Children's Rights in England. Review of Government action on United Nations' recommendations for strengthening children's rights in the UK. London: CRAE.

Fielding, M. (1998). Students as Researchers: From Data Source to Significant Voice. Paper presented at the 11th Congress for School Effectiveness & Improvement. University of Manchester, UK 4–7 January 16pp.

James, A. Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) Theorizing Childhood. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lee, N. (1998) Towards an Immature Sociology. *Sociological Review*, 46 (3), p458-481.

Lee, N. (2005) Childhood and Human Value Development Separation and Separability. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Mayall, B. (2000) The Sociology of Childhood in relation to Children's Rights, *The International Journal of Childhood Rights* 8 (3), 243-259.

Mayall, B. (2003) Sociology Can Further Children's Rights, *Educational Journal*. 72, 7

Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) (2013) A Child Rights Impact Assessment of Budget Decisions: including the 2013 Budget, and the cumulative impact of tax-benefit reforms and reductions in spending on public services 2010-2015. London: OCC.

Prout, A. (2011) Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Reconsidering the New Sociology of Childhood. *Global Studies of Childhood* 1 (1), 4-14.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) UN General Assembly Resolution 44/25.

Appendix 1: Prompt cards with summaries of statements relating to budgetary changes, as

proposed in the 2013 Autumn Statement

Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 won't have to pay for their school dinners any more.



The amount you can earn before paying tax has increased from £9,400 to £10,000. If you earn more than this you will now pay less money (tax) to the government.



Money will be spent on improving run-down housing estates and cities.



If school pupils don't pass GCSE English and Maths at grades A, B or C, they must keep learning these until they are 19 years old.



Less money will be spent on benefits such as housing, disability or child benefit. This will not affect pensions or Job Seekers' Allowance



Money will be provided for people who want to start their own business (StartUp loans). This money will need to be paid back.



There will be more spaces for people to go to university – 30,000 more in 2014-15.



People paying rent to live in a home owned by a council will be given help to buy it, but they will then have to pay for any repairs.



Employers will no longer pay National Insurance (money to the government) for employees under 21 as they do for those over 21, so it's cheaper to employ under-21s.



School leavers not in work or college may have their benefits stopped after 6 months unless they do a training course, community work or work placement.



An additional 20,000 apprenticeships will be funded over the next two years.



There will be no increase in tax paid on fuel for vehicles including cars and lorries.



Married working couples, where one earns less than £10,000 and the other more, will now take home about £200 more per year.



Additional discussion prompts used in Stage 2 of the fieldwork:

- 1. The amount people earn before paying tax will increase from £10,000 to £10,500, meaning that if you earn more money than this you will pay less tax to the government.** (This replaced the following statement used during Stage 1 of the fieldwork - 'The amount you can earn before paying tax has increased from £9,400 to £10,000. If you earn more than this you will now pay less money (tax) to the government').
- 2. The Help-to buy loan scheme is being extended to 2020** - the government will lend people some money to buy a newly built home, but this money will need to be paid back. This will make it easier for some people to buy a new home.
- 3. Less tax will be paid on most alcoholic drinks.**
- 4. There will be fewer policies to encourage businesses to use 'green' energy sources** (rather than gas, oil or coal).

Participants were also asked: What resources/activities do you think the government should spend money on if they are to improve the rights of children?

Appendix 2: Family ‘cases’ used as a basis for discussions of how proposals within the 2013 Autumn Statement and 2014 Budget are likely to impact on the rights of children and young people.

Five family cases were discussed during stage 2 of the fieldwork.

