

Business Plan

2023-24

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Foreword from Dame Rachel de Souza



Looking to a new business year, I have been reflecting on children and young people's lives over the last couple of years and thinking about everything they have told me since I have become Children's Commissioner.

When I started in role, the impact of Covid and children's lives returning to normal was at the forefront of my mind. It was right at this time that we focused on Covid recovery and listened to children's needs. That is why, The Big Ask, the largest-ever survey of children, was such a powerful moment. With more than half a million responses I was able to gather the voice of a generation, hearing everything they cared about, wanted to achieve, and things they were worried about too. This survey shaped the seven pillars of work that my office has focused on over the last couple of years. These pillars are school, family, community, children's social care, health, jobs and skills and a better world.

Across all the pillars, we have worked to make children's lives better and represent the needs of all children, particularly the most vulnerable. I am incredibly proud of everything the office has achieved. Highlights include the Independent Family Review, representing children's needs in the online world, and my ongoing work on school attendance.

Alongside this, there have been some tough times. The case of Child Q stirred me and my office to look at the number of children being strip searched by the Met, and then extended this search to England

and Wales – with some truly shocking findings. And, visiting unaccompanied children seeking asylum after their difficult and perilous journeys has made it clear to me that we need to do more to protect them, especially with the proposals in the Illegal Migration Bill. I am clear we must continue to strive to make sure that the rights and needs of children are protected and have outlined an ambitious programme of work in this year's Business Plan.

This Business Plan comes at a particularly critical time for children and young people. We are going to start hearing more and more from Government and officials about what their plans and commitments are for the future as we get closer to the next General Election. I want to make sure children and young people's needs and voices are at the heart of policy makers' thinking.

Across all the work outlined below, I will make sure to seek out children and young people's voices and views. I am canvassing voices far and wide, including surveys, focus groups, visiting children and young people across the country, and taking what they say back to policy makers. Alongside this, I will be working with my newly established Children and Young People's Advisory Board and Care Experienced Advisory Board. I am incredibly proud of how many children and young people we have heard from, and I am looking forward to hearing from even more.

My advocacy service Help at Hand will continue to assist children in care and IMO will continue to provide a unique offering for care experienced children to make their voices heard. This past year, Help at Hand has seen a significant growth in number of children coming to the service but our aim is that every child in need of help is aware of service so we will continue to reach as many children and young people as possible, making our services as accessible as possible for every child.

IMO, our digital platform for teenagers in care and care leavers, has a great community of care experienced contributors and followers, both of which have increased over the past year including downloads of our award-winning podcast, sharing open and honest conversations with care leavers, as well as the wide range of blog posts and resources which have been shared. We will continue to attract and promote new peer-led content to the site and social media channels, ensuring we are offering relevant and useful content for the young care experienced community.

Across every piece of work and every output the office produces, children's voices will be at the heart. By putting children and young people's views at the centre of thinking for policy makers, there is an opportunity to look to the future and what we can all do to make the UK the best place in the world to

grow up as a child. By the end of this Business Plan year, therefore, I will create a Children's Manifesto to represent the things that children, young people, parents, and families are calling for.

Executive Summary

This Business Plan outlines the office's work across the seven pillars set out in The Big Ask and last year's Business Plan. Underneath each pillar: school, family, community, children's social care, health, jobs and skills and a better world.

This Business Plan outlines how we have delivered for children and looks to the future of what more we can do to improve their lives. Every part of this Plan reflects what children have told us through the surveys and focus groups that inform our reports and recommendations to the everyday interactions and interviews with children and young people up and down the country in our visits to schools, hospitals and health facilities, youth offender institutions, children's homes, and youth centres.

This year under each pillar the office will work to deliver for children:

School

We want to make schools places where children want to be, and a site of wider support. For those with additional needs or at risk of falling behind, support needs to be accessible in every school across the country and centred around the needs of the child and their family. The Government's SEND Implementation Plan sets out a roadmap for improvements across much of the system, however these reforms need to be delivered swiftly to ensure every child, including those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), can flourish in school every day.

Family

We want all children to grow up in loving, stable families, in all their forms, with support from local services that better reflect their strengths instead of their challenges. We will push policymakers to reset the relationship between Government and family, with a focus on the issues children tell us most affect their parents' and carers' wellbeing.

Community

We want children to feel safe in their communities – both offline and online – and to be able to trust that the people and professionals they interact with are acting in their best interests. This means listening to children's experiences and concerns and giving parents, carers, schools the confidence to

have these conversations including addressing the issue of setting boundaries online and pushing tech platforms to robustly protect their young users.

Children's social care

We want all children who come into contact with children's social care to be able to have the same things as any other child: a loving, stable home; a brilliant education that sets them up for the career they want; and people who love and care for them into adulthood. No child should grow up in an institution, including those arriving in our country from overseas.

Health

We want all children to be able to grow up physically and mentally well, with access to support quickly and locally when they need it. We will be publishing new analysis of disabled children's views and experiences of their lives and transition points. This will include exploring some of the new and emerging risks to children's health, including vaping, screen time or inappropriate advertising. These are often issues where it is challenging for children, parents, and schools to understand the risks.

Jobs and skills

We want to match the ambition that young people have for their futures, helping them fulfil their career goals – with a particular focus on those young people with poor employment outcomes. We will engage directly with young people on their aspirations and what they want from their lives as adults.

Better world

Children's voices will continue to shape everything we do, spearheaded by the work of our two advisory boards. We will advocate for them with policymakers and politicians, so that their rights, views, and experiences shape all possible visions for the future of this country.

This Plan also includes reflections from our advocacy service Help at Hand, which works tirelessly to accommodate an ever-increasing demand for high quality advice and representation to children in care, care leavers, children living away from home and children working with children's service.

Our research draws on the views and experiences of children we represent directly, and those we speak to on visits. In the year ahead we will also continue to make use of the Commissioner's unique data

powers to request data; use cutting-edge methods and approaches to analysis; and proactively respond to the emerging issues that matter most to children.

**Over the last year the
Children's Commissioner
and her team have
spoken to and visited
children and young
people across
the country**





School

'In my opinion, schools like this shouldn't have to exist, this should just be commonplace in every school, you shouldn't have to go out of your way to go to a school like this' - Boy, 15, attending a medical AP.

The Children's Commissioner has set a clear objective that every child should be able to attend a fantastic school, every day, engaged and ready to learn. This will allow all children to leave school able to read, write, and do maths, as well as providing any additional support needed. For children with barriers to engaging with school, such as those with additional needs, there needs to be the right support in place to empower them to achieve to the best of their ability.

How we delivered for children

Attendance: Back into school

For children to get the most out of their education they need to be regularly attending school. In 2022-23 the Commissioner delivered an ambitious programme of research under the [Attendance Audit](#), which sought to understand the barriers that children face to attending school and identify the solutions that work to improve attendance. The Audit involved speaking directly with more than 500 children and professionals across a range of education settings as well as analysing the daily attendance data of 32,000 children from three [Multi-Academy Trusts \(MATs\)](#). Evidence collected through the Audit was used to inform the work of the Attendance Action Alliance (AAA), a forum which brings together experts from across education, children's, social and health services chaired by the Secretary of State for Education, in DfE's consultation on how unregistered [Alternative Provision](#) (AP) is commissioned and delivered; and in the Education Select Committee's inquiry into persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils.

In September 2022, the office created '[Back into School](#)' webpages, working with others, including the Department for Education and the Young Carers Alliance, to bring together practical resources informed by our research for schools, children, and their families to support good attendance.

