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year as  
**Children's  
Commissioner**

**March 2021  
to March 2022**



When I started the  
first thing I wanted  
to do was listen to  
children.



## Foreword from Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza

On the first anniversary of my appointment as Children's Commissioner, I am publishing this report to reflect on my office's work and achievements for children over the last twelve months.

It has been an absolute honour to take on this crucial role, sitting at the heart of Government, delivering for children, and championing their voices and needs.

As an educationalist, working directly with children in schools throughout my career, I have seen firsthand how passionate and compassionate children are. This is an ambitious generation who want to succeed in life, but who also want to play their part in improving the world around them. They need us, as adults, to listen to them and ensure they get the right help to fulfil their true potential.

My first task had to be to go out and listen to children across the country, to hear about their lives and the impact of lockdown, to help shape my time as Children's Commissioner. That's why I launched The Big Ask, the largest-ever survey of children in England. I'm incredibly proud and awed by the response we received. Children up and down the country told us about their experiences of the pandemic, their lives today, their dreams for the future and their ideas for how we

can help children in this country achieve their ambitions. I am particularly proud that, through the survey, our visits and focus groups we heard about the experiences of children of all ages, including babies and toddlers; children from all local authorities, and children from hard-to-reach groups, including children in care.

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I am incredibly proud and awed by the response we received.

The Big Ask showed that this is not a snowflake generation – it is a heroic generation, veterans of the pandemic, determined to get back to school, to enjoy life, to do well and to make a difference for others. I want to spend my six years in office helping them to achieve these dreams and protecting children's rights.

The Big Ask has helped identify my key priorities for these six years: Family, Community, Education, Health and wellbeing, Jobs and skills, Children in Care,

and championing children's voices on creating a better world, such as protecting the environment. My priorities this year have included keeping children safe online; improving support for children with a mental health need; increasing children's attendance in education, and championing an ambitious approach to social care reform.



## The Big Ask showed that this is not a snowflake generation. it is a heroic generation

I am pleased to say that we are already making a difference. In the 2021 Spending Review, I was delighted to see support for families, with investment in Family Hubs and the Supporting Families Programme. It was also good to see additional funding for children's homes. Alongside this, as part of my commission from Government on representing children's needs in the Online Safety Bill, I was pleased to see that age assurance for the adult industry will be included. As a member of the Education Secretary of State's Attendance Action Alliance I am pleased to see the commitment to a register of children who are home educated, which will help local authorities to provide support to children who need it.

I want to be able to share our work with children as much as possible. This is why we have, and will continue, to produce practical materials and guidance to support children and young people. We have produced a guide for parents on what children and young people wish their own parents and carers had known about online harassment and staying safe online. We have also produced guides for

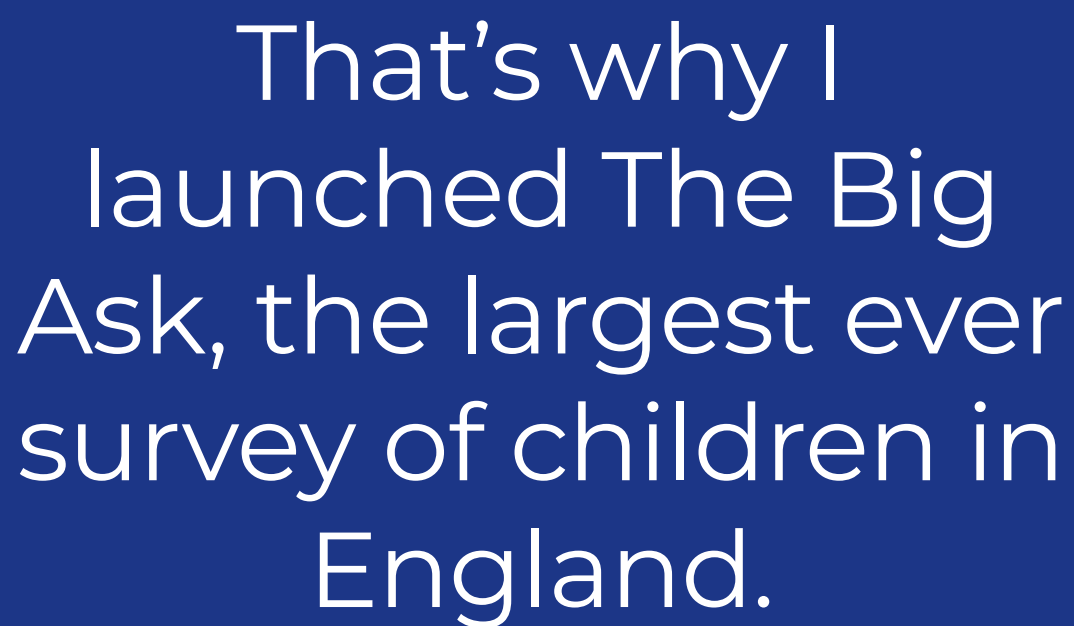
children on how to talk about their feelings and where to go for help if they are worried, a back to school guide, and a guide for COP26. Alongside this, we have represented children's rights internationally on the Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) and in response to the evolving situation in Ukraine.