Family 1

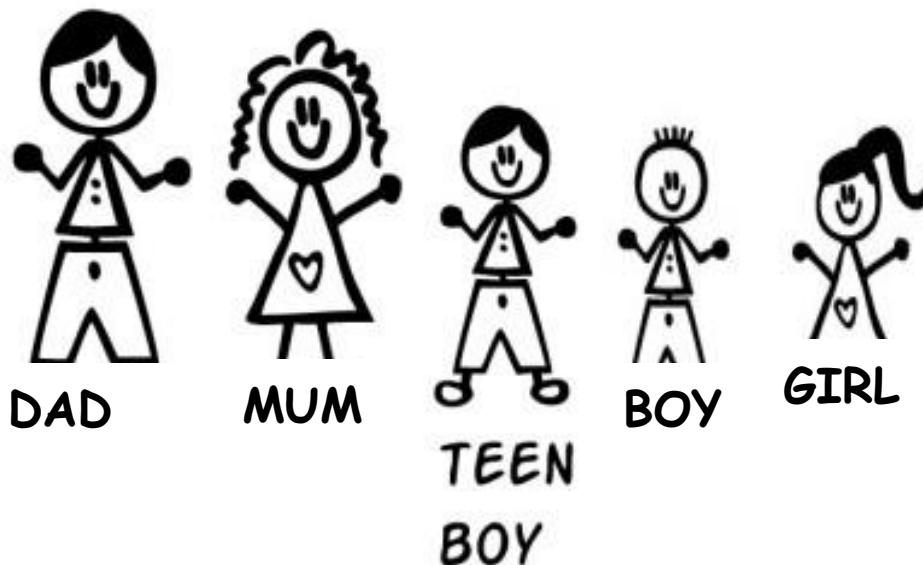
Mum and dad (married)

3 children aged 5, 7 and 17 all at school (the 17 year old is hoping to go to university)

Dad earns £52,000; mum earns £7,000

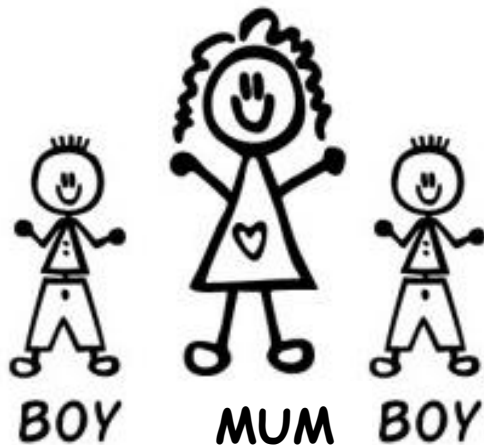
Live in semi-rural area and run two cars

Paying mortgage on their four bedroom house



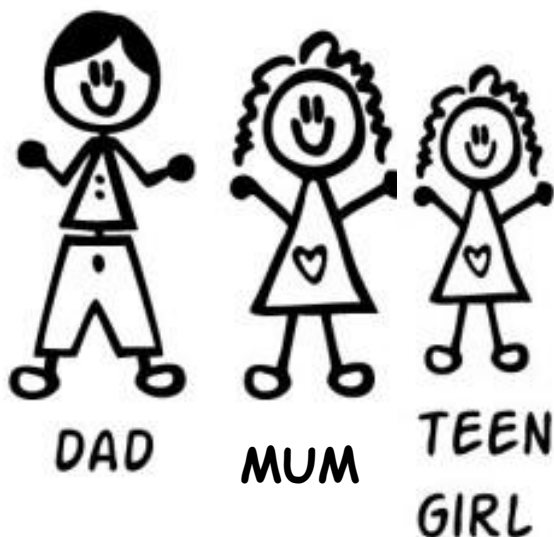
Family 2

Single mum, with no contact/payment from children's father
2 children (boys) aged 3 and 5
Mum doesn't work so is on benefits
Live in three bedroom social housing