Beyond the Labels – A SEND system that works for every child, every time

We know from The Big Ask that children with SEND are ambitious for their future, and when they received the right support, they were more likely to be happy with their life at school. The office has been carrying out research and engagement with children to understand their needs and how the system needs to be improved for them. This has included novel analysis of [Education, Health and Care Plans \(EHCPs\)](#) from two local authorities and speaking directly with more than 50 children with SEND and using what children told us to inform the government's [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) Green Paper consultation](#).

The Children's Commissioner set out three overarching ambitions for the SEND system, the realisation of which would result in a system able to deliver for all children and their families built around early intervention and data led systems. Many of the office's recommendations for the SEND Green Paper were recognised in the Implementation Plan. Crucially, that of the importance of including children's voice at the heart of conversations about their care and support.

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)

The Children's Commissioner was asked by Department for Education to look at what more could be done to improve the teaching of RSHE in schools. In response to this, the office combined children's voices from The Big Ask, conducted a nationally representative survey of children and young people, and observed RSHE lessons in schools. Alongside this, the office engaged with a range of stakeholders and teachers about their thoughts. As a result of this work, we published [recommendations](#) on how RSHE could be improved.

Our priority for this year

We want to make schools places where children want to be, and a site of wider support. For those with additional needs or at risk of falling behind, support needs to be accessible in every school across the country and centred around the needs of the child and their family. The SEND Implementation Plan sets out a roadmap for improvements across much of the system, however these reforms need to be delivered swiftly to ensure every child, including those with SEND, can flourish in school every day.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Schools as a locus of support

To attend school every day means not only addressing the barriers that the office has identified through the Attendance Audit but also understanding what makes a school a great place for children to be. This year, the office will listen to what children have told us they need from their schools and how the education system can deliver this so schools are somewhere that children want to be.

We know that children want to access the right support in a setting familiar to them, and schools should be positioned and equipped to provide this nexus of support. For many children, even having fantastic teachers won't be enough to overcome the additional challenges in their life and they will need additional support to be able to learn and thrive. Reforms are needed across the system, nationally and locally, to make this a reality. The office will continue to champion this ambition and hold the system to account where it falls short. This will include research into what constitutes a strong pastoral offer in schools that provides the wrap-around support that children tell us they need.

Attendance: children missing education and the consequences of poor attendance

Alongside this work, the Commissioner will carry out a bold programme of research exploring children's journeys out of education, the consequences of missing education and the interventions which work to support children back into education.

The office will build on the findings of the Attendance Audit by investigating in detail the experience of children who drop out of the education system altogether or those who have never been part of it, 'children missing from education' (CME) and home-schooled children. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out that every child has a right to an education, yet for CME they have no access to this basic right. The Audit highlighted how little is known about these children and that nationally there is not even an accurate estimate of how many there are. There is therefore a serious need for evidence-led improvements across the system to support these children into education.

The office has collected data from local authorities which will allow for the first time an assessment of how many looked after children are missing from education. The office will explore not only the numbers of CME among this group, but their journeys into care and the characteristics most associated with becoming CME. This analysis will hold local services to account but will also support them to understand the children in their care at risk of becoming CME.

As part of the Attendance Action Alliance, the office will also deliver a new research programme investigating the range of journeys children outside of the care system take to become CME and what effective action can be undertaken by schools, local authorities, and other agencies to get children into education. This research will combine new analysis of national data with qualitative research with children and services, placing their stories at the heart of the analysis.

Delivery of the SEND Implementation Plan

The office will continue to champion the rights of children with additional needs, building on the research already carried out in 2022-23. We will closely scrutinise the delivery of the government's Implementation Plan so that it delivers for all children with SEND, providing constructive challenge to departments where planned reforms will not meet children's needs or deliver the intended benefits.

The office has been told by children that they can experience particular difficulties when transitioning between services or from one stage of education to the next. This is often where children find packages of support that they rely on suddenly are no longer available, or they and their families are forced to renegotiate the support they receive. The Implementation Plan made a commitment to produce guidance on transitions but offered little in the way of concrete plans for improvement. The office will work with children and young people with additional needs to understand the challenges of transitions in more detail so that recommendations can be made to government to build on the Implementation Plan.



Family

'I would say that family is more expansive than the people you live with. I have got some childhood friends, and them and their parents are called my aunt and uncle. So I am not related to them, they are my dad's best friends, and their kids, so people I am really really close with I would also consider family. So yeah, I would say that family is quite extensive.' – Boy, 14, bereavement support group.

The Children's Commissioner's ambition is for children to grow up in loving, stable families, whatever form that takes, with services that empower them. Last year the office set out its plan to carry out a comprehensive independent review of family, with the objective of exploring its impact and effects on children's lives and how we can reform public services to support families as units and enable them to support one another.

How we delivered for children

The Independent Family Review

As part of the Commission on Race Equalities and Disparities (CRED) Review, the office was commissioned to conduct an Independent Family Review. The office conducted an extensive research programme made up of focus groups and interviews, roundtables and workshops, and a series of visits to nurseries, family hubs, domestic abuse support services, schools and youth custody settings speaking to children, parents, carers, and the professionals that support them in every area of the country.

In addition, the office conducted two large scale surveys and several pieces of new research using The Big Ask and existing survey and administrative data. [The Big Summer Survey](#), completed by 15,000 children, asked children about how they spent their summer holidays and who they would turn to for support with family life. [The Family Services Survey](#) was a nationally representative survey asking parents about their experiences with specific types of family support.

This work culminated in the publication of the Family Review in two parts, in September and December 2022. The [first part](#) focused on getting an accurate and up to date picture of family life in the UK in 2022,

with new insights into the dynamic and changing nature of childhood. It highlighted, for example, that 44% of children do not live with both parents for the entirety of their childhood. However, the report showed that it is not the formation of family that matters, but the quality of the relationships within it. It detailed and quantified, for the first time ever, the ‘protective effect’ that a loving family provides, showing the positive impact that this effect has on children.

The [second report](#) focused on the need to place family at the heart of policy and decision making, describing how services could be reimagined to replicate the protective effect of a loving family. It called for policymakers to be brave in explicitly aiming to strengthen families and set out a range of comprehensive recommendations which would allow services to function as a loving family does – without judgement or stigma, consistently there through thick and thin, and flexible to need.

Alongside the main reports, the office published nine further report annexes looking in detail at particular issues. This included three annexes exploring answers to some of the systemic challenges in the delivery of effective public services. The first, [‘Utilising data to improve children’s outcomes’](#), set out recommendations for improving the collection of data about families, as opposed to just the individuals within them, and for sharing data between services. The second, [‘Outcomes framework’](#), set out a high-level set of outcomes which all services working with families should be working towards, so that different services are not pulling families in different directions. The third, [‘Local integration of services’](#), explored how the many different statutory bodies working for families at the local level could be reshaped, to make sure that families are prioritised by those working to improve public safety, public health, and safeguarding. There were a further three annexes with a focus on families in particular circumstances: [‘Celebrating military families’](#); [‘Siblings in Care’](#) and [‘Youth Custody’](#).

The findings of the reports on siblings in the care system and youth custody are provided in more detail in the children’s social care and community sections of the Business Plan. A final three annexes provided more detail on the surveys and research that was included in the main reports: [‘The Big Summer Survey’](#), [‘Family Services Survey’](#) and [‘Family Information Services’](#). The Children’s Commissioner shared her findings with officials, Government and Parliamentarians, and appeared in front of the Children and Families Act Committee in the House of Lords.