Looking forward, there are some major reforms underway which need to be joined up to ensure the right support for children and their families. My team continues to feed into the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Review, Schools White Paper, Health and Care Bill and we have published our ambition for the Independent review of Children's Social Care. It is vital we don't think of these reforms in isolation, but as part of a wider system and use this opportunity to identify the key outcomes we want to achieve for our children and young people. All these reforms are changing the way children and families are supported – and I will continue to work across Government to ensure that children's voices, and their needs, are at the centre of these reforms.

As I look to the next year, I am excited to continue delivering for children, ensuring their voices and needs are at the heart of Government.



## There are some major reforms underway which need to be joined up to ensure the right support for children and their families



That's why I  
launched The Big  
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# The Big Ask

The Big Ask launched in April 2021 and is the largest ever survey of children in England:

## 557,077

children aged 4-17 responded from all 151 local authorities, including:

26,000

children receiving mental health support

13,000

children with a social worker

6,000

young carers

5,200

children attending special schools

2,300

children from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background

Over 5,900

children in care

Over 2,200

children supported by Youth Offending Teams

Over 97,000

children with an additional learning need

## Nearly 260,000

children responded to the free-text questions telling us about the barriers that they, and other children, face

# The Big Ask

The Big Ask findings were presented in The Big Answer report

The Big Ask survey gave us a unique insight into what children think and feel at a critical time during the pandemic. This research has given the office a unique data pool to draw on and an insight into what this generation of children want us to deliver for them.

## What children told us:



### Family:

Children told us how much they care about their families, and how much they value seeing them. 80% of 9—17-year-olds said they are happy or okay with their family life, along with 95% of 6—8-year-olds. “A loving family is worth more than money and will give you guidance support and love and advice”

- Boy, 11.



### Community:

Just over half (52%) of children aged 9—17 are happy with the choice of things to do in their local area. They want things to do: activities that are affordable, fun, and sustaining. “I think that we all spend so much time on social media, worrying about how many followers

we have, that we don’t get enough time to just stop and do nothing, or go outside or spend more time with our families”

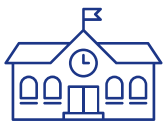
– Girl, 12.



### Health and wellbeing:

The pandemic took a toll on young people’s wellbeing. The majority of children aged 9—17 (80%) were happy or okay with their mental health. But 20% were unhappy, making it the top issue for children today. “The lack of help with mental health has been the biggest thing that has stopped me and my friends from achieving what we want. It is difficult to access as we are not taken seriously, and when we are, waiting lists are so long”

– Girl, 17.



## Education:

After so much online learning, children in England – vulnerable children, especially – care passionately about being able to go to school again. They find school challenging, but fulfilling. 90% are happy or okay with their progress in education while 10% said they were unhappy. “I really want to learn even if it’s hard because education is important to me”

– **Girl, 11.**



## Jobs and skills:

Children told us they want to get on and do well. They want to work hard, and spoke in terms not just of jobs, but careers – often civic-minded careers. Nearly 7 in 10, 9—17-year-olds (69%) said that having a good job or career was one of their main priorities when they grow up – the most common answer for this age group. “I don’t really know what I want to be but what I do know is that I want to go to university as none of my family members have yet to do it”

– **Boy, 8.**



## Children in care:

Children in care share the same hopes and aspirations as their peers. Children told us about the care they were grateful for, but also about the bureaucratic processes which they found frustrating or alienating. Among children in care aged 9—17, the majority (63%) said they are happy with their life, and 68% said they are happy with their family life. “I wasn’t so concerned about the pandemic itself, I was more concerned about social services trying to bring me back into care”

– **Boy, 17.**



## Better World:

Children described an ambitious, socially conscious and reforming vision of the world they want to live in. They want a society where everyone can succeed and told us that they care about the environment and planet. \ Just over 1 in 5 children (22%) chose ‘a healthy environment and planet’ as one of their top priorities for having a good life when they grow up and 1 in 5 children chose ‘everyone being treated fairly’. “We are all humans, and earth is our home. People forget that”

- **Gender not given, 15.**



# Impact of The Big Ask

Following our policy proposals and recommendations outlined in The Big Answer about how to improve children's lives, we were delighted to see additional investment in support for children in the [2021 Spending Review](#). This included:

**£500 million investment in Family Hubs and the Start for Life Early Years Programme as well as the Supporting Families Programme.**

In a speech launching the Government's programme of support for Family Hubs, Children and Families Minister Will Quince MP specifically referenced evidence from The Big Ask on how much children value their family life.

