



# Bringing up the next generation: from research to policy

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Final Report: Carey Oppenheim with Richard Batcheler and Jordan Rehill



# Changing family forms and parenting experiences

## What's changing?

- Most children living with both parents but shift from marriage to cohabitation
- Rising diversity of family forms
- Data suggests increase in parental separation/re-partnering
- Increase in developmental childcare
- Rise in parental mental health difficulties

## Why does this matter?

- Context for parenting
- Sliding scale of resources: family forms
- Small independent effect of parental separation on child outcomes
- Quality of relationship key
- Pressures on parents

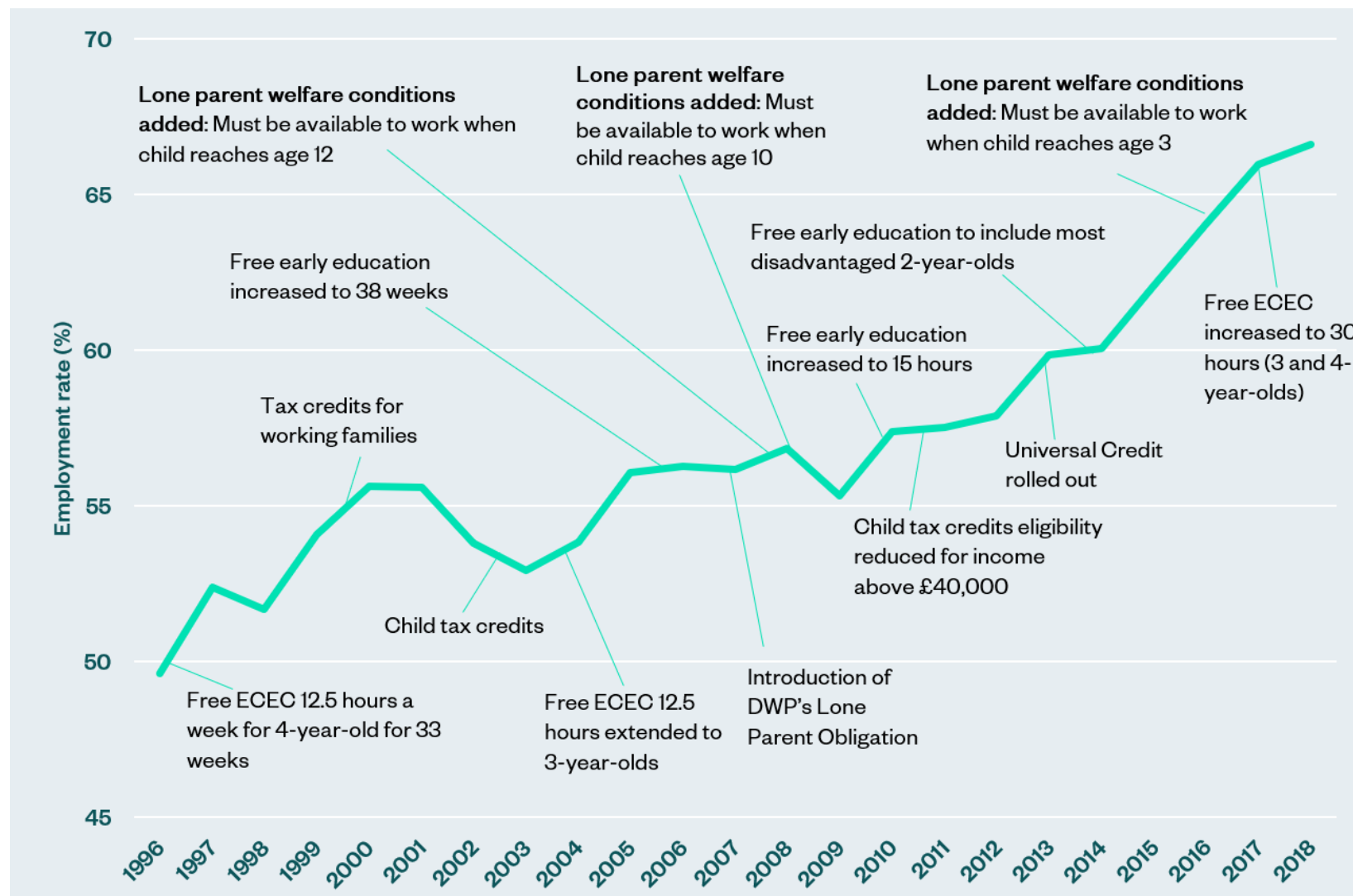
*Source: Kiernan et al. 2022.*

**Limited data/understanding:** diverse family forms, fathers, relationship quality, parenting patterns

## Rising employment rate for mothers of young children

Source: ONS (2019).  
Adapted from Conboye & Romei (2018).