Childcare

In addition, the Commissioner published a standalone report on one of the key issues that emerged as a pressure on family life – childcare. In her October 2022 [‘Vision for Childcare’](#) report, she set out new analysis of the uptake of childcare and early years education, as well as how readily available information about childcare was in different areas. The report included a full set of recommendations about driving up childminder numbers, the use of school-based provision, and support for one- and two-year-olds. Many of these proposals were included in the Government’s plans announced in the Spring Budget 2023.

Our priority for this year

We want all children to grow up in loving, stable families, in all their forms, with support from local services that better reflect their strengths instead of their challenges. We will push policymakers to reset the relationship between Government and family, with a focus on the issues children tell us most affect their parents’ and carers’ wellbeing.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Implementing the Family Review

The office will work to ensure the wide-ranging recommendations arising from the Family Review are implemented, with the one year on from CRED expected. The Family Review recommendations span a range of family types and topics and some elements are covered more fully in other sections of this plan. But the core elements of the Family Review were about making sure that all parents were able to access support in their local area, from services that felt familial and loving. This will require not only changes to the way services are delivered – with Family Hubs rolled out to every area, with multi-agency teams sitting within them – but also to broader systems. The office will continue to push for greater local integration, improved data collection and sharing (including a unique childhood identifier) and for a shared child and family outcomes framework.

A focus on parenting

Alongside this, the office will focus on the needs of particular groups of parents such as young fathers, and care leavers. There is limited information about how many people are in these groups, and they

often face stigma when it comes to accessing support with the challenges that all parents encounter. The office wants to make sure that all parents are able to be open about the joys and difficulties of parenting, and to get the right help when they need it.

Supporting children in the earliest years

This year will see plans put in place for a significant expansion of Government-funded childcare and early years education, which will be very welcome to many families. It is essential that this investment truly benefits those children who receive it, and so the office will work to ensure that, from the outset, plans are in place to effectively monitor the quality and impact of the expanded offer.



Community

'I don't really think there's a set age on this, like they're looking for it because [...] any child could go onto the internet and see, like anything, whether they meant to or not because it's just [...] such an international thing at this point.' – Young person, 16.

In The Big Ask the office heard from many children describing their experiences of abuse and harassment, online and in real life, particularly girls. The Children's Commissioner has been at the centre of the campaign for a strong Online Safety Bill which reflects children's needs and experiences of harm online and holds tech firms to account when harmful content is not adequately addressed. Whether online or offline, in their communities, children should have safe places to play and have confidence in the adults whose job it is to protect them.

How we delivered for children

The use of strip searching by the police

Following the deeply concerning revelations regarding [Child Q](#) in August 2022, the office published a [report](#) into strip searches of children conducted by the Metropolitan Police under stop and search powers, based on data obtained using the Children's Commissioner's statutory powers. The report found that police were frequently strip-searching children and that these searches were disproportionately being carried out on children from an ethnic minority. Furthermore, police were regularly not meeting statutory codes of practice and not able to readily account for the number or circumstances of the searches they had conducted. The office has engaged extensively with the Metropolitan Police, National Police Chiefs' Council, and other stakeholders on improving practice. The Commissioner and her team also visited children and young people in custody settings and spoke to Violence Reduction Unit teams to hear their experiences.

To understand whether the issues were isolated to the Metropolitan Police, the office carried out an expanded data request to all police forces in England and Wales. The results of this were [published](#) in

March alongside recommendations to improve data monitoring and collection when strip searching powers are used. The office was pleased to see the report taken forward by Parliamentarians, with an [Urgent Question](#) on the strip searching of children taking place in the House of Commons, and a commitment from Government to closely consider the recommendations.

Online safety

The office has continued its relentless focus on online safety and digital rights this year to ensure that protections and safeguards expected in the offline world extend to the digital sphere. The office has consulted extensively with children, teenagers, and young adults – the true experts on online risk and harm – through ongoing focus groups to understand their digital lives and ideas for making the online world a safer, more inclusive place for childhood and adolescence.

In this effort, the office published findings from a survey of more than 2,000 children aged 8-17 and their parents on exposure to harmful content on social media and messaging platforms, '[Digital Childhoods](#)', in September 2022. The survey and accompanying report explored issues around online harm and protection in depth. This included per-platform breakdowns of harm exposure to content including self-harm, suicide, gory and pornographic material. The findings, which demonstrated the extent and severity of harm exposure, received significant coverage across a broad spectrum of UK print media, speaking to the breadth of concern about this issue.

The publication coincided with the conclusion of the inquest into [Molly Russell's](#) tragic and untimely death, further underscoring the urgent need for robust regulation of tech firms and accountability for inaction. The Children's Commissioner continues to meet with bereaved families, including Molly's parents and the parents of Frankie Thomas, who have paid the heaviest price for unregulated tech firms, to drive real and positive change in their children's memories.

In pursuit of this aim, the office has continued to engage closely with Ministers and Parliamentarians on both sides of the House to inform the development of the [Online Safety Bill](#). This includes chairing meetings with leaders in the third sector and producing coordinated Parliamentary briefings, as well as meeting regularly with Ministers and Secretaries of State, and elevating the platform for children's need for protection online in print and broadcast media.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

In The Big Ask, girls and young women articulated clearly and passionately the impact of sexual harassment and violence on their everyday lives. Girls as young as 11 wrote about the need to employ diversion and defence tactics in public spaces and spoke about the lack of protection from adults and statutory agencies. This is simply unacceptable. This year the office contributed to the Home Office consultation on the creation of a new offence of [Public Sexual Harassment \(PSH\)](#) with the voices of girls who wrote bravely and honestly about the impact of sexual harassment. Following the consultation, the office welcomed the Government's decision to introduce a new offence to criminalise PSH.

Following findings from the Children's Commissioner's Government-commissioned review of sexual harassment and abuse in schools and colleges, prompted by the Everyone's Invited movement, the office this year conducted research to understand the relationship between pornography consumption and harmful sexual behaviour. The office published [results](#) from a survey of more than 1,000 young people aged 16-21 to understand the scale, nature and impact of pornography exposure. The survey benchmarked existing data on the prevalence of exposure to pornography and contributed new insights into the relationship between pornography consumption (including mediating factors such as age of first exposure and frequency of consumption) and real-life attitudes and behaviours towards sexual relationships and gender roles. The quantitative analysis was accompanied by a series of focus groups with teenagers aged 12-19 who spoke honestly about the negative impact of pornography, and with passion and insight about the need to protect children through robust age verification measures.

The Victims Bill

In June 2022 the Children's Commissioner provided [oral pre-legislative scrutiny evidence](#) on the Draft Victims Bill to the Justice Select Committee calling for the recognition of child victims as a separate and distinct category. In preparation for this, the office engaged extensively with survivors of criminal harm and abuse to inform the Commissioner's position on strengthening the Bill for child victims. Alongside this, the office supported [Daisy's Law](#) and was pleased to see this in the updated Victims Bill. The office will carry this work through into 2023-24.

Youth custody

The office has also conducted a series of visits to children in youth custody in order to understand how they are supported to maintain healthy family relationships from within these settings. Visits were accompanied by a statutory data request of all custody settings in England and Wales on children's distance from home and access to in-person or virtual family contact. As referenced in the 'Family' section of this plan, this was part of the Independent Family Review.

