



Business Plan 2017-18

APRIL 2017

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Introduction by Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England



When I published *Ambitious for Children* on taking office in 2015, I set out my priorities for my term in office. These were to build the aspirations and resilience of children, particularly those with a less than easy start to life; and to shine a light on hidden issues affecting the vulnerable, in order to change their lives for the better.

In the past year we have conducted data-gathering 'lightning reviews' which revealed gaps in child mental health provision and the identification of young carers by local councils; challenged policy-makers and social media companies to put resilience and agency at the heart of a new digital settlement for children; created a new measure of stability to identify where children in care are being 'pinged' around the system; and began a landmark **Growing up North** project, to challenge the new City regions to put the highest aspiration and ambitions for children at the heart of plans for devolution.

I am proud of this work and also of the practical help my office has given hundreds of children in care through our advice service, Help at Hand.

With a restructured office focusing on strength of evidence and the demonstration of real impact, we have consulted widely about the groups of children who will be the focus of this year's business plan – those who are under-represented, unheard or 'invisible' to policy makers, planners or service providers. Overwhelmingly, children as well as adults told us that mental health – particularly, among primary school children, issues of anxiety and self-esteem – were their top concern.

"Help children with anxiety and how to help them get better. Some children worry all the time and they don't how to stop or control it so their mind can be calm." (12-year-old girl)

We will use the Children's Commissioner's data collection powers this year to highlight the real level of need among children and teenagers for mental health services, in order to help build resilience and address the shortfall in provision at every level.

Our aspiration for children drives everything we do. From those in care, to those behind the closed doors of young offender institutions or secure children's homes; those with hidden needs or all those grappling with childhood and young adulthood in a complex and often disempowering digital environment, our focus will be on the children's viewpoint. Services and

"It's sad and scary and I miss my mum."

(12-year-old boy in care)

authorities and policy and regulatory frameworks are essential for the protection of children, but these are not what a child sees. The child sees the baffling rules, the closed door, the silence where they need support.

Two years ago I committed myself to promoting the highest aspirations for all children; believing they are all capable of greatness and should be given the support they need to succeed. Today, I recommit my office to using the full range of its powers to shine a light on the hidden issues which can prevent children fulfilling the highest ambitions we must encourage in all of them.

Ann Zytner.

Work programme 2017-18

Voices of Children

It was Lord Laming's review into the death of Victoria Climbié, a little girl killed in February 2000 following months of abuse by her great-aunt and a male friend, which directly led to the creation of a Children's Commissioner. Lord Laming sadly concluded that Victoria – so frail and abused that she was 'stooped like an old lady' when admitted to hospital – was let down by services which were 'underfunded, inadequately staffed and poorly led', and failed to put the best interests of Victoria first. Despite being well-known to children's social care, health and police, Victoria was ultimately, in Lord Laming's words, 'abandoned, unheard and unnoticed'.

The Children's Commissioner's Office was established the following year, tasked with promoting awareness of the views and interests of children in England, and holding inquiries into issues of public policy of relevance to children. This role was later enhanced by the addition of a duty to promote and protect children's rights, and to provide advice and assistance to children living away from home or receiving social care.

The views and interests of children in England influence all the work that we do. In preparing this business plan we have consulted 330 children through a survey and a network of schools, many of them in the Children's Commissioner's new 'children create' network of primary schools. We have listened in addition to the views of 80 children in care.

Children's primary concern, which they told us about in many different ways, was mental health, including the effects of parental mental ill health and the stress caused by divorce.

They also expressed fears about feeling anxious and lonely, and lacking confidence.

"How will children be able to do work when it's hard to get help with homework if their parents don't care about them?"
(9-year-old)

"Waiting lists for services are too long."
(Teenage schoolgirl)

"I think some children feel really worried about their lives, you know, if their parents are shouting at each other or if they feel no one loves them. They can be worried or blame themselves. They can feel lost or sad if their parents are shouting at each other. They might need help as they don't know who to tell their problems to."
(10-year-old)

"Some people with anxiety can't even handle being in public places or doing things like school or work, and they probably need some help."
(Teenage girl in care)

Responses from older children (age 12-18) focused directly on the inaccessibility of mental health services, a lack of access to help and the stigmatisation of children with mental health difficulties.