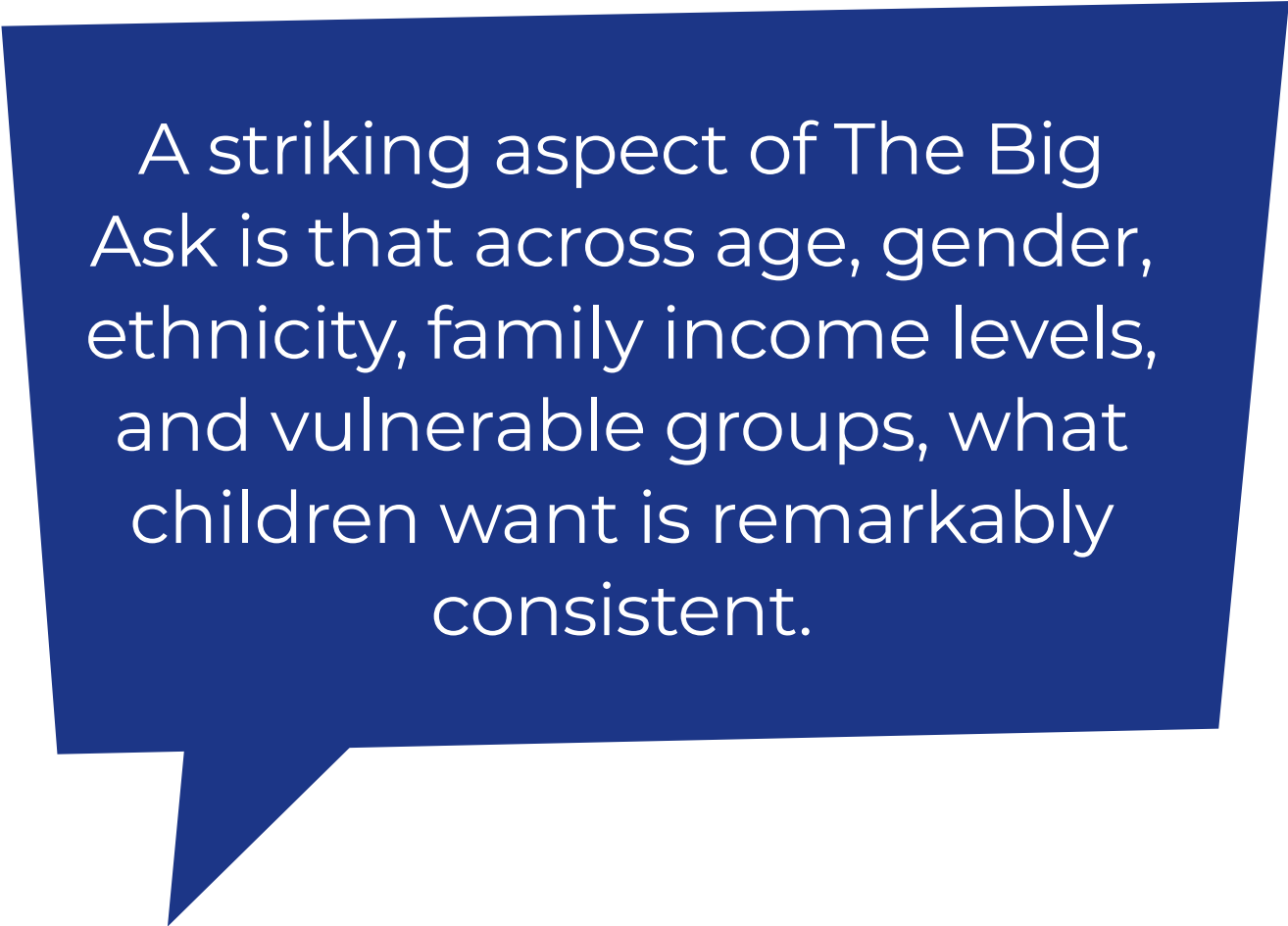
**In The Big Answer, we called for a renewed focus on educational recovery. Overall, by 2024/25, the level of new catch-up funding promised for schools will reach £4.7 billion.**

Within this, we recommended a focus on provision for 16- to 18-year-olds and are glad to see this provided. We were also pleased to see more funding for children with special educational needs.