The Commissioner has engaged extensively with the Youth Custody Service and Ministers to understand how family contact and systemic issues facing the estate – particularly in how violence, staffing and time out of cell – may be urgently addressed. The Commissioner has also engaged productively with partners on wider ambitions needed to address the chronic issues of staffing, violence, and education provision in the largest custody settings. The Youth Custody Service are carrying out a review into their policies on family contact within the youth justice estate, in order to address some of these issues and set out the office's vision for the youth justice system.

Our priority for this year

We want children to feel safe in their communities – both offline and online – and to be able to trust that the people and professionals they interact with are acting in their best interests. This means listening to children's experiences and concerns and giving parents, carers, schools the confidence to have these conversations, including addressing the issue of setting boundaries online and pushing tech platforms to robustly protect their young users. In the offline world, we want children to feel safe and feel they can seek help and support if they need it. We will continue to work with children and young people and professionals to make sure they understand the unique needs of children.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Online Safety Bill receiving Royal Assent

The Children's Commissioner's office has been recognised on the face of the Online Safety Bill as a statutory consultee on the Codes of Practice for Ofcom to represent the voices and needs of children and young people. The office looks forward to this important Bill becoming legislation and will continue to elevate and bring children's voices to the centre of the debate until the Bill reaches Royal Assent this

Parliamentary session. This includes ongoing work on the impact of the online world on impacting on children and young people's behaviour in the offline world.

Peer on peer abuse

This year, the office will publish first-of-its-kind research into the nature of child-on-child sexual offences and will explore how these may relate to pornography consumption in childhood, guided by an expert steering group of leaders in academia, clinical practice, policy and law enforcement and interviews with children who have been impacted by harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) perpetrated by another child.

The interview findings will also be used to inform policy recommendations around support for children who have experienced sexual harm and abuse, including much greater support throughout journeys to law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Children involved in the criminal justice system

The office will build on our research from the Independent Family Review into how the youth secure estate can help children maintain family relationships and continue a series of regular visits to youth justice system settings, such as the youth secure estate, custody suites, and probation, youth offending, or violence reduction services, to understand children's experiences of interacting with different parts of the courts and youth justice system.

Keeping children safe in their communities

The office's analysis into the use of strip searching by police in England and Wales, '[Strip search of children in England and Wales – analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England](#)' highlighted the widespread non-compliance with statutory codes of practice for strip searches of children with more than half of strip searches conducted without an 'appropriate adult' present, as well as cases of searches conducted at schools and in public view, and by officers of another sex than the child being searched.

Whilst the vast majority of children will not interact with a police officer during the exercising of police powers, our analysis revealed systemic problems with transparency, scrutiny and compliance to the policing guidelines in the treatment of children.

The office will continue to advocate for immediate reforms towards a child-centric policing model that sees vulnerability and prioritises safeguarding. This will be informed by children’s interactions with the police and their views on how the trust and confidence of children can be built. We will also take a broader look at how children, particularly the most vulnerable, are supported and kept safe in their local community and protected from youth violence, gangs and other criminal exploitation risks.

Youth work

The office will explore the sufficiency and suitability of youth services and other positive activities for children and young people in their local areas, and how well this offer is integrated with formal education. A key consideration will be how to make sure children feel safe in, and connected to, their communities.

Victims and Prisoners Bill receiving Royal Assent

The office will work to ensure that children and young people’s views are represented as the now Victims and Prisoner Bill progresses through Parliament to become law. It is vital that we do more to provide specific support services for children and young people who are victims and to understand their unique needs. To achieve this the office will work with trusted partners in the children’s sector to advocate for further strengthened provisions, including statutory recognition of specialised advocates for child victims. More broadly, the office will continue to work closely the Victims Commissioner and Domestic Abuse Commissioner to make sure the voices of child victims are represented and heard.



Children's Social Care

'Once you have left care and that support decreases from the support team, just having a sibling will be so important for having the support from them' - Boy, care leaver.

Last year the Children's Commissioner set a clear goal to raise the ambition we have as a society for children who interact with the care system. The office set out to build on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, focusing specifically on ensuring that the system is focused on improving the outcomes for children who interact with the care system, making sure that families have the support they need earlier and before problems escalate, and that there is a greater focus on stability for children across the social care system. There is still significant progress to be made on these objectives. At the time of publishing this Business Plan, we estimate that 49% of children in care are being looked after by a local authority children's services department which has been found inadequate or, at best, to require improvement.¹

How we delivered for children

Social care reform and children's social care improvement

To inform the Government's response to the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), the office has sought to highlight the areas of the children's social care system that need greater focus and ambition. As a member of the National Implementation Board for the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the office pushed for the government to focus on strengthening family relationships and investing in early intervention. The office was therefore glad to see the Government's plans to invest in exploring effective practice in Family Help and a greater focus on outcomes for children, rather than processes; important proposals for improving data collection and sharing and an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the challenges of placement sufficiency. But these are only ideas on paper - the real work begins now. The Children's Commissioner also appeared in front of the Public Services Committee

¹ CCo calculation based on tracking of Ofsted reports as of March 30 2023 and the number of children in care as of March 31 2022 in each local authority, from Department for Education, [Children looked after in England](#).

to speak about the Government's Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, to represent children and young people's views.

Kinship care

During National Kinship Week in October 2022, the office highlighted the unique importance of kinship care arrangements as families may turn to their wider network for support first and foremost. The office published a [resource](#) developed with Kinship Carers Liverpool to help raise awareness about kinship care. Alongside this, the Children's Commissioner attended the APPG on Kinship Care to discuss with parliamentarians how this group of children and young people could be better supported.

Siblings in care

Following the publication of the Part 2 of the Independent Family Review, the office conducted a specific piece of research delving deeper into family life for children in care, focusing in on their relationships with their siblings. In January 2023, the office published '[Siblings in Care](#)' which includes novel analysis of the number of siblings in the care system who have been separated. It drew on conversations with children in care, care leavers and Help at Hand case studies to understand the reasons separations occur, and how they can be avoided to ensure that sibling relationships are maintained across the care system.

Supporting young people in care and beyond

When a child does have to live in an institution, they must have the absolute highest standards care. No failure rate is acceptable. In July 2022 the office published '[Reforming children's homes: a policy plan of action](#)', looking at the child's perspective of what children's homes need to provide as a minimum set of expectations whatever a child's needs or circumstances.

In October 2022 the office published its '[Vision for Care Leavers](#)' which set out our policy recommendations for how to ensure every care leaver has access to loving relationships, a stable home and safe community, high quality education and good opportunities. This report focused largely on what more can be done to support care leavers after they turn 18 but the foundations for all the things care leavers aspire to achieve are laid throughout their childhood, and their time in care. The office was glad

to see the government's strategy make tangible commitments to care leavers, many of which the office had called for in its care leavers report. Alongside this, the office published a [practical guide](#) for care leavers starting university.

The office also outlined its position on the use of [supported accommodation](#) for 16 and 17 year old children in care through the Government's consultation on the draft regulations and guidance for the accommodation (formally known as 'unregulated' provision). The [submission](#) to the consultation overwhelmingly welcomed these regulations and guidance as a positive step, but set out that the standards should be viewed as interim steps towards the ultimate aim of ensuring that every child (regardless of their type of accommodation) should be receiving care until 18.

Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum

The office has been very concerned about the safety and welfare of unaccompanied children seeking asylum who are placed in temporary hotel accommodation while awaiting transfer to longer term placements in local authorities. The Children's Commissioner has written to the [Home Secretary](#) on several occasions to express concerns over cases of children going missing from the hotels, the length of time children are accommodated in hotels and to seek information about the safeguarding procedures are in place across the hotels to ensure these children are protected. The Children's Commissioner and Help at Hand advisers have conducted a regular programme of visits to the hotels to ensure that the children housed in hotels have their voices heard and rights upheld.