“They need help as they are suffering mentally and it isn't as obvious to see it. There is also the big stigma around mental health still so maybe young people feel that if they do say they need help they won't get it. The CAMHS team are struggling to see everyone.”
(Teenage schoolboy)

“If we are not with our mums and dads etc. then we need someone to look after us and support us as we are quite vulnerable and it's easy to go off the rails.”
(Teenage girl in the care system)

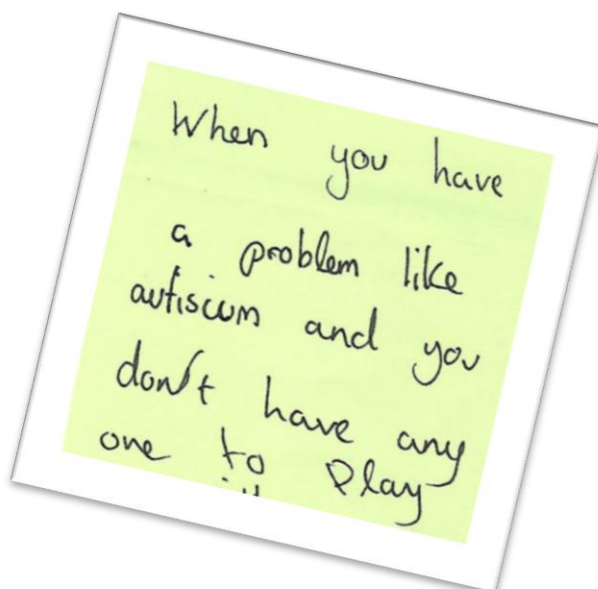
“It's hard when you don't see your parents every day, especially for younger children.”
(12-year-old girl in care)

Children in care also questioned whether mental health services were adequate, with older children in care often expressing concern for younger ones.

Fears about exclusion, being 'left out' or bullied due to difference were also striking throughout the responses. Children with disabilities, asylum-seeking and refugee children, LGBT and minority groups were all recognised as vulnerable.

“There are children who don't have English as a first language – often they can be bullied.”
(Teenage girl in care)

“I can't name a person who doesn't have a mental health problem. Only half are getting help from CAMHS and youth workers. There just isn't enough money or staff or support.”
(Teenage schoolgirl)



These responses point to the need to build the resilience of children against a blizzard of messages telling them how to look and 'be'. **I will work this year to highlight the scale of the problem of low-level anxiety, particularly among younger children**, and the imperative that we have as a society to address it.

To help inform our programme of work in the forthcoming year, we have developed a **network of digital youth platforms** who have generously agreed to provide the Children's Commissioner with aggregated data and regular insight into their users' interests and concerns. The information from *Silent Secret* (60,000 users aged 11-19), *tootoot* (600 schools) and *The Mix* (1.5 million 16-25 year olds) will inform the Commissioner's strategy and policy work and help ensure it is relevant, targeted and effective.

"Kids can be teased if they can't really read or find it hard to do work. Sometimes, they act silly as if they are feeling bad about it. They need extra help as it is not fair for them."
(10-year-old)

"It's hard when you have a problem like autism and you don't have anyone to play with."
(9-year-old)

"I find at school that it is actually seen as 'cool' by the majority of students to target gay people."

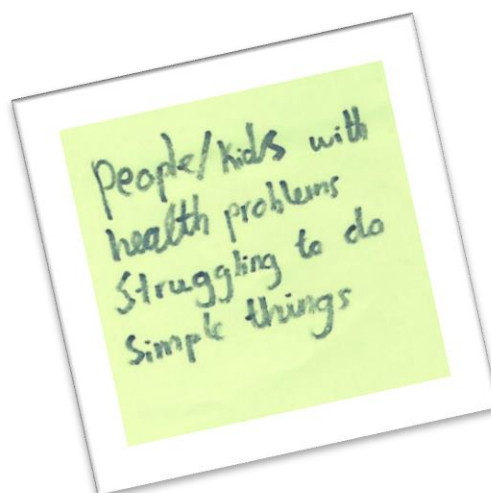
(Teenage girl)

"People say I'm fat because when they say it I don't act upset, because I know that's what they want me to be, but I have feelings and it does make me upset but sometimes I don't tell anyone."

(11-year-old)

Our consultation with children on this year's business plan identified gaps in our ability to consult with children with disabilities. **We will therefore make it a priority in the 2017-18 business year to establish better links with participation networks for children with disabilities and to ensure that the voices of these children are fully represented in all the work that we do.**

We will work closely with the Council for Disabled Children to achieve this.



Digital Children

Our research last year into children's digital rights, 'Growing up Digital', found an extreme inequality between the rights, protections and freedom afforded to children online, and those owned by social media companies. The Children's Commissioner firmly believes that online resilience should be embedded in children's education, to enable them to engage creatively, positively and fearlessly with digital life, and to level the playing field of power between children and the companies which form such an important part of children's social interaction.