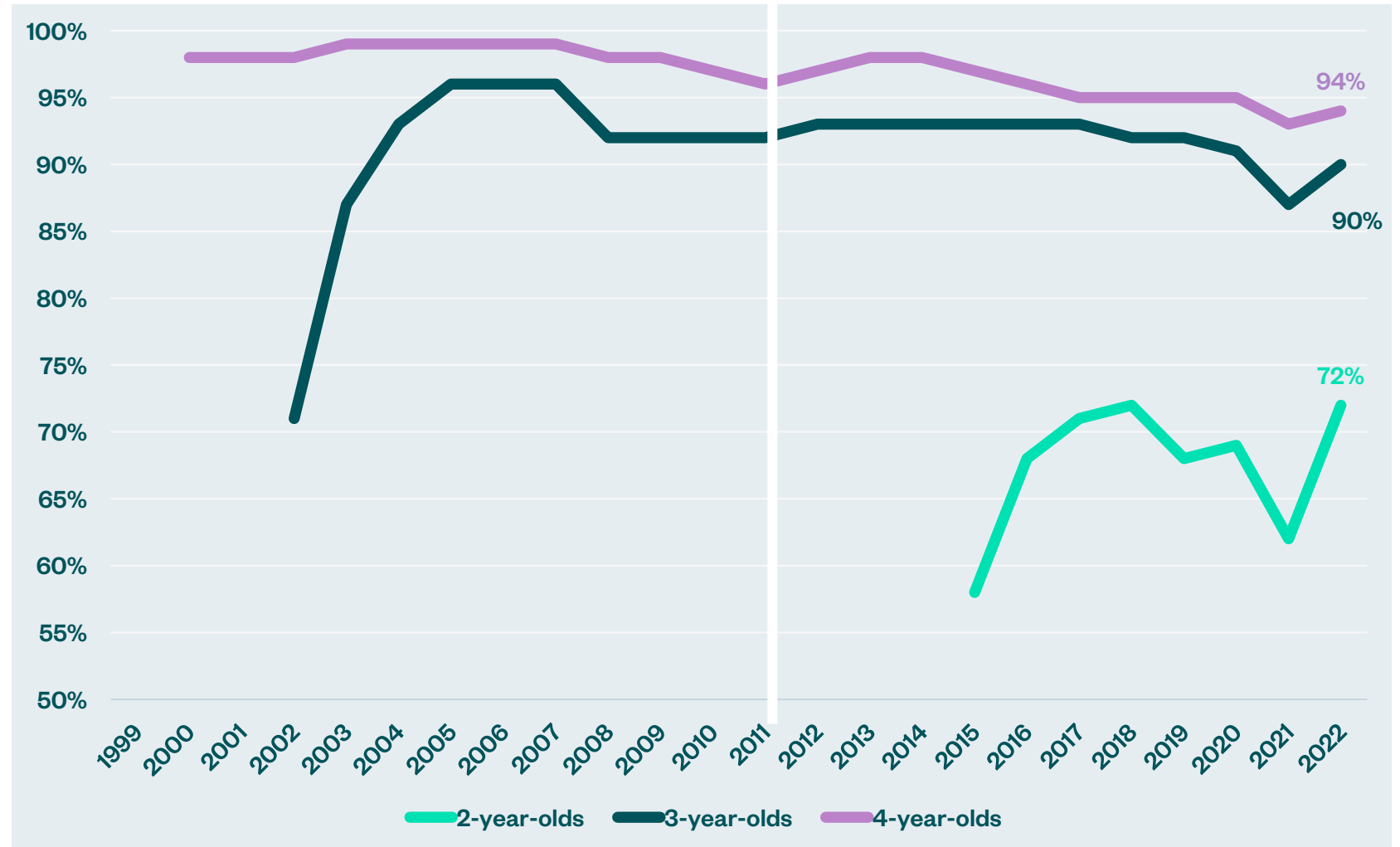
Employment rate (full and part-time) of mothers of children under five. England, Jan-Jun, % of 16-64 population.