**We called for more investment in opportunities for children to play and take part in activities. We are pleased to see the Government's commitment to a £560 million 'Youth Guarantee'.**

This will fund 300 new and refurbished youth services in the most deprived parts of the country, and offer the Duke of Edinburgh award to every state secondary school. We were also delighted to see that the Holiday Activities Fund is to be continued for a further 3 years, alongside wider investment in community sports facilities and parks.

**Further investment in children's social care, with £259 million for more residential children's homes, including secure homes. Plus £104 million to continue reforms to unregulated accommodation for children in care.**



A striking aspect of The Big Ask is that across age, gender, ethnicity, family income levels, and vulnerable groups, what children want is remarkably consistent.

# Making children's voices heard

Both the call to complete The Big Ask, and the published findings The Big Answer, featured across external outlets.

The call to complete the Big Ask featured in an array of media outlets which was a significant contributing factor to its success. This included trade magazines such as [Schools Week](#); national newspapers including [The Telegraph](#) and [The Guardian](#); and broadcasters including [BBC](#), [ITV](#) and [Sky News](#). This national exposure was supported by [local press coverage](#) during the Children's Commissioners tour and follow-up announcements, such as the survey's [support from Marcus Rashford](#).

The Big Ask was crowned the biggest survey of children in England with 557,077 responses. And [The Big Answer](#) report of the findings received media coverage to match that.

We received support from a number of stakeholders including Education Secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi MP:

"I'm encouraged to see most children and young people are happy, resilient and ambitious, but there are concerns too and we just address them."

The Children's Commissioner has also spoken widely on priority areas across the year.

We have shared children's voices externally:

- [Reducing school absence](#) (iNews) and [ensuring children are in school](#) (Woman's hour)
- [The tragic case of Arthur Labinjo-hughes](#) (Andrew Marr)
- [Tackling young people's exposure to porn](#) (The Sun) and [calling on organisations](#)

[such as OnlyFans to do more](#) to protect children (BBC)

- [Ensuring mental health support is available](#) (Daily Mail)
- [Improving the lives of children in care](#) (Sky News)

Supporting external media, the Children's Commissioner has published regular [blogs throughout the year](#). These have included [The Big Ask and apprenticeships](#), [Cheering all round – children excited to return to school](#), and [Help at Hand: The issues facing care leavers this year](#).



The Children's Commissioner's increased its total social following by 8.6% to 79,852 in the period of March 2021/22.

Instagram, the Children's Commissioner's newly launched social media platform, received a significant spike in reach during the launch of The Big Ask survey. In April/May the campaign reached almost 30,000 people. Overall, in the last year it has reached more than 80,000 people.



We continue to deliver for  
children across our teams:  
Policy, Research, Public  
Sector Reform, Help at  
Hand, IMO

# Policy, Research and Public Sector Reform

Across all our work we have spoken to thousands of children, taking a child-centric approach and putting their needs at the centre of everything we do. This year The Big Ask provided us with a wide-ranging set of suggestions from children as to what changes would help improve their lives. Here are some of the ways the Children's Commissioner has taken forward these ideas:

## School and Attendance

The Children's Commissioner is part of the Government's Attendance Action Alliance, and for this we are undertaking a major programme of research to investigate the



barriers to school attendance for children who are persistently and severely absent and those missing from education completely. The research includes a survey to local authorities to see if they know how many children are in their areas and how many are in different education settings and a deep dive of 10 local authorities conducting 3 to 5 interviews with staff in every area, to understand how these children are identified and supported. We are also carrying out focus groups with children, particularly with those most vulnerable, who are not attending school and those who are at most risk of non-attendance and an analysis from daily attendance data from three multi-academy trusts. Using the findings from this we will produce evidenced policy recommendations to help children to re-engage with school. We are pleased to see the Government confirm the introduction of a register for children educated at home, which will remove a significant barrier to the identification of children in need of further support.

We also produced a [Back to School guide](#) for Children returning to school after lockdown and spoke to children in a [podcast](#) about their concerns returning to school following the pandemic.

## Online harms commission from Government

The Children's Commissioner was commissioned by Government to look at how children can be protected online before the Online Safety Bill comes into effect. As part of the commission the children's Commissioner was also asked to look at how children's needs can be represented in the legislation.