The Children's Commissioner has been clear that children must be excluded from the provisions in the [Illegal Migration Bill](#) which would mean their claims for asylum are inadmissible, and they are liable to be detained and deported. Children must still be able to access protections as victims of trafficking and modern slavery and must be looked after by local authorities, in foster care or children's homes, as soon as they arrive and not be accommodated by the Home Office.

In January 2023, the Children's Commissioner appeared in front of the [Joint Committee on Human Rights](#) to talk about her work to promote and protect the rights of children in England. During the session the Children's Commissioner reflected on the office's submission to the United National Committee on the Rights of the Child which highlighted the need to promote and protect the rights of three groups of children in particular, in care (including refugees), children with disabilities and economically

disadvantaged children. Importantly, the Commissioner also raised issues around the safeguarding of unaccompanied children seeking asylum arriving in the UK and protecting children from exploitation.

IMO

IMO – In My Opinion – is the Children’s Commissioner’s 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 more than 3,800, and an award-winning podcast series which has been listened to more than 9,850 times.

IMO continues to grow and over the past year we shared episodes of series 3 of our award-winning podcast of open and honest conversations with care leavers, added to our Turning 25 series, where young care experienced people share stories of losing support from their local authority, and ran a campaign around this as part of National Care Leavers Week.

We heard about projects that care experienced young people have founded and participated in, shared practical information and resources around: career planning and employability resources, finding discounts, grants, funding, career and mentoring opportunities, applying to and starting university and provided support details and funding information for care leavers and care leaver team contacts for UK colleges and universities. We have also run giveaways and competitions, with responses shared to support the community, added to our Career Experienced People series, shared more quick and delicious budget recipes, and run goal setting workshops.

IMO has recently been incorporated into the main Children’s Commissioner website to bring clarity to the service and make it easier for care experienced young people to access the other support we can offer.

Our priority for this year

We want all children who come into contact with children's social care to be able to have the same things as any other child: a loving, stable home; a brilliant education that sets them up for the career they want; and people who love and care for them into adulthood. No child should grow up in an institution, including those arriving in our country from overseas.

How we will deliver this for children this year

This year will see the Government move towards implementing the 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy. The Commissioner will of course remain closely involved with the development of these plans, to ensure that children's voices are included and that the plans are ambitious and fast moving enough.

To support effective implementation, the Commissioner will work closely with her Care Experienced Advisory Board to scrutinise and respond to plans. The Commissioner will carry out visits to looked after children in all forms of accommodation, to understand their needs for stability, care, and support. Every child in care needs to have a loving home, where they feel safe.

Accessing support and outcomes

To achieve this, it is essential that children in care have their voices heard and have someone to support them every step of the way. This year the office will examine what access children have to some of these people – including advocates and independent visitors – to understand how many children are getting the support they are entitled to. The office will assess where the gaps in provision are and drive improvement in these services where needed for vulnerable children.

Referrals to children's social care and their outcomes can follow a range of different journeys – for some children no further action will be taken, while others will be assessed and receive support through Child in Need or Child Protection Plans. A large group of children who receive support from children's social care are those children on Child in Need plans, yet this is a group of children who are under-explored compared to children on Child Protection Plans or those who are Looked After. This year the Commissioner wants to better understand which children are offered support under Child in Need plans, and to shine a light on the consistency and quality of planning and support for these vulnerable children.

The office will seek to understand the factors that affect the journeys of different children, as well as shining a light on the consistency and quality of planning and support for these vulnerable children. The office will produce and publish a kinship friendly employment strategy.

Homelessness

Accessing support also includes that every child and young person should have access to a safe and stable home. Too often, our Help at Hand service hears from children and young people that are housed in temporary, overcrowded or emergency accommodation without a home - including from 16- and 17-year-olds who need support from children's social care because they are unable to live with their own families. There is limited information available about what happens to this group of children, where they end up living, and who is there to support them. This year we will conduct further analysis to look at the extent of this issue, with a particular focus on 16 – 18 years that should be in a familial environment until they are at least 18. We will also look at the number of care leavers who are known to be living in inappropriate accommodation, or whose whereabouts is unknown, and examine the relationship with their outcomes.

Children seeking asylum

The office will make sure children seeking asylum have their views and experiences heard and understood. These children are some of the most vulnerable and their voices often go unheard. The office will continue to provide direct advocacy and support to these children through Help at Hand. The office will also continue to work on ensuring that children's rights and interests are reflected in the Illegal Migration Bill, that all children receive care from the day they arrive in accordance with the Children Act 1989, and that they are able to seek asylum and receive support if they have been victims of modern slavery.

IMO

IMO will continue to provide a unique offering for care experienced children and care leavers to make their voices heard. We will look to support new contributors and will undergo a review of our social platforms to ensure we are providing the best and most relevant offer for care experienced young people. Our Care Experienced Advisory Board will play a role in driving content for the platform and shaping its direction.

With the incorporation of IMO into the Children's Commissioner website there will be more opportunities to integrate peer-led and professional support so that our website works for care experienced children when they want to hear from other children in a similar situation, or, when they need to challenge decisions made about them.



Health

'I've been put on the waiting list for mental health support but the waiting list is a year and a half, I'll be in year 9 by then I've just joined year 7 I can't wait that long for support from people who actually know how to help me [...] It's important that we have the role of mental health officers and young carers champions [...] I'm proud of being a young carer, it's built so much of who and what I am [...] we are just like everyone else we just have a few extra responsibilities that make life a bit harder' - Young carer, 12.

The Children's Commissioner wants to see all children getting the right support to stay mentally and physically healthy, and to get timely, high-quality intervention and treatment if they become unwell. Support needs to happen where children want to receive it, which is often through their schools, so that problems don't escalate. It is the Children's Commissioner's ambition that no child should live in an institution – including mental health inpatient wards – which means putting the right help in place earlier.

How we delivered for children

Mental health

In July 2022 the office published ['A head start: early support for children's health'](#) setting out a comprehensive strategy for improving children's wellbeing and preventing mental ill health, as well as getting the right support in place when children need it. This report was the office's response to the Government's call for evidence to inform their National Mental Health and Wellbeing plan, to ensure that children's voices were at its centre. The office also produced a set of [resources](#) for children to encourage them to talk about their feelings and attend brought the voices and needs of children right to the heart of Government at a [roundtable event](#) hosted by the then Prime Minister.

The office published its [annual mental health briefing](#) in March 2023, which analyses data on the number of children referred to children's mental health services, the time they waited for treatment, the number of children whose cases were closed before receiving treatment, and spending on children's mental

health. This year, it also included data on inpatient admissions and detentions under the Mental Health Act as well as the findings from visits to children's inpatient mental health settings. The report included recommendations on the improvements needed to both children's community and inpatient services, including how to make inpatient settings feel more familial and caring. This followed the Children's Commissioner and her team visiting children and young people in inpatient settings and children's hospitals. The office submitted this report as evidence to the Rapid Review on Inpatient Mental Health.

The office has continued to contribute to various strategic pieces of work, including the [Hewitt Review](#) Call for Evidence to ensure children are included in the oversight and governance of Integrated Care Services (ICSs) and the pre-legislative scrutiny of the reforms to the Mental Health Act.

