

Delivering the Children's Commissioner's Strategy

April 2021 – March 2024

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a self-assessment on the progress the Children's Commissioner's Office has made against its three-year strategic (2021 -2024) plan. This has been divided into two sections:

- **The Children's Commissioner's priorities** – These reflect the core mission statements of the Children Commissioner and the guiding principles that underpin all the work undertaken by the office. Our self-assessment against these areas includes looking at how we have engaged and listened to children and young people, how we have used our outreach channels to showcase and amplify the voices of children, and how we have used the Commissioner's statutory powers to provide a robust evidence base to drive forward change and position the work of the office as an expert in children's policy. The examples used in this section are snapshots of indicators of the overall impact of the office.
- **Strategic pillars** – These reflect the seven strategic policy areas, set by the findings of the Big Ask, in which the office sets its business plan activities against to ensure that all our work is aligned towards what children tell us needs to change to make England the best place in world for them to grow up in. Our self-assessment in this section looks at notable successes against the strategy and annual business plans both in planned projects and where the office has made use of commissioned work and influencing opportunities to put children