



Good childcare benefits parents, helps child development and supports our economy. UKIP's vision for childcare is a system where parents, teachers, schools, nurseries, children's centres, local authorities, childcare providers and businesses all work together to make provision as affordable, flexible, available and as high-quality as possible.

The policies of current and previous governments have been counter-productive in many ways: over-regulation has helped create an acute shortage of places and voucher systems have contributed to pushing up the cost of childcare.

UK childcare costs are now the most expensive in Europe, and among the highest in the world. Costs can be crippling for ordinary families. What is the point of having a childcare system that is so expensive it does not pay to work?

Children from socially deprived backgrounds are adversely affected because their applications for places are most likely to be turned down, especially if parents are unable to pay for 'top-ups' such as meals, nappies and so on.

Childcare provision is also complex and fragmented. Several government departments oversee different schemes providing help with childcare costs. Parents may struggle to work out which type of childcare funding system will work best for them. Those on modest incomes who work hard may find they 'fall through the gaps.' Parents who are self-employed, agency workers, those on zero-hours contracts or commission are most likely to be affected, as any rise in income may prove punitive, depending on which childcare support scheme has been chosen.

A simpler system, more responsive to families' changing needs and with integrated sources of funding, must be initiated at the earliest opportunity, alongside proposals to reduce the cost of childcare and increase the number of childcare places, while giving parents more choice.

We will initiate a full review of childcare provision.

EARLY YEARS CHILDCARE

UKIP will continue to fund the current childcare offer of fifteen hours a week of free childcare at a nursery, pre-school, or for a childminder, for all three to four year olds, and for all two-year olds whose parent are on certain benefits. We will also honour the current Government's commitment to providing a new tax-free childcare scheme, worth up to £2,000 for children under twelve.

However, we will amend the voucher scheme in order to address the shortage of places and cut the cost to both parents and the state, by de-regulating childcare provision.

At the moment, if parents want to claim their free childcare entitlement, they must place their child with an Ofsted-registered childminder. UKIP will remove this requirement and allow parents to use any third-party, non-related child carer they feel comfortable placing their child with, provided the care provided can be proven to be genuine. This is intended to encourage experienced parents whose own children have grown up, for instance, or who would like to combine looking after other people's children alongside their own, to offer childcare. Our plans will also make it cost-effective for parents to hire a nanny if they have more than one young child, or enable parents to club together to hire a nanny.