Our [programme of work to increase safeguards for children against online harms](#) continues to make progress. We are working with tech firms to encourage them to do more to keep underage users off their platforms and to provide safer experiences for children above the age limit. We have held a roundtable with Secretaries of State for both the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and with the tech firms. Tech firms have pledged to continue to work with us to share data



on children's use of their platforms and the nature of harms they may be exposed to. We have continued to engage with regulators and industry experts to influence the development of regulation. After the roundtable we held with the adult industry, we are delighted that the Government has accepted our recommendation to include the adult industry within the scope of the forthcoming Online Safety Bill, which will require those companies to implement age assurance. We gave evidence to the Joint Committee on the Online Safety Bill and will continue to work across Government and Parliament to strengthen the safeguards in the Bill and to include children's voices as the Bill undergoes the legislative process.

We have also conducted research with children and young people aged 14-21 on their own experiences, and used this to create [guidance for parents on sexual harassment](#). The guide has been widely circulated amongst schools and youth groups, and the charity Refuge has included it in its resource pack for survivors of domestic abuse.

## Children's Mental Health



Children's mental health was the number one concern raised by children in The Big Ask. To maintain focus on the need for improved children's mental health services in February we published our annual briefing on [children's mental health](#). This report brings together data from multiple sources to look at local and national provision, in terms of spending,

waiting times, numbers of children accessing services and those turned away. This year's report found that progress has been made to increase access to care in recent years, but the pandemic has made this more challenging as it disrupted services and led to a big jump in the number of children needing NHS care. The briefing demonstrated the wide variation between local areas on spending, access and waiting times, amounting to a postcode lottery of care, and was widely covered in the media and promoted by key organisations in the mental health sector. Earlier in the year, the Children's Commissioner gave evidence to the Health Select Committee inquiry into children's mental health and our research was frequently mentioned in their December report, which called for a higher level of ambition in increasing access to children's mental health care, including many of our policy recommendations.



## Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC)

This year the UK held the G7 Presidency, and formed GEAC to galvanise ambition on gender equality. The Children's Commissioner was appointed to the GEAC to champion the voices of girls, with a wide-ranging programme of work before, and across the G7 summit in Cornwall.

We were delighted that this resulted in a final G7 communique which included commitments on girls' education, such as tackling the gender imbalance in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)

education and careers, and on tackling online harms. Throughout the year, the Children's Commissioner has championed the need for regulation to ensure that companies implement accurate age verification technology; and that websites containing pornography and other harmful content have proper controls in place to track and report illegal activity.



## COP26

Children told us in The Big Ask how much they care about their peers and aspired to have a fairer, better world. A key message from this was how much children care about the environment and the future of the planet. In response to this, we teamed up with Generation Earthshot at COP26 to teach local Glaswegian children about the environment. The Department for Education also invited us to attend a teach-the-teacher lesson where we heard first hand from children how passionate they are to reduce climate change and solutions they recommend to make this happen.

We also bought out a [children's guide and slides for schools](#) to ensure children could understand and get involved with COP26.

## Parliament

The Children's Commissioner has a specific statutory role promoting the views and interests of children to Parliamentarians, this is a role we discharge in three ways:

1. Wide-ranging work to increase awareness of children's voices across both Houses of Parliament. This year we have focused on informing Parliament on The Big Ask and engaging Members on its findings.
2. Work with individual Members and groups of Members on specific issues relating to children. This has ranged from speaking to the APPG on Education, reporting back the findings of The Big Ask, to working with the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation to share the findings of our work on children's access to pornography.
3. Formal evidence to Parliamentary Committees. Our office keeps up regular contacts with the Clerks of all the Select Committees that have an interest in children, and the Children's Commissioner has been pleased to give evidence to three Committees whose enquiries aligned particularly closely with our own priorities:
  - i. The Health Select Committee's inquiry into "Children's Mental Health"
  - ii. The Lord's Public Services Committee inquiry into "Vulnerable Children"
  - iii. The Education Select Committee inquiry into 'Children's Homes'

## Visits

The Children's Commissioner and her team were really pleased to be able to restart a wide-ranging programme of in-person visits this year after being restricted during much of the pandemic. The Commissioner commenced her tenure with a tour of the country to hear from as many children as possible as we emerged from the pandemic. The Children's Commissioner and her team have continued this throughout the year, hearing from children in as many different locations, and different settings across the country, with a particular focus on those accommodated by the state. This diverse programme of visits

has included: Barnet Onside Youthzone, care leavers in Plymouth, Harlow College, Bedfordshire VRU, The Centre School, Kinney House children's home, Feltham youth offending institute, visits to unregulated children's homes, Cardinal Hume family centre, NSPCC Better Start, Kent refugee intake unit and hotels, Glenthorne community primary school, Harris Westminster sixth form and Phoenix Park Academy.