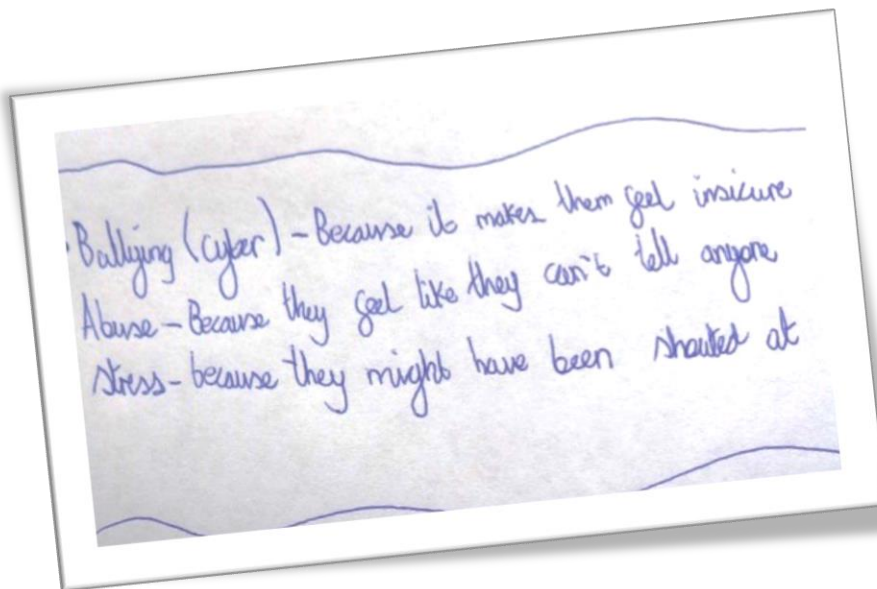
We will conduct research into the relationship between social media use and children's mental health, aspiration and wellbeing.

And while welcoming the Government's commitment to introduce a Life Skills curriculum in all schools, we will **continue to campaign to include digital resilience in the new Life Skills curriculum, so that children learn digital citizenship and online resilience**, from how to recognise when they are being manipulated, to identifying fake news, protecting their information, or knowing how to disengage from social media.

"Cyber bullying makes children feel upset, sad, powerless and scared." (10-year-old)

"You should work on tighter Internet legislation and monitoring to address the bombardment of abuse young people are faced with left, right and centre online."

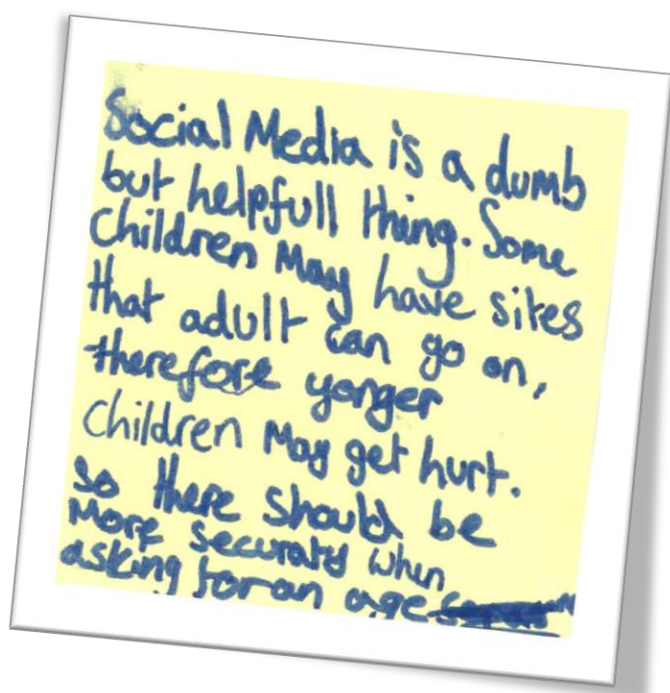
(Teenage girl)



We will maintain pressure on social media companies to be more transparent about the ways they collect children's data, and the complaints they receive. And at the request of teachers **we will prepare a pack of teaching aids based on social media companies' bewildering terms and conditions, to guide children in their understanding and decisions about use of their data online. We will also continue to campaign for the introduction of a children's digital ombudsman.**

In the course of last year's work on children's digital lives, 'Growing up Digital', we were told of problems around the restricted access of children in care to the internet. **Growing up Digital in care will explore whether the access of children in care and adopted children to digital networks is restricted by their care status or safeguarding concerns of the adults caring for them, and what can be done to broaden access.**

And we will work with partners and care leavers to try to create a safe digital platform for children in the care system.



"I think it is important that the Children's Commissioner is making sure most young people in care have internet."

(Teenage boy in care)

'Invisible' children

Children, as well as adults working in or with the children's sector, told us of a range of concerns over 'hidden' groups of vulnerable children whose needs are not fully recognised or understood. These ranged from children with lower level mental health needs to trafficked children; children with alcoholic parents and children getting caught up with gangs; those who fall through the gaps in the education system and the children of prisoners.

"I think they are often in the background and need somebody to reach out to them."

(Teenage girl with a disability)

"Children are pulled into gangs by older boys because they are getting into trouble and think there is no way out and that they don't have a future."
(Teenage boy)

Groups of vulnerable children who are 'invisible' today to services include:

Children 'hidden' within official statistics – for instance, unofficially excluded or absent from school; identified as in need but not receiving support.

