



North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission Call to Action

C/O Children North East
North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission
89 Denhill Park,
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Participation.team@children-ne.org.uk

Dear [NAME],

We are members of the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission's Caring Responsibilities Working Group. We are a group of people from across communities, businesses and public organisations in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland who have come together to tackle poverty head on. With more than one in four people across the North East living below the poverty line, we know that this is one of the biggest challenges impacting our region right now. We also know, from our work together, that there are some actions we can take collaboratively that would help in the North of Tyne. We are writing this letter to share these views and ask for your support.

We have looked at care and caring responsibilities as part of our Poverty Truth Commission. This includes people looking after children, supporting children and adults with disabilities or special educational needs, and caring for other relatives because of ill-health or age-related conditions. Unpaid care has a significant economic value recently estimated at £445 million a day – or £162 billion a year – across England and Wales. We know that when the work of care is properly valued and supported it makes children, adults, families and communities healthier, happier and more productive.

The work of care has power and value. But our work found that it is often impossible to care and work well. This means that people who care often have lower incomes, are less likely to work or more likely to be underemployed, have fewer opportunities and more likely to live in poverty – as well as facing stress and poor health themselves.

We want to shine a spotlight on the poverty trap that caring responsibilities can create. The work of our Commission has identified three things that can change this:

1. Bringing support services to carers to increase opportunity and access.

We have looked at what works across the North of Tyne and have identified the Child Poverty Prevention Programme as good practice. The 'welfare

support through the school gate' pillar of this pilot project has so far provided welfare rights advice and support to parents, carers and staff in 33 school settings across Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside. Some commissioners had experience of using this service directly. The benefits of having advisers in easy, accessible and safe spaces meant people felt more comfortable getting advice quickly and easily. People who used the services also felt there was less stigma talking to advisers in the trusted setting of their school. The North of Tyne Combined Authority has recently committed additional funding to expand this model, to include more schools and families. We welcome this move and would also like the Combined Authority, with partners, to explore how this could be expanded to other places carers attend regularly e.g. hospitals, other NHS services, community centres and Family Hubs.

“When you try and ring Citizens Advice, you can’t get through and it becomes a big effort. It’s easier to access when you know they’re going to be there at the school you’re going to anyway. It takes the stress away.” Community Commissioner

2. Improve career opportunities for people with caring responsibilities. We have identified two practical ways in which this action could be addressed:

- a. By expanding the North of Tyne Good Work Pledge so that employers are encouraged to recognise, accommodate and support people with caring responsibilities – both in their current workforce and when they are recruiting.
- b. By the Combined Authority working with the Department for Work & Pensions and Jobcentre Plus to undertake a pilot exploring ways in which a more flexible, personalised service for people with caring responsibilities can be delivered to people in our area.

“When I go into Jobcentre Plus – because I don’t fit into one of their boxes – they can’t help me. Despite my challenges and caring responsibilities, I have a lot to offer. I want to thrive, to make a success of my life and support my family but the current system won’t let me.” Community Commissioner

3. Long-term and ongoing support from systems. Support systems are complex and can be hard to access and navigate: this is well known and well-rehearsed. However, time and time again, in the evidence we considered, people explained that being treated ‘like a human’ or with ‘respect and

sensitivity' could make the difference between feeling like the system was working for them or against them. We identified training tools like trauma-informed practice, and values and behaviours like patience and empathy as being central to good experiences with the benefits system and other mainstream services. We would like to see staff in services who demonstrate these values commended and relevant training considered and applied at a local level.

“I understand that people’s hands are tied by working within systems, but there should be more compassion and understanding for individual circumstances and experiences. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what their situation is.”
Community Commissioner

These recommendations are evidence-based, practical and focused. We understand that there are some parts of the systems which support carers which are outside regional control and the scope of this work. However, as a North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission we have asked ourselves **who cares for our carers?** We have worked together to come up with some answers.

We would like to invite you to join us in this work and at the Call to Action event on 24th January 2024 and look forward to hearing how you may be able to support us.

An initial response before the event would be appreciated.

Yours,

Caring Responsibilities Working Group, North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission:

Amanda Bailey, Director at North East Child Poverty Commission

Amy Rose, Community Commissioner

Christine Paxton, Assistant Director Business Development, Communications and Change at Karbon Homes

David Black, Community Commissioner

Gemma Johnson, Community Commissioner

Nicola Morrison, Community Commissioner

Rhiannon Bearne, Executive Director (Policy and Representation) at North East Chamber of Commerce

This letter is being sent to:

- Abi Conway, CEO at Northumberland Citizens Advice
- Tracy Armstrong, Chief Officer at Newcastle Citizens Advice
- Mark Almond, Chief Executive at North Tyneside Citizens Advice
- North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll
- NOTCA Deputy Mayor Dame Norma Redfearn DBE, Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- North of Tyne Councillor Nicholas Kemp, Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Karen Kilgour, Deputy Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Carl Johnson, Deputy Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- NOTCA Councillor Glen Sanderson, Lead of Northumberland county Council
- NOTCA Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader Northumberland County Council
- Lucy Winskell OBE, Chair of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Board
- Lisa Goodwin, Mayoral Ambassador for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
- Caroline Preston, North of Tyne Combined Authority – Good Work Pledge
- Phil Capewell – Society Matters
- Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
- Guy Opperman MP
- Ian Levy MP
- Ian Lavery MP
- Rt Hon Sir Alan Campbell MP
- Mary Glendon MP
- Rt Hon Nick Brown MP
- Chi Onwurah MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP
- Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner – Kim McGuinness
- DWP – Strategic Partnership Manager for the North East, Sharon Thorpe
- Joanne Jobling– Job Centre Plus
- Pam Smith, Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council,
- Paul Hanson - Chief Executive, North Tyneside Council
- Dr Helen Paterson - Chief Executive Northumberland Council
- Pauline Steele, CEO Carers Trust Tyne and Wear
- Nic Palmarini, Director of the National Innovation Centre for Ageing