## Research underpins all our policy work

The research team continue to collate and analyse data on children to help inform all our policy work. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to reach children from all backgrounds across the country, all ages, and backgrounds. Running The Big Ask



survey drove developments in the way that the research team analysed qualitative responses to free text survey questions. Natural language processing was used to pick up key themes and topics in the comments of around 260,000 children so we could really understand what those children were telling us. This has helped to inform the Children's Commissioner's strategy and we are utilising these data science techniques for other research projects. The data gathering powers have offered unique insights into all parts of children's lives and what their needs are.

## Public sector reform

One key theme to arise from The Big Ask was that the quality of specific services had a major impact not just on children's experiences, but their confidence in their future. Children



repeatedly told us how their perceptions of their school, health service or care package was determining their prospects; with frequent frustrations that their ambitions were not being shared by those around them.

In response to this, the Children's Commissioner has set out to champion the need for public sector reform that delivers for children. Traditionally, reform has been motivated by a sense that 'the system' is under-pressure. The Children's Commissioner is seeking to turn this on its head and instead think about reform from the perspective of children, asking what reforms are needed to improve children's experiences and outcomes.

Our policy platform in this area will be underpinned by two major pieces of work we have completed to inform the Care Review and forthcoming SEND Review.





## Children in care

This year we published our [vision paper](#) on children's social care 'putting children's voices at the heart of reform'. The paper outlines a vision for reform based around four key experiences we believe are the foundation of good experiences, and good outcomes, for both children in care and families in contact with social care. These are:

1. To be listened to and responded to.
2. To have relationships that are trusting and stable.
3. To feel loved, supported and stable.
4. To be able to access practical help and support.

The paper is then built around the practical changes needed to help ensure more children, in more areas, have these experiences.



## SEND Review and the Schools White Paper

We are complementing this work with two equivalent strands of work looking at reform of the SEND system and the school system, to feed into the Government's SEND Review and Schools White Paper. Both strands of work

are grounded in what we hear from children about what they want from the services they access. For example, a key theme to arise from The Big Ask was the desire for schools to offer, or be the access points, for a wider range of services and support, including mental health provision and extra-curricular activities. As part of the SEND Review we piloted innovative data science techniques to collect and analyse information from Education Health and Care Plans from two local authorities and provided survey analysis to help inform the review. We continue to feed into the Schools White Paper and the positive impact this can have on children's school life.

Alongside this, we are undertaking work to challenge some of the underlying issues which inhibit better coordination and cooperation between different public services supporting children and families.

In October last year, the Children's Commissioner gave evidence to the House of Lord's Public Service Committee inquiry into vulnerable children. In evidence the Children's Commissioner focused on three major points:

1. That our understanding of childhood vulnerability has improved significantly over the past decade, but it is still evolving.
2. We put too much focus on policy, and not on practice. We need to direct much more energy to the slow, and complicated job of improving the quality of individual public services.
3. That we don't talk enough about outcomes for vulnerable children. We talk about the risks they face, sometimes about their experiences. But not enough about their potential.

This approach has underpinned evidence the Children's Commissioner gave to the Education Select Committee inquiry into children's homes in January 2022. In this the

Commissioner stressed the need to think about children's homes as part of packages of support to children, so that they received a continuum of support across education, health and care. These packages should be locally provided and sufficiently flexible that when a child's needs change, the services respond, rather than forcing a child to move between homes when their needs change.

The Children's Commissioner is keen not just to advocate for these changes to the system, but to be part of delivering the reforms children tell us they want to see. For that reason, we are pleased to have launched two programmes of work – both running in collaboration with a range of partners – that will address some of the systemic barriers to achieving the changes children want to see. As part of this we will be working with the Information Commissioner's Office to understand the barriers to better data-sharing across children's safeguarding systems. Vulnerable children repeatedly tell us of their frustrations about being judged by professionals who do not have all the relevant information, or about how traumatic it can be to have to constantly retell their story. Our work will understand how we can better improve understanding of how to apply new data sharing powers.

Alongside this, we are working with a range of services around children to devise a set of outcome metrics that can be adopted across safeguarding partnerships (the local arrangements which bring together local authorities, the police, the NHS and schools). We want to build consensus around a set of outcome metrics which: align with what children have told us they want from public services, represent tangible improvements in children's life chances, and incentivise better cooperation and collaboration between agencies.