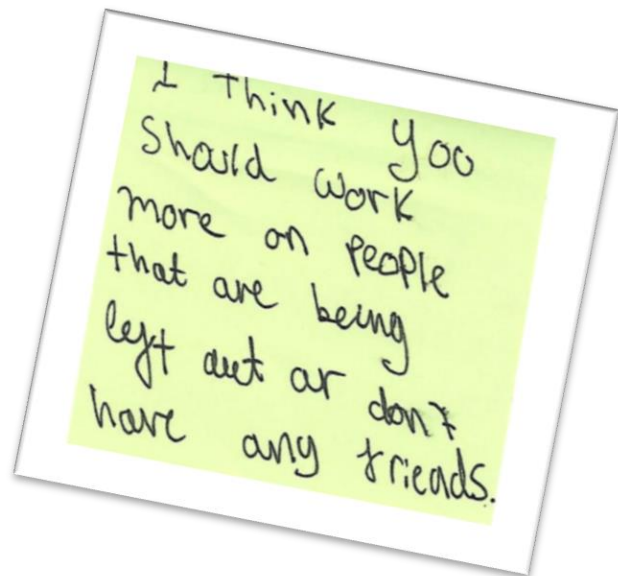
Children missing from official statistics: children who may be vulnerable whose needs are not identified or recognized in policy.

Missing children

In 2017-18 we will begin a major programme of work to assess the extent of child vulnerability in England.

An initial stage of this work programme has been commissioned; a **Children's Commissioner Report on Vulnerable Children**. The report, on definitions and numbers of different types of vulnerable children, as well as their outcomes and well-being, will help to identify groups of missing or 'hidden' children, and assess what is known about them. From this report we will select particular groups of children whose needs and outcomes **we will assess in greater detail in order to reveal gaps in services.**

These will include children who fall through cracks in the education system, children with mental health needs below the threshold for CAMHS support, babies at risk of neglect, and children associated with gangs.



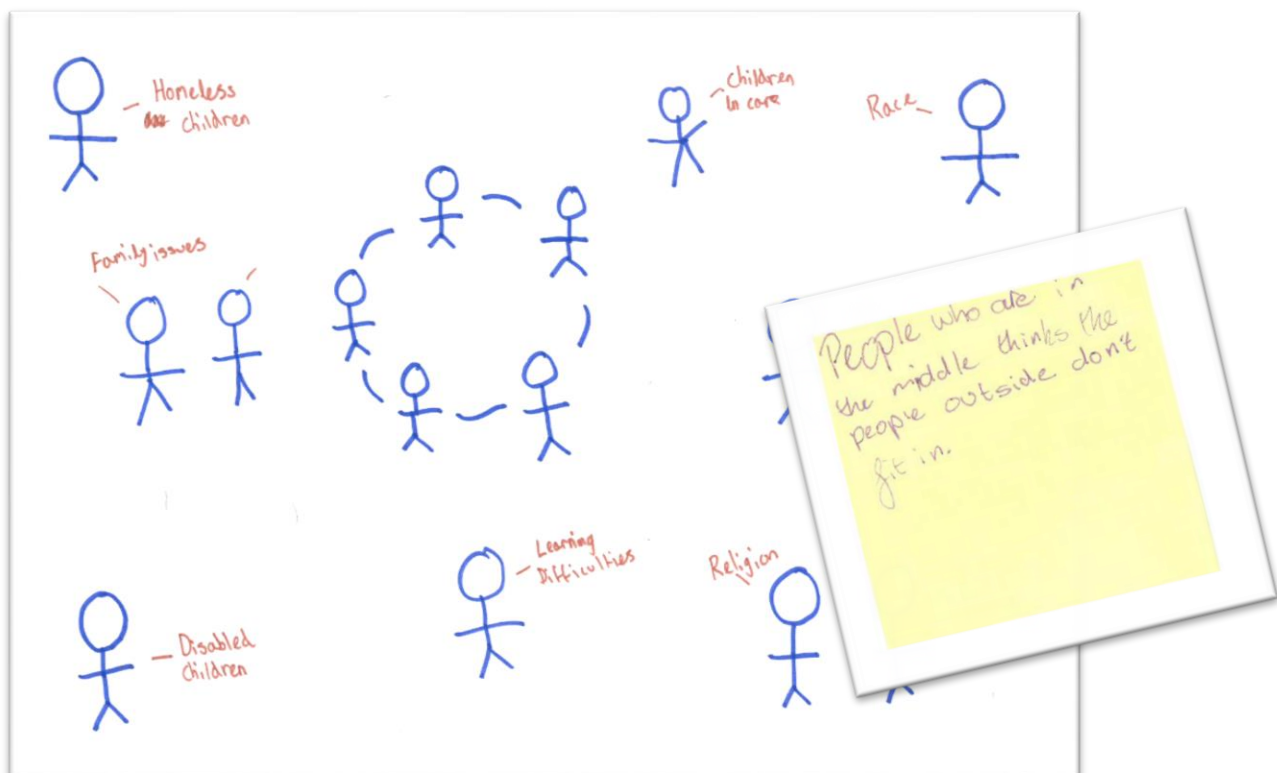
A new series of reports, Voices from Children, will directly represent the voices of relatively small groups of children whose views and interests might otherwise go unheard. The first of these will reflect the **thoughts and experiences of refugee children** who have recently arrived in the UK.