Health and wellbeing

The office has also continued to encourage active lifestyles and participation in sport including attending the [Commonwealth Games](#) in Birmingham with the Youth Sport Trust to celebrate the success of the School Games programme.

The Children's Commissioner's Independent Family Review set out a range of recommendations about getting support right for families, all of which have a bearing on children's health. In particular, the Family Review included a call for a Family Hub in every area, and for local areas to test out better ways of integrating health, safeguarding and public safety services.

Our priority for this year

We want all children to be able to grow up physically and mentally well, with access to support quickly and locally when they need it. We will be publishing new analysis of disabled children's views and experiences of their lives and transition points. This will include exploring some of the new and emerging risks to children's health, including vaping, screen time or inappropriate advertising. These are often issues where it is challenging for children, parents and schools to understand the risks.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Mental health

The Commissioner's ambition is for every child to get the right support with their mental health in the community, so that no child needs to be admitted to an institution. To understand children's access to community support, the Commissioner will continue to track how well and how quickly mental health services are meeting the needs of children and young people. The annual mental health briefing will highlight Integrated Care Partnerships which are performing well, as well as areas where progress is needed.

The number of Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges is continuing to grow, with current plans for there to be 500 in place by April 2023. The office will keep pressure up to ensure that there is full coverage in all schools by the end of 2025. And, more broadly the office will continue to look at how early prevention in schools can help to support more children and young people to receive help as soon as they need it. The office will convene children's lead in ICSs to make sure children and family's needs, voices and experiences are put front and centre.

This work will continue to align with the office's ongoing work on online safety, where children and young people often speak about the harms the online world causes on their wellbeing.

Health and wellbeing

This year, the Commissioner will also consider how able children are to access a broader range of health services including physical health services, and whether they are getting timely and effective help.

The Commissioner believes that the foundations for both mental and physical wellbeing are laid in the very earliest days of children's lives, and so will explore the support, guidance and services that babies, and their parents and carers receive. The Commissioner has been pleased to support the work Dame Andrea Leadsom has done on 1001 Days which outlined six areas for action to improve the health outcomes of all babies in England and will continue to do so. The public sector transformation called for in the Family Review: greater local integration, improved data collection and sharing (including a unique child identification number) and a shared child and family outcomes framework will also be reflected in

the office's work on health. The office will push for health services to consider whole-family approaches using the language of children and families rather than service users.

Alongside this, the Commissioner will look at influences on children and young people's health as they grow up, including those of vaping, screen time or inappropriate advertising.

The Commissioner consulted with children and put forward formal proposals in her ['Head Start'](#) report on what should be included on the Government's proposed Mental Health Wellbeing Plan. The Government recently announced that this 10-year plan would not progress, but instead that there would be a Major Conditions Strategy, which will include mental health and a broader list of health concerns. The Commissioner has sought, and will continue to seek, to ensure that children's health needs will be prioritised within this strategy.



Jobs and Skills

'In particular, our visit to the Children's Commissioner's office was a great opportunity to witness the role of public servants. We were greeted courteously and had the listened to an engaging presentation that covered the possible career options within different departments.' – Girl, 17, who visited the office as part of a school trip.

Children want to get on in life when they become adults and that means a good job or career. Children are ambitious for their futures, so we have to be ambitious for them. The Children's Commissioner's ambition is for a cradle-to-career approach to skills that includes a stronger focus on vocational options and better careers education.

How we delivered for children

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)

The office has listened what children want from their future careers and the skills they need to get there. The office has established a Children's Advisory Board and Care Experienced Advisory Board, which will continue to focus on what's important to children in this area.

To encourage children to see the importance of STEM skills in their future careers and lives, the office created an interactive resource, ['Where can I go with maths?'](#), featuring more than 60 career profiles of role models using maths or maths skills in their work. It was developed to show connections and transferable skills between the Key Stage 3 maths curriculum, careers and everyday life. Following up on this work in Maths Week 2022, [the Big Ask Maths Week Challenge](#) allowed children to use real data from The Big Ask and was an opportunity for young people to hear what other young people told us about their wellbeing and future priorities.

Preparing for the workplace

Further analysis of children's views in The Big Ask was published on apprenticeships in [National Apprenticeship Week](#) and other vocational routes into a career, along with analysis of the specific employment challenges of children leaving care and children from [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller](#) (GRT) communities.

Advisory boards

The Children's Commissioner's office established two new forums for children's voice, a Children's Advisory Board and a Care Experienced Advisory Board. The Children's Commissioner is grateful to the children and young people involved for giving their time. A key focus of the continuing programme with these boards is to understand their views on and priorities for helping children gain the skills they need for the jobs they want. The office engaged with children about careers, including care experienced apprentices, primary children getting their first careers conversations, visiting an FE college, representatives from multiple youth leadership boards and many schools and colleges.

Our priority for this year

We want to match the ambition that young people have for their futures, helping them fulfil their career goals – with a particular focus on those young people with poor employment outcomes. We will engage directly with young people on their aspirations and what they want from their lives as adults. We will particularly focus on what more can be done to support care experienced young people.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Causes of poor employment outcomes

Not all children go on to have equally good employment outcomes when they reach adulthood. We will explore the factors in childhood that lead to poor employment outcomes as adults, such as children in Alternative Provision and care-experienced children (link with Education). The office will explore what makes it more possible for these young people to achieve their goals and go on to have the careers they dream of.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)

We will continue our focus on promoting STEM, updating our interactive resource, [‘Where can I go with maths?’](#), to feature a greater range of careers and career pathways, and promoting our [The Big Ask Maths Week Challenge](#) as a great data set and exercise for schools to utilise.

Numerical literacy is a key skill for children to have bright futures and we will be looking further into maths education and how this skill can be developed, hosting a roundtable to discuss the Prime Ministers new policy pledge to require all pupils in England to study maths up to the age of 18. The discussion will explore what this should look like, what the expectations should be within different courses as well as the potential barriers to specific groups and how we can support them.

Exploring different career pathways

Using the Children’s Commissioner’s platform to speak directly to children, we will also create resources to encourage children to consider different career and skills paths, such as vocational routes into careers. We will look at the experiences of children in part-time employment such as ‘Saturday jobs’ and understand their views on conditions in and the availability of these jobs, and we will create resources to help children connect their desire to help the environment with the skills necessary for a green career (link with Better World).



Better World

‘One thing we would change to improve is to use less energy and help put an end to racism and climate change’ – Young person who takes part in the Children’s Advisory Board.

Better World is a core pillar of the Children’s Commissioner’s strategy to ensure children feel listened to, and their views are amplified. Putting children’s voices at the heart of policy makers’ agenda, particularly on issues which children tell us that they care the most about, is a key priority, including the environment and building a fairer society.

How we delivered for children

Building on the foundations of The Big Ask, the office worked to ensure that children and young people’s voices were heard in the heart of Government. To achieve this, the office established the first Children’s Advisory Board and Care Experienced Advisory Board, putting children and young people at the heart of our work, including a survey of children’s views on key topics.

Children’s rights

Attending the 94th pre-session and children’s meeting of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) in Geneva following the Children’s Commissioner’s report [submission](#) was a fantastic opportunity to raise the issues facing children in England and amplify children’s voices directly with the UN Committee. Children from our Children’s Advisory Board also represented children across England on an international stage at the children’s meeting, giving a brilliant presentation about equal rights for women and girls.