# Help At Hand

[Help at Hand](#) has continued to provide advice, assistance, and advocacy for children who are in care, leaving care, involved with children's services, or living away from home in hospital or custodial settings. Help at Hand has achieved success on a range of issues, such as preventing children from being moved from foster carers against their wishes, ensuring that young people leaving care were provided with appropriate housing, and challenging local authorities and health providers when children with serious mental health conditions were left in unsuitable settings. Key areas of our work this year have been those children caught in the gap between health and social care provision, children with disabilities not receiving the right support within their families, and young people struggling with homelessness and poor accommodation after leaving care.

Help at Hand recorded 863 cases and counting (1st March 2021 to 9th February 2022). The Children's Commissioner has personally written in 39 of those cases to try and seek resolution.

Feedback from users of the Help at Hand Service

*"Again, thank you so much for being supportive and empathetic towards this problem I've had, it has made me feel empowered and I'm assured now that my frustration or upset by this situation is valid which has only helped me pursue answers."*

*"You were the reason the social workers started to listen to my thoughts, wishes and fears and I am really grateful for your help. Thank you so much for being there for me."*

*"It was great to have someone else supporting the child who knew more about the child's rights. The Help at Hand team was amazingly supportive."*

*"It was the first time someone actually appeared interested in the problem and the situation. I had been going round in circles trying to find accommodation and support for a vulnerable 18-year-old. The HaH person displayed empathy for the individual young and their situation. We are both most grateful"*

*"Help at Hand became involved at the request of this young student and single handily shook the hornets' nest, the professionals took ownership and made a swift decision, which was child centered."*

*"Well done team! Changes are being made and if it stops another child or sibling group being moved, they will never know how lucky they were."*

Help at Hand has had many successful interventions in the past year. Here are some examples<sup>1</sup>:

- When Anna, a child with autism and anorexia, was placed in a general paediatric ward and was not receiving appropriate mental health support and care, we wrote to the local authority and NHS bodies to express our concerns and continued to advocate for her until she was moved to a more appropriate setting.<sup>1</sup>
- Millie, was struggling with autism, severe anxiety, and OCD, and was not being offered the support she needed from the local authority, causing huge stress to her and her family. We intervened to

ensure that she had a full children's social care assessment, so she could receive appropriate services for her needs.

- John, a care leaver who had been successful in gaining a place at a university but was refused support with housing because he had moved out of the area. We helped him to challenge the local authority to fulfil its obligations and he was ultimately provided with the financial support he needed to secure accommodation and complete his studies.
- Simon was sleeping on the floor of a family friend after leaving his home to escape the abuse of his father. His school was very worried about him and came to Help at Hand as their requests to social services had been refused. After Help at Hand challenged the local authority and obtained advocacy services for Simon the local authority reversed their decision and agreed to accommodate Simon.

While we are happy to have achieved many positive outcomes for children and young people, their experiences have shown us there is still a great deal more to be done. This is why we are committed to using learning and examples from Help at Hand to drive our work on innovation in social care, health and education, with the aim of improving systems and practice for children at both a local and national level.

<sup>1</sup> Identifying details have been changed in all case studies set out



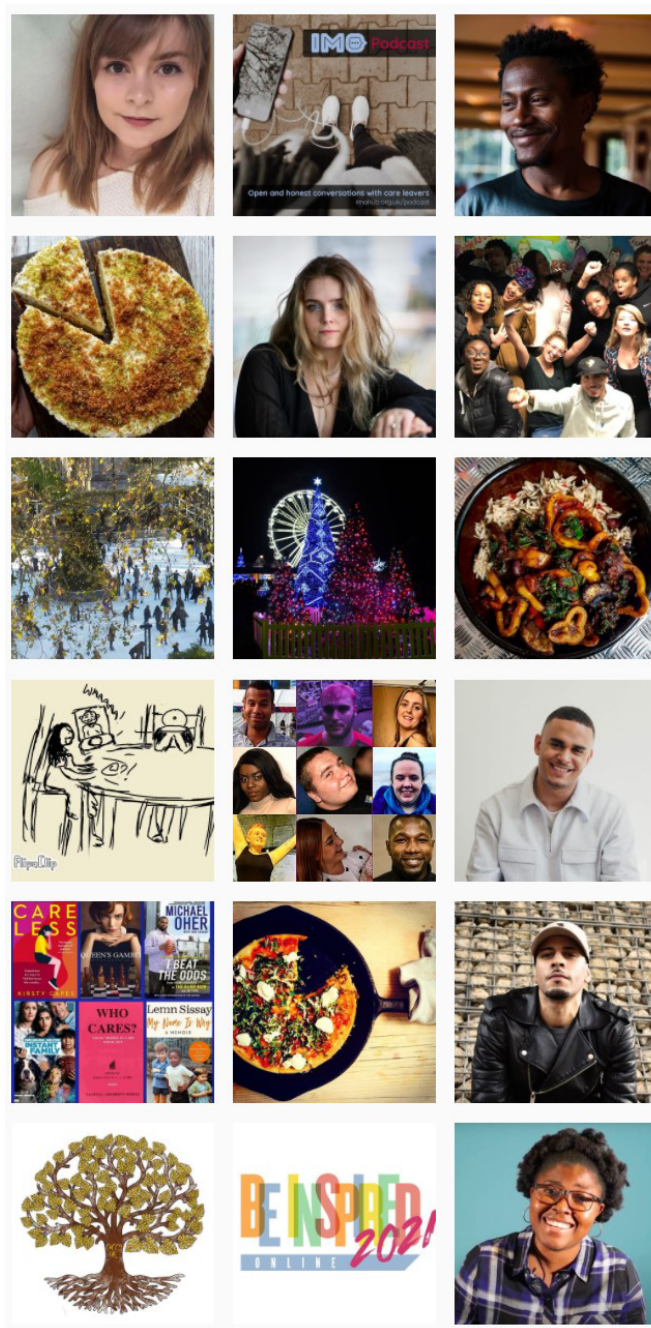
[IMO – In My Opinion](#) –is our digital offering for children in care and care leavers. A unique, peer-led website, which serves as a meeting point for children in the care system and care leavers. Somewhere that they share stories, experiences, and achievements, get and give advice, and gain access to career advice, training opportunities and content competition prizes.