The second will shine a light on **the voices and experiences of the children of service personnel** whose education and social stability are often disrupted by repeat home and school moves.

With a rising population of children in care at a time when council funding faces enormous cuts and the pressures on local authorities, particularly from an ageing population, are intense, **we will lead a debate about our priorities as a country for spending on vulnerable children. And we will pilot a new model of assessing council-led spending at different levels of child need, in order to understand how resources are allocated to different groups of vulnerable children.**

“Often these children are unable to or fear speaking out, and sometimes are not even known as existing, therefore they rarely or don't have people they trust and would be happy sharing their issue with.”

(Teenage girl)



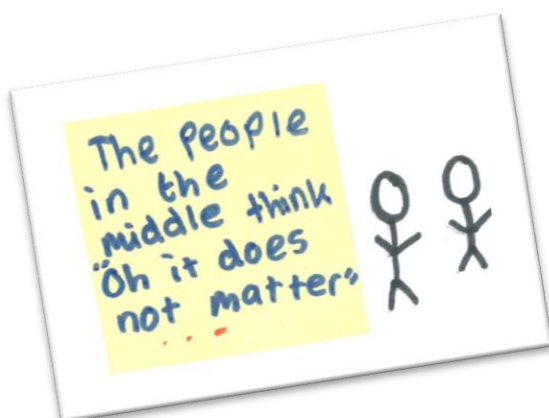
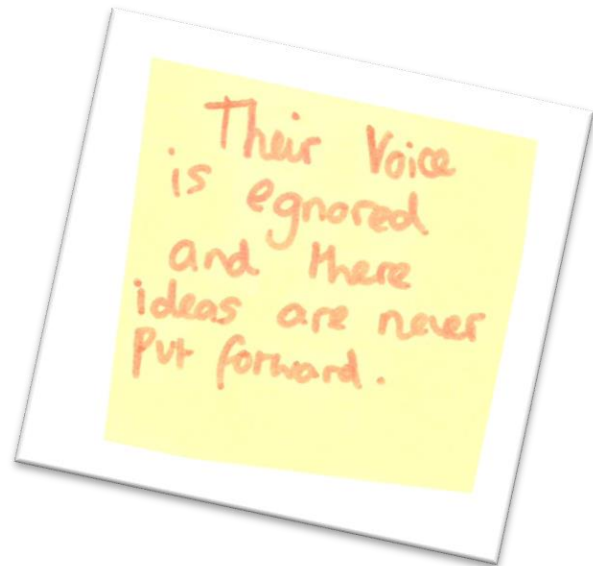
Children Behind Closed Doors

Children are accommodated by the state in England in a variety of centres, from secure welfare units to Tier 4 mental health beds and young offender institutions. **In order to promote transparency and improve outcomes for children locked out of sight, we will use the full range of Children's Commissioner powers to gather data and to visit children accommodated in health, criminal justice and welfare settings; to assess where these children are, how far from home they are, and what we know about their welfare.**

We will also **investigate the mental health provision for these children**, working in collaboration with the Care Quality Commission.

The number of girls under 18 in custody has fallen dramatically over recent years. At any time, there are now in the region of 30 - 40 girls in prison in England.

The Commissioner and Dame Louise Casey have visited 10 of these girls to learn about their lives before entering custody and understand the factors that led to them being imprisoned and what, if anything, could have been done to change their trajectory. **'Voices from the Inside' will reflect on the experiences of the 10 girls as they grew up and recount their story.**



"Something in their life might be very wrong and they just need someone to talk to and take them down the right path."

(12-year-old boy talking about children who break the law)

Children in Care

The Children's Commissioner has a particular responsibility to listen to and represent the views of looked after children and children living away from home. **Help at Hand** is the Children's Commissioner's national advice line for children and young people who are in care, leaving care, living away from home or working with children's services. The advice line is independent of the Government and exists to make sure that young people's rights and entitlements are upheld and that their views are taken seriously.