## Increased take up of early years entitlements

Pre 2011 data included all settings attended by a child. Post 2011 data records only the setting attended the most.

Proportion of eligible children taking up their funded early education places (England). *Source: West and Noden (2016); DfE (2022).*



## Higher rates of relative poverty for families with a young child

In 2019/20, the proportion of children in poverty in families with youngest child under five stood at 36% - compared to 30% in 2013/14.

Relative poverty by age of youngest child in family. *Source: Stewart and Reader (2021).*



# Changing patterns of poverty and vulnerability

## What's changing?

- Persistent & deep poverty increasing
- Very high risk for some groups
- Geographical differences
- Rise of in-work poverty, private rented housing
- Vulnerability: 560,000 under 5s; increasing rates of SEND
- Increasing % of young children on protection plans, coming into care

## Why does this matter?

- Poverty a causal factor in child outcomes (*Cooper and Stewart, 2017*)
- Associated with greater risk of other difficulties
- Housing conditions & insecurity

**Limited data/understanding:** Intersectionality, 'invisible groups', complex need

Proportion of children in households with youngest child aged 0–4 in poverty by tenure type. *Source: HBAI (DWP 2021).*

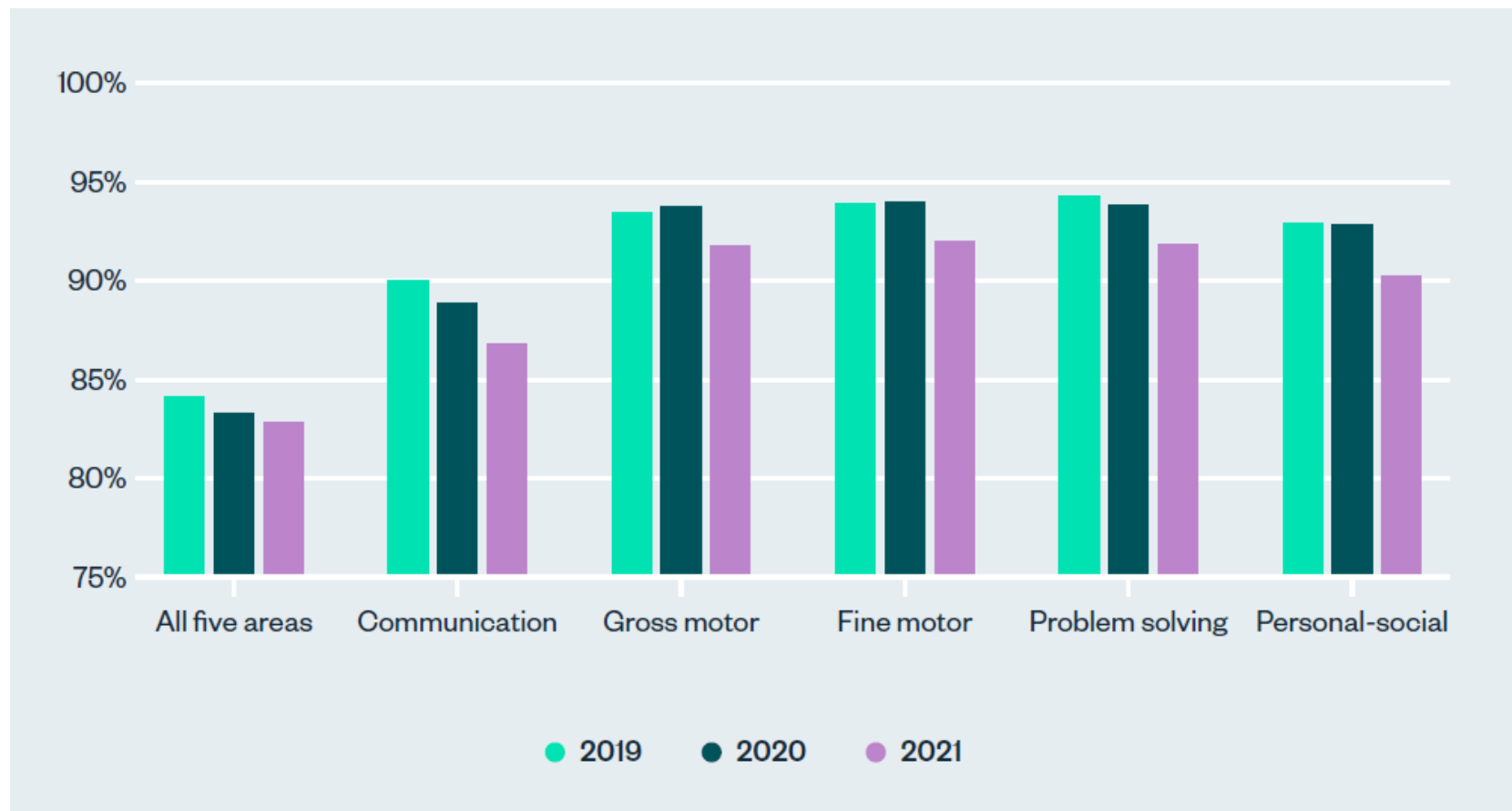
**Growing  
proportion of  
families with a  
young child in  
poverty in  
private rental  
sector**