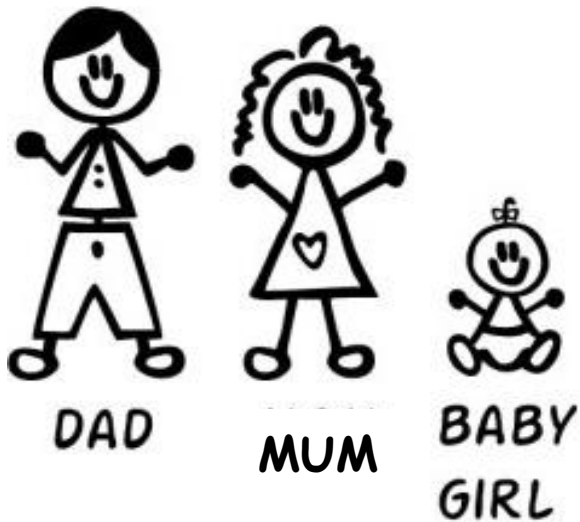
Family 3

Mum and dad (married)
1 child aged 18 who failed Maths GCSE and is seeking Job Seekers Allowance
Dad earns £14,000; mum earns £15,000
Paying mortgage on their three bedroom house.



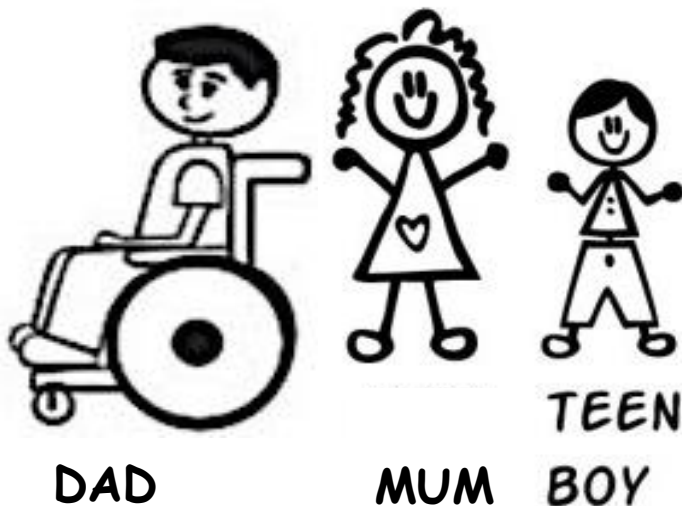
Family 4

Mum and dad both aged 19 (unmarried)
1 child age 2 years
Dad works 40 hours per week and earns
£10,000; mum doesn't work
Living in two bedroom social housing



Family 5

Mum and dad (unmarried)
1 child aged 14
Dad disabled and unable to work; mum works part-time and earns £5,000
Renting two bedroom house



Appendix 3: Cards outlining specific Articles of the UNCRC

The statements used on these cards were taken from the 'UNCRC In Child Friendly Language' (http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_crcchildfriendly.pdf, accessed 30th September 2013). The statements were presented to the Young People's Steering group who advised the research team on the final wording of the statements.

The following Articles were used to underpin all discussions about how budgetary changes might impact on the rights of children and young people:

Children's Rights - Article 1/2

All children have rights and should be treated fairly, no matter where they live, what they think or say, what type of family they come from, what their ethnicity, gender, religion or abilities are.



Children's Rights – Article 3

When adults make decisions, they should think about how decisions affect children and do what is best for children.



Children's Rights – Article 7

All children have the right to a name and nationality (to belong to a country), and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.



Children's Rights – Article 12

Children have the right to give their opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.



Specific attention was given to the following Articles when discussing participants' perceptions of the impact budgetary proposals are likely to have on the rights of children and young people.

Children's Rights – Article 6

Governments should do all they can to make sure that children survive and develop as well as possible.



Children's Rights – Article 16

Children have the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life.



Children's Rights – Article 18

Children have the right to be raised by their parent(s) if possible. Governments should support parents by giving them help they need, especially if they work.



Children's Rights – Article 23

Children with any kind of disability should have special care and support. Governments should do all they can to provide support to disabled children.



Children's Rights – Article 24

Children have the right to the best health possible. Governments should provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment.



Children's Rights – Article 26

Every child has the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need.



Children's Rights – Article 27

Every child has the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have their basic needs met. Governments should help families who cannot afford to provide this.



Children's Rights – Article 31

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in activities like sport, art, music and drama.



Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
E info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