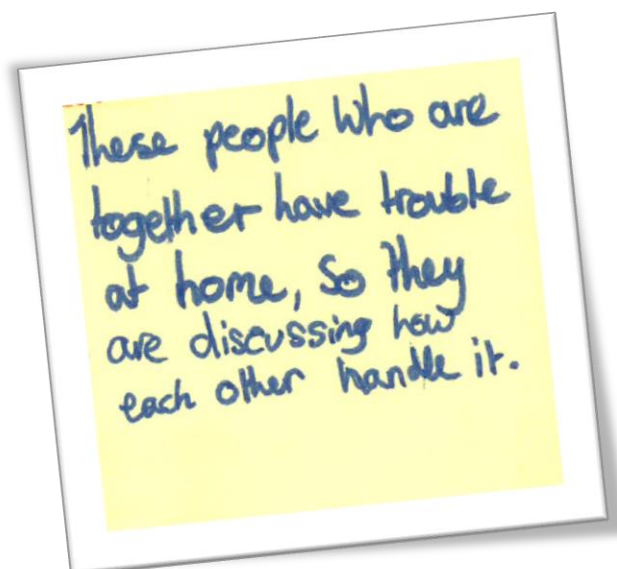
Enquiries to Help at Hand have increased by more than half over the past year. Common issues addressed include not feeling included in planning, how to make a complaint against the local authority, unwanted placement moves, housing problems, financial support and access to education. Our team of Child Rights Advisers speak to the child or sometimes a professional working with them, provide advice when information is missing, assistance when support is needed and representation when someone in authority needs to listen.

"Everyone cares more about money than about us."

(12-year-old girl in care)

"The Children's Commissioner should help children that have grown up without their families, to help them deal with the trauma of being in care: they are scared, worried, feeling unloved and neglected and confused." (Teenage girl in care)

One of the major concerns we are told about for children in care is stability; of placement, of school, of social worker. **The Stability Index is a new initiative by the Children's Commissioner to shine a light on the children 'pinged' between social workers, placements and schools.** By monitoring a combined measure of stability for the first time, we will assess trends, and work with local authorities and others to support improvements to looked after children's lives.



In 2017-18 we will extend the hours of the Help at Hand service to ensure that more children and young people can get the help and advice they need. With a new data gathering and analysis framework, Help at Hand will be better able to report on issues, trends, impacts and outcomes related to the enquiries raised by children. This live data regarding children's experiences will help drive change in local authority practice through the Commissioner's direct correspondence with Directors of Children's Services, and through a new link with Ofsted.

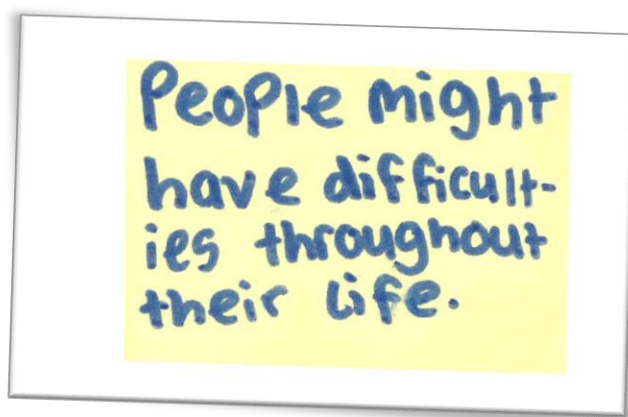
“I think the Children's Commissioner should make sure that there is not a regular change in social workers and make sure that our social workers listen to our views and our feelings.”
(Teenage girl in care)

Care Monitor will bring together the best studies from across the country to substantially improve knowledge about the views, experiences and perspectives of looked after children and children leaving care, particularly the voices of children less often heard. It will, in time, enable us to introduce elements of personal experience and identity into the Stability Index so that the Index captures children's own sense of belonging and relationships, as well as administrative measures of their care experience.

“You have to adjust yourself into a new environment and learn to live alone.”
(19+ girl, who is a care leaver).

“Help with the transition age between 16- 18 year-olds in care. There is not a lot of support given to them to help with housing or the right type of home.”
(Teenage girl in care).

We will work with a group of councils, virtual school heads, fostering agencies and children to test the underlying drivers of instability, and to develop the Index so that it not only provides data but can begin to assess the experiences of looked after children through their eyes, including the impact of moves, and out of area placements. Alongside this, we will bring together national government, local agencies and other organisations to share cutting-edge data analysis that drives improved service provision and child outcomes.



We will create two apprenticeships in the Children's Commissioner's Office for children leaving care as a first step towards understanding and exploring the challenges and successes of care leaver mentoring and apprenticeship programmes.

We will also make children in care the centre of activity for the **Takeover Challenge** in this business year. Steered by the Children's Commissioner, the Takeover Challenge sees children and teenagers 'taking over' organisations up and down the country, to give their insight and views into how services and businesses operate, and how they might better serve the interests of children.

While organisations that take part in the Challenge make their own decisions about how to implement it locally, the Children's Commissioner provides advice and guidance on organising successful Takeovers, as well as co-ordinating its promotion. In 2016, over 1,000 organisations took part, involving 50,000 children.