## Impact of COVID on early development

Estimated two-fifths of children in reception not reaching expected level of development in 2020/2021 (Tracy et al. 2022).

Proportion of children at or above the expected level of development aged 2–2.5. *Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2021).*





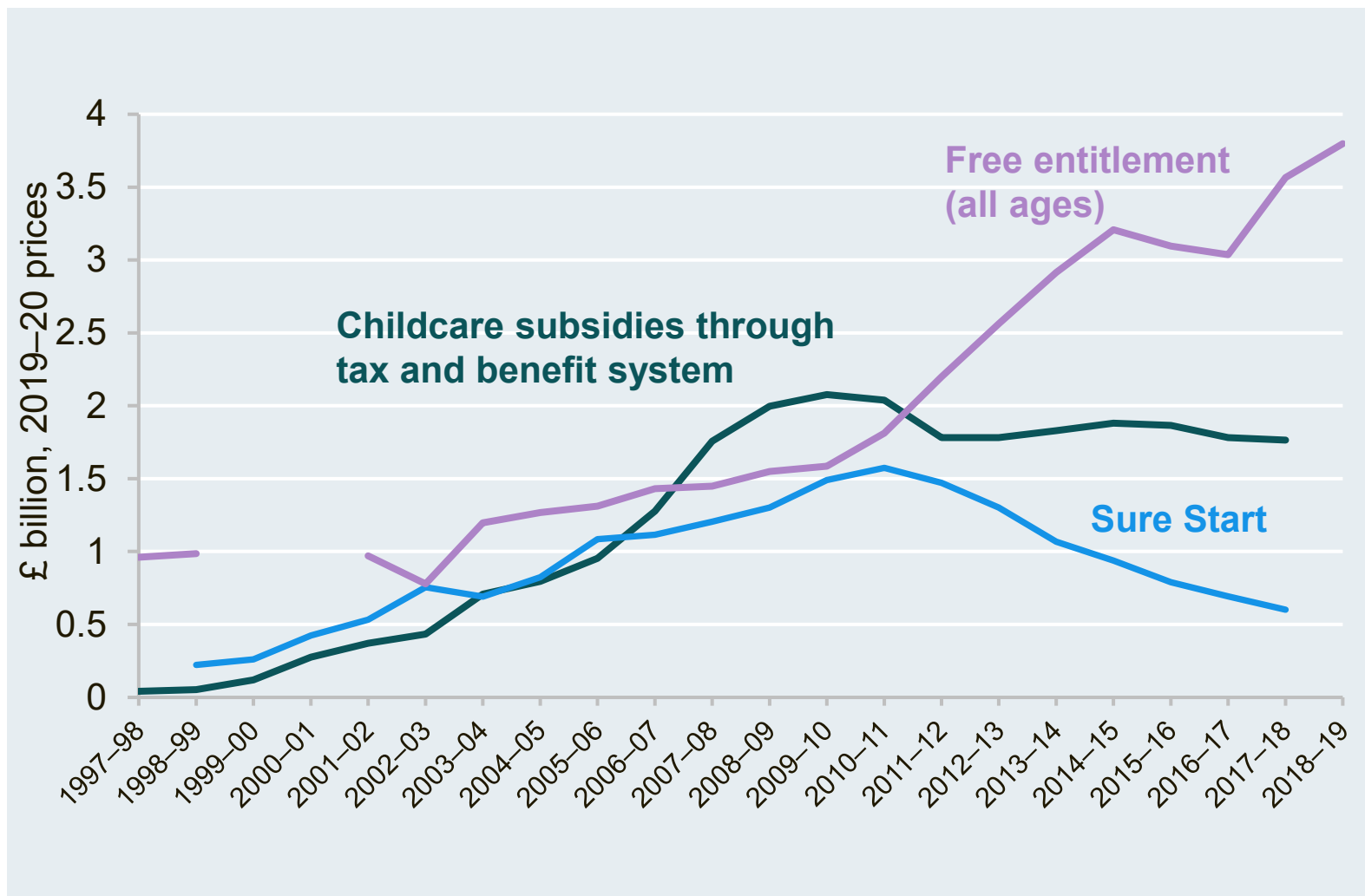
**Shifting policy  
landscape: major  
shift in social  
security and tax  
credit spending  
away from child**