Launched in 2018, the project includes the website which receives 15,000 unique page views annually, social media channels with a combined following of 3,750, and an award-winning podcast series which has been listened to over 7,550 times.

During the last year we have developed a third series of our [award winning podcast](#) challenging negative perceptions of those in the care system and encouraging new perspectives. We widened the scope of content shared on IMO with a variety of new series including projects run by care experienced people and the 'Turning 25' series where care leavers shed light on their experiences of losing support from their 'corporate parents'.

We ran a 'Dear Future Me' goal setting workshop with a group of children in care and with care leavers. This workshop was shared with other Children in Care Councils (CiCCs) and participation officers so that they were empowered to run the workshop themselves.

We ran a successful photography competition to find a photograph to be used for the official Children's Commissioner 2021 Christmas Card and CiCCs were involved in campaigns publicising our offer to stakeholders. We continue to catch up with participation organisations and officers and care leavers.





The Big Ask has helped  
identify my key priorities:  
Family, Community, Health  
and Wellbeing, Education,  
Jobs and Skills, Children in  
Care and a Better World

# Forward view

The Big Ask set out seven key priorities for children. These were:

- **Family:** Thinking of children as part of a wider family unit, and highlighting the need to focus on families, and support for families right from the earliest years..
- **Health and wellbeing:** Prioritising children's health and wellbeing, including mental and physical health, with a focus on preventing ill health and increasing access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time.
- **Education:** Helping all children to succeed in school, particularly those with additional needs. Ensuring the right provision for children with special educational needs and a focus on support for those at risk of falling behind their peers, in the early years and throughout their time in school..
- **Community:** Providing children with the time and space to play safely, on or offline, no matter where in the country they live. Ensuring that children are supported to feel safe in their communities, including women and girls.
- **Jobs and skills:** Adopting a cradle to career approach to education, including a stronger focus on vocational routes such as apprenticeships and better careers education, bringing schools and workplaces closer together, helping children achieve their ambition of a good job or career when they grow up.
- **Children in care:** Raising the ambition we have as a society for children growing up in care. This means building on the review of children's social care to set out a new approach, with a clearer outcomes framework, more support to help families stay together and a strong focus on improving stability for children in care, with

more high quality foster and children's homes across the country.

- **A better world:** Putting children's voices at the heart of policy making, particularly on issues which children tell us they care the most about, including the environment and building a fairer society.

The past year has been a critical moment in children's lives, as we have begun to see the recovery from the pandemic. So many of the things that children told me they missed, school, seeing their friends, and things to do, have started to return.

As Children's Commissioner it has been an honour to be able to be part of the journey of improving the lives of all children, protecting their rights and paying particular focus to the lives of children in care. These children will continue to be my priority over my time as Children's Commissioner.

This year, I have been particularly proud of the work on attendance, making sure we understand and know where children are. And of our work on online harms and making sure the internet is a safer place for children to be.

The next year marks a chance to go even further in our work to improve all children's lives. It marks an exciting opportunity to build on the work we have been doing, across all the strands children told us they care about in The Big Ask. We will continue to put children's needs and voices at the heart of everything the office does.



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