The Children's Commissioner's office focused its own resources on organising 'takeovers' of Whitehall departments by children in care; some 100 teenagers in the care system worked with 22 Government Ministers and 54 Senior Civil Servants across the majority of Government departments. We are evaluating the benefit to participants, both the children and the Whitehall departments, of this activity with a view to developing it for the 10th anniversary of Takeover this autumn and embedding the views of children in the care system more firmly in relevant Whitehall departments. We will also encourage businesses and other organisations around the country to focus their own Takeovers on vulnerable groups of children locally, in particular children in care or care leavers under the age of 25, to open up opportunities to those who might not usually be offered them.

Appendix

The Commissioner's Office

We have built enhanced Evidence and Strategy functions to support delivery of a more tightly-focused programme of work, intended to demonstrate real impact in improving outcomes for children.

- > Strengthened functions to deliver highly credible and impactful **evidence**, including reflecting children's experience.
- > A greater focus on **public affairs** with an ability to shape policy and legislation across government.
- > Strengthened **strategic communication** to shape and lead public debate and help drive policy change.
- > Strategic alignment across all policy areas integrating the use of the Commissioner's statutory powers as appropriate.
- > Stronger **digital engagement** with a wider range of children and young people.

In order to promote and protect all children's **fundamental rights**, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Children's Commissioner has agreed to serve on an advisory group to the Department for Education to support and challenge the department on the implementation of the 2016 concluding observations of UNCRC.

Advisory Board

The Commissioner's Advisory Board has provided insight and advice to inform the business plan and will continue to advise on a quarterly basis throughout the year.

The Children's Commissioner for England speaks up for children so that policymakers and the people who have an impact on their lives take their views and interests into account when making decisions.

She does this by talking to children, carrying out research and compiling evidence on the things that affect children's lives. She also provides advice to children in care or living away from home.

Independent of Government and Parliament, the Children's Commissioner has unique powers to help bring about long-term change and improvements for children, in particular the most vulnerable children including those in care. She is the 'eyes and ears' of children in the system and the country as a whole.

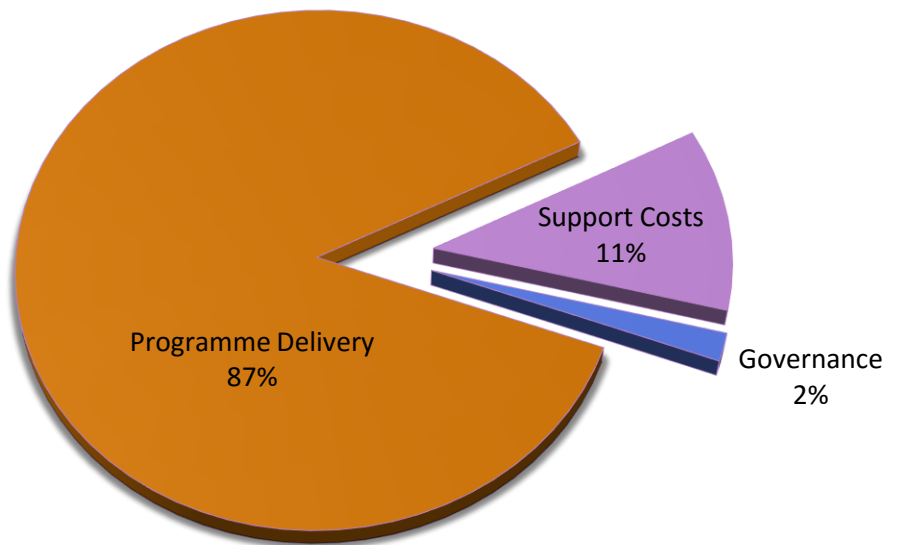
Our Budget 2017/18

The budget for the Office for 2017/18 is £2,562,700

■ **Programme Delivery**
Staffing, project spend etc.

■ **Support Costs**
Premises, IT, finance and
HR support etc.

■ **Governance**
Internal and external
audits, annual report
etc.



United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The work programme for 2017-18 relates to the following articles in the UNCRC.