Cumulative change in social security and tax credit spending since 2009/10. *Source: Vizard and Hills 2021.*



**Shifting policy  
landscape: balance  
of early education  
and care spending  
less focused on  
disadvantaged,  
youngest children  
and families**

Total early years spending through various programmes (2019/20 prices). *Source: Britton, Farquharson and Sibietta (2019).*



# Shifting policy landscape: foundations to build upon

- Services for young children have been built up
- Covid catalysed innovative practice: digital opportunities
- Evidence of what works
- New interest:
  - Within central government: Best Start for Life, Family Hubs, new investments and Independent Review of Children's Social Care
  - Outside: local government, civil society
- Questions remain: scale, reach, 3 years, siloed, evidence gaps

## **Next steps: goals for early childhood policy**

1. Services that understand and respond to the needs of families with young children in the round
2. All parents to have a choice about how they care for their young children
3. An early childhood education and care system to support all young children's learning in the broadest sense – with a focus on disadvantage
4. A societal commitment to tackling the causes and effects of early childhood poverty

# Next steps: big challenges

- Gap between the inter-related nature of early childhood development/risks and how services, data, departments connect
- Addressing gender inequality in care and work choices
- Gaps and the balance of support across ages in early childhood
- Tensions between objectives of early education and care system
- Persistence of early childhood inequalities and addressing intersectionality
- Insecurity: work, housing, income and costs
- Balance between meeting higher and lower level needs
- Balance between national and local approaches

# Services that understand and respond to the needs of families with young children in the round

- Best start for Life – to 5 with early years education and care a core part of integrated family support services and recognition of material poverty.
- Joining up data to develop a shared view of the child and family
- Timely integrated development checks – family focused
- Meeting needs of those who are under-served
- Building the evidence base for lighter touch and digital forms of support

# All parents to have a choice about how they care for their young children

- Extending the scale and reach of work-care policies
- Enabling mothers and fathers to balance work and care
- Inclusive family-friendly entitlements for self-employed, insecure
- Bridging the gap between parental leave and education/care entitlements
- Employers – proactive role, high quality jobs more flexible

# **An early childhood education and care system to support all young children's learning in the broadest sense – with a focus on disadvantage**

- A whole system review
- Boost support and quality for disadvantaged children: 2 year old focus
- Incentives for graduate early years leaders to work in disadvantaged areas
- Raise the early years pupil premium
- Simplification of system to support the costs of childcare
- Link support for providers to improvements in quality



# A societal commitment to tackling the causes and effects of early childhood poverty

- Address poverty directly and indirectly – through increased mental health and parenting support
- A comprehensive measure of relative income poverty within government
- Ensuring social security boosts employment and addresses immediate needs
- Tackling poverty as part of joined-up services in early childhood
- Housing needs of families with a young child
- Material deprivation and poverty – is a key element in child protection, alongside mental health, domestic violence and addiction