Through the advisory boards and extensive qualitative research, including for the Family Review and Attendance projects and responses to the SEND and Care reviews, the office continued to look at where disparities in opportunities and outcomes exist for children and make sure that systemic barriers are addressed, as well as more practical obstacles removed. The Children’s Commissioner appeared in front of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to speak about this work.

Promoting the voice of every child

The experiences of children in care and children from [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller](#) backgrounds were further explored through in-depth analysis of The Big Ask and wider research on their outcomes and experiences. The office has also published a number of blogs reporting on our work within Better World, such as posts on championing the voices of children in England, creating accessible resources for children on our work and sharing ideas on how to do your bit for the environment.

Our priority for this year

Children's voices will continue to shape everything we do, spearheaded by the work of our two advisory boards. We will advocate for them with policymakers and politicians, so that their rights, views and experiences shape all possible visions for the future of this country.

How we will deliver this for children this year

We will use a new survey of children and parents to inform engagement with politicians as they look ahead to the next general election. We will use our evidence on what children think government should do to make children's lives better to make sure children are heard in manifestos and political debates over the coming year.

Climate change and the environment

In The Big Ask, children told us that one of their key worries was the environment and said they want their future careers to help the planet. The office will create a series of resources to help children connect their desire to help the environment with the skills necessary for a green career, including information on the variety of pathways children can take towards a green career ([link with Jobs & Skills](#)). We will continue to hear and seek children and young people's views about climate change and build on the work we did around COP26.

Building a fairer society

Importantly, the Better World pillar is about children's views on a fairer, inclusive society. They want to be heard and for someone to listen. The office will be listening to children and will make sure all work is

delivering on what they have told us. In particular, the office will continue to look at where disparities in opportunities and outcomes for groups of children that can often struggle to be heard, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and migrant children along with wider research to make sure that systemic barriers are addressed as well as more practical obstacles removed, so that children can feel confident that they are growing up in a world that feels fair.



Help at Hand

'I would have been taken off the social housing list [...] I wouldn't have been a care leaver anymore; I would just have been a homeless person. I probably wouldn't have been able to find a place so soon. They took the stress off. [...] I didn't have time. So, Help at Hand being there and assisting with that ensured everything.' – Care leaver.

This year, Help at Hand supported nearly 800 children with direct support, advice, and advocacy. This includes children living away from home, in Youth Offending Institutes (YOIs), children in care, children with disabilities awaiting a school place, and children falling between the care and health systems.

The Children's Commissioner's office undertook a review of the Help at Hand service in 2022 that included a consultation with children and young people in the service's remit. The review was published in the autumn and made several recommendations regarding raising the profile, accessibility, and impact of the service. These recommendations have begun to be implemented and the office will continue to implement them to make sure we meet as many children's advocacy needs as possible.

How we have delivered for children

Help at Hand has continued to provide high quality advice and representation to children in care, care leavers, children living away from home and children working with children's service.

In addition to this day-to-day direct work, Help at Hand has worked to implement the recommendations of the 2022 review. This has included:

- Delivering training sessions to advocates and children's homes staff on child rights issues such as access to education and stability.
- Commissioning a video and easy read materials to make the service more accessible to children with disabilities.

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- Updating and improving the service's presence on the office website.
 - Visits to where children are living, including unaccompanied children seeking asylum accommodated by the Home Office.

In more than 80% of cases where Help at Hand made representations, there was a positive outcome in the last year. An example is Alfie (name changed). Alfie is 11 and has a number of physical and mental health conditions. His parents contacted us because they desperately needed more support for him, including additional hours with carers, short breaks, and help with his education. The local authority refused to provide this at the level the family needed, and Alfie's challenging behaviour escalated to the point of several very serious safeguarding incidents. After numerous interventions from Help at Hand to both health and children's services, Alfie was offered short breaks (respite) in his local area, more support at home from carers, and ultimately was able to return to education and get the therapeutic input he needed from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Alfie's parents told us this has made a huge difference for him - he is now making great progress, needs fewer short breaks, and is feeling good about his future. His parents are so relieved that he has the help he needs and can continue to live within his family.

Following the implementation of some of the Help at Hand review recommendations, the service has seen a growth in number of children contacting the team – there were 285 inquiries in the five-month period April 2022 to September 2022 and 350 in the following five-month period of September 2022 to January 2023.

Our priority for this year

Help at Hand will continue to implement the remaining review recommendations – making the service more accessible to children with disabilities and unaccompanied children seeking asylum, the children most in need of high quality advocacy and who at present have no right to it. The office will also carry out an advocacy audit looking at the quality of advocacy provision across the country. The office will also continue to use the experiences shared with Help at Hand to inform the work of the whole office.

How we will deliver this for children this year

Help at Hand will continue to deliver a high-quality child rights service to children and care leavers. It will build on work done in the last year with unaccompanied children seeking asylum, including conducting regular visits to Home Office accommodation for these children, and will do more work to reach children with disabilities, particularly children with communication needs.

The office will continue to reach out to local authorities whose children are in homes that are rated inadequate by Ofsted, to make sure that they have access to advocacy and are able to contact Help at Hand if they want or need it.

Appendix: How the work in the Business Plan will map against the UNCRC priorities

The Children's Commissioner for England also assumes the role of Children's Commissioner for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland on any matter where the UK Government is responsible for non-devolved policy. We will continue to regularly convene with the offices of the Commissioner of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and proactively share research with our BINOCC colleagues on the things that matter and affect children across the Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

In line with our statutory duty to protect and promote the rights and needs of children and young people, all our work has been mapped against the UNCRC. Alongside this, all the reports the office has published are listed and resources for children and young people.

Business Plan priorities for 2023 - 24	Article of UNCRC
Pillar: School	
Schools as a locus of support The office will continue to listen to what children want from their schools and champion the ambition of reform, with schools as a nexus of support, holding the system to account where it falls short.	3, 29, 18
Children missing from education The office will carry out research exploring children's journeys out of education, the consequences of missing education, and the interventions which work to support children back into education, considering the experiences of looked after children and those outside the care system.	3, 28, 29
Delivery of the SEND Implementation Plan The office will scrutinise the delivery of the government's SEND Implementation Plan so it delivers for all children. This will involve work with children and young people to understand the challenges of transitions and inform recommendations to build on the Plan.	2, 3, 23, 28, 29
Pillar: Family	

Implementing the Family Review The office will work to ensure the recommendations arising from the Family Review are implemented, making sure that all parents are able to access support in their local area, from services that feel familial. We will continue to push for greater local integration, improved data collection and sharing, and a shared child and family outcomes framework.	2, 3, 5, 9 18, 19, 20, 27
A focus on parenting The office will focus on particular groups of parents such as young fathers and care leavers, to ensure they get the right help when they need it.	2, 5, 9, 18
Supporting children in the earliest years The office will work to ensure the Government’s expansion of funded childcare and early years education is effectively monitored to ensure it truly benefits the children who receive it.	3, 18
Pillar: Community	
Online safety The office will continue to elevate and bring children’s voices to the centre of the debate until the Online Safety Bill becomes law, including ongoing work on the impact of the online world on children and young people’s behaviour in the offline world.	3, 5, 34, 35
Peer on peer abuse The office will publish research into child-on-child sexual offences and explore the link to pornography consumption in childhood, informed by interviews with children and an expert steering group. This will be used to make policy recommendations around support for children.	17, 34
Children involved in the criminal justice system Building on research from the Independent Family Review, the office will conduct regular visits to youth justice settings, to understand how children interact with different parts of youth justice system.	2, 3 ,9, 37, 40
Keeping children safe in their communities	3, 12, 19, 37, 40