Business Plan Work Strand	UNCRC articles applicable to each Work Strand Article 1 applicable to all			
We will use the Children’s Commissioner’s data collection powers this year to highlight the real level of need among children and teenagers for mental health services.	3	24		
	6	39		
	12	42		
	13			
We will work this year to highlight the scale of the problem of low-level anxiety, particularly among younger children.	3	18		
	6	29		
	12			
	17			
We will make it a priority in the 2017-18 business year to establish better links with participation networks for children with disabilities and to ensure that the voices of these children are fully represented in all the work that we do. We will work closely with the Council for Disabled Children to achieve this.	2	6	42	
	3	12		
	4	13		
	5	23		
We will conduct research into the relationship between social media use and children’s mental health, aspiration and well-being.	3	17		
	12	31		
	13	36		
	16			
We will continue to campaign to include digital resilience in the new Life Skills curriculum, so that children learn digital citizenship and online resilience.	3	13	28	42
	4	15	29	
	6	16	31	
	8	17	36	

<p>We will prepare a pack of teaching aids based on social media companies' bewildering terms and conditions, to guide children in their understanding and decisions about use of their data online. We will also continue to campaign for the introduction of a children's digital ombudsman.</p>	3 4 5 8	16 17 18 31	36 42	
<p>We will explore, via Growing up Digital in Care, whether the access of children in care and adopted children to digital networks is restricted by their care status or safeguarding concerns of the adults caring for them, and what can be done to broaden access.</p>	2 3 12 13	16 17 19 20	25 31 42	
<p>We will work with partners and care leavers to try to create a safe digital platform for children in the care system.</p>	2 3 12 13	15 16 17 19	20 31 34 36	42
<p>We will begin a major programme of work in 2017-18 to assess the extent of child vulnerability in England. An initial stage of this work programme has been commissioned; a Children's Commissioner Report on Vulnerable Children. From this report we will select particular groups of children whose needs and outcomes we will assess in greater detail in order to reveal gaps in services. These will include children who fall through cracks in the education system, children with mental health needs below the threshold for CAMHS support, babies at risk of neglect, and children associated with gangs.</p>	2 3 6 12	19 20 22 23	24 27 28 34	36 42
<p>We will create a new series of reports, Voices from Children, to directly represent the voices of relatively small groups of children whose views and interests might otherwise go unheard. The first of these will reflect the thoughts and experiences of refugee children who have recently arrived in the UK.</p>	2 3 6 8	10 12 13 19	20 22 24 27	28 31 37 38
<p>Our second Voices from Children report will shine a light on the voices and experiences of the children of service personnel whose education and social stability are often disrupted by repeat home and school moves.</p>	12 13 18	27 28 29	31	

<p>We will lead a debate about our priorities as a country for spending on vulnerable children. We will also pilot a new model of assessing council-led spending at different levels of child need, in order to understand how resources are allocated to different groups of vulnerable children.</p>	<p>3 23 27 4 24 20 25 22 26</p>
<p>Children are accommodated by the state in England in a variety of centres, from secure welfare units to Tier 4 mental health beds and young offender institutions. In order to promote transparency and improve outcomes for children locked out of sight, we will use the full range of Children's Commissioner powers to gather data and to visit children accommodated in health, criminal justice and welfare settings; to assess where these children are, how far from home they are, and what we know about their welfare.</p>	<p>2 12 25 40 3 13 27 42 4 19 28 6 24 37</p>
<p>We will also investigate the mental health provision for these children.</p>	<p>3 37 24 40 25 42 27</p>
<p>The number of girls under 18 in custody has fallen dramatically over recent years. At any time, there are now in the region of 30 - 40 girls in prison in England. The Commissioner and Dame Louise Casey have visited 10 of these girls to learn about their lives before entering custody and understand the factors that led to them being imprisoned and what, if anything, could have been done to change their trajectory. 'Voices from the Inside' will reflect on the experiences of the 10 girls as they grew up and recount their story.</p>	<p>12 13 37 40</p>
<p>We will extend the hours of the Help at Hand service in 2017-18 to ensure that more children and young people can get the help and advice they need. With a new data gathering and analysis framework, Help at Hand will be better able to report on issues, trends, impacts and outcomes related to the enquiries raised by children. This live data regarding children's experiences will help drive change in local authority practice through the Commissioner's direct correspondence with Directors of Children's Services, and through a new link with Ofsted.</p>	<p>3 20 9 42 12 13</p>

<p>We will launch a new initiative, The Stability Index, to shine a light on the children ‘pinged’ between social workers, placements and schools.</p>	<p>3 20 42 9 25 12 27 13 28</p>
<p>A Children’s Commissioner report, the Care Monitor, will bring together the best studies from across the country to substantially improve knowledge about the views, experiences and perspectives of looked after children and children leaving care, particularly the voices of children less often heard.</p>	<p>3 20 9 25 12 27 13</p>

Thanks

Thank you to the children and young people who shared their views and opinions with us to inform this business plan and to the teachers and assistants and others who supported them:

Bourne Abbey Church of England Primary Academy - Lincolnshire

Hillcrest Primary School - Bristol

Sunnyhill Primary School - South London

Approach Too - County Durham

Cleves Cross Primary School - County Durham

Chilton Primary School - County Durham

Epic ELM C.I.C - West London

What about me? (WAM) - Nottinghamshire

Bishop Alexander School - Nottinghamshire

Fenstanton Primary School, part of the Gipsy Hill Federation - South London



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