The office will continue to advocate for urgent reforms towards a child-centric policing model, informed by children's views and experiences. We will also build on this work to make sure that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, are supported and kept safe in their local community.	
Youth Work The office will explore the sufficiency and suitability of youth services and other positive activities for children and young people in their local areas.	29, 31
Victims and Prisoners Bill The office will ensure that children and young people's views are represented as the Victims and Prisoners Bill progresses through Parliament and will continue to work with partners to make sure the voices of child victims are represented and heard.	3, 12, 34, 35, 36, 40
Pillar: Children's Social Care	
Reforming children's social care The office will remain closely involved in the development of the Government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy, ensuring that children's voices are included and the plans are ambitious and fast enough.	3, 19, 20, 23
Accessing support and outcomes The office will examine what access children in care have to people who can support them to have their voices heard, to assess where there are gaps in provision and drive improvement in these services. The office will seek to understand the factors that affect the journeys of different children following referrals to children's social care. This will consider the consistency and quality of planning and support for these children, with a focus on children supported by child in need plans.	2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 19, 20, 22, 23, 27
Homelessness This office will conduct further analysis to look at the extent of homeless amongst young people, with a particular focus on 16 – 18 year olds and care leavers.	2, 3, 20, 27
Children Seeking Asylum The office will make sure children seeking asylum have their rights respected and their views and experiences heard and understood. The	2, 3, 19, 22, 37, 38, 39

office will continue to provide direct advocacy and support to these children through Help at Hand.	
IMO IMO will continue to provide a unique offering for care experienced children and care leavers to make their voices heard. We will undergo a review of our social platforms to ensure we are providing the best and most relevant offer for care experienced young people and provide more opportunities to integrate peer-led and professional support.	12, 13
Pillar: Health	
Mental health services The office will continue to track how well mental health services are meeting the needs of children and young people, including with the annual mental health briefing. The office will also seek to ensure that Mental Health Support Teams are present in all schools by the end of 2025.	3, 24, 39
Health and wellbeing The office will consider how able children are to access a broader range of health services including physical health services, and whether they are getting timely and effective help. The office will look at the support, guidance and services that babies and their parents and carers receive and explore new and emerging risks to children's health, including vaping, screen time or inappropriate advertising.	3, 23, 24
Pillar: Jobs and Skills	
Causes of poor employment outcomes The office will explore the factors in childhood that lead to poor employment outcomes as adults, such as children in Alternative Provision and care-experienced children.	2,3

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) We will continue our focus on promoting STEM and will be looking further into maths education and how this skill can be developed.	28, 29
Exploring different career pathways The office will create resources to encourage children to consider different skills and career paths, including vocational routes and green careers.	28, 29
Pillar: A Better World	
Climate change and the environment The office will create a series of resources to help children develop skills for a green career and will continue to hear and seek children and young people's views about climate change.	
Building a fairer society The office will continue to look at disparities in opportunities and outcomes for different groups of children who struggle to be heard, with wider research on how systemic barriers can be addressed and practical obstacles removed.	
Help at Hand service	
Supporting children's rights Help at Hand will continue to deliver a high quality child rights service to children and care leavers.	3, 12, 19, 20
Children with disabilities The office will implement the Help at Hand review proposals to make the service more accessible to children with disabilities, particularly those with communication needs.	2, 12, 23
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children The team will continue work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, including regular visits to Home Office accommodation.	2, 12, 22, 35, 37
Advocacy audit The office will carry out an advocacy audit focused on the quality of advocacy provision.	3, 12, 23

Children's homes The Help at Hand team will continue to reach out to local authorities whose children are in homes that are rated inadequate by Ofsted, to ensure they have access to advocacy and Help at Hand if they want it.	3, 12, 19, 23
Children's voices We will continue to use the experiences shared with Help at Hand to inform the work of the whole office.	3, 12

Appendix: 2022-23 Reports

- [Briefings to MPs on the Online Safety Bill](#) (April 2022)
- [Voices of England's missing children](#) (June 2022)
- [A Head Start: Early support for children's mental health](#) (July 2022)
- [Back into school: New insights into school absence – evidence from three multi-academy trusts](#) (July 2022)
- [Reforming children's homes: a policy plan of action](#) (July 2022)
- [Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service – new analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England](#) (August 2022)
- [Family and its protective effect: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review](#) (September 2022)
- [Digital childhoods: a survey of children and parents](#) (September 2022)
- [Vision for childcare](#) (October 2022)
- [Vision for care leavers](#) (October 2022)
- [Help at Hand Annual Report and Review](#) (November 2022)
- [Beyond the Labels: A SEND system which works for every child, every time](#) (November 2022)
- [What children need from an integrated alternative provision system](#) (November 2022)
- [The Children's Commissioner's submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) (December 2022)
- [Education history and attendance](#) (December 2022)
- [A positive approach to parenting: Part 2 of the Independent Family Review](#) (December 2022)
 - [Celebrating Military Families](#) (December 2022)
 - [Utilising data to improve children's outcomes](#) (December 2022)
 - [Outcomes framework](#) (December 2022)
 - [Local integration of services](#) (December 2022)
 - [Family Services Survey](#) (December 2022)
 - [Family Information Services](#) (December 2022)
 - [The Big Summer Survey](#) (January 2023)
 - [Siblings in care](#) (January 2023)
 - [Family contact in youth custody](#) (March 2023)
- [Findings from the Big Ask: Children in Care](#) (January 2023)
- [Supported accommodation for children in care](#) (January 2023)
- [A lot of it is actually just abuse - Young people and pornography](#) (January 2023)
- [Attendance is everyone's business](#) (February 2023)
- [Statement from the Children's Commissioner in response to the SEND Improvement Plan](#) (March 2023)
- [Children's mental health services](#) (March 2023)
- [Briefing to MPs on Illegal Migration](#) (March 2023)
- [Illegal Migration Bill – priorities for Amendment drafting](#) (March 2023)
- [Strip search of children in England and Wales](#) (March 2023)



Appendix: 2022-23 Report Resources

- Family and its protective effective: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review (September 2022)
 - [Qualitative research](#)
 - [The Big Ask](#)
 - [Additional analysis](#)
 - [Family Life Survey](#)
 - [Literature Review](#)
- Beyond Labels: A SEND system which works for every child, every time (November 2022)
 - [Summary of focus groups with children and young people](#)
 - [Further analysis of EHCPs](#)
 - [Findings from 'The Big Ask' on Special Educational Needs and/or Disability \(SEND\)](#)
 - [Experiences of children with SEND: findings from a nationally representative survey](#)
- The Children's Commissioner's submission to the United Nations Committee on Rights of the Child (December 2022)
 - Children's Version – [Right to No Discrimination](#)
 - Children's Version – [Right to be Heard](#)
- 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people & pornography (January 2023)
 - [Information sheet](#)
- Attendance is everyone's business (February 2023)
 - [Infographic](#)
 - School assembly packs: ['Back to School: is Why attendance is important?'](#)
 - [Guide for Attendance Officers](#)
- Children's Mental Health Services (March 2023)
 - [CCG Data](#)
 - [Interactive Maps](#)
- Podcasts
 - [Talking about Attendance](#) (May 2022)
 - [Conversations with care leavers: Relationships in the care system](#) (October 2022)
 - [Children's Voices: Views on family from student at Ark Boulton Academy](#) (December 2022)
 - [Conversations with Shammi Rahman: The importance of Religious Education](#) (February 2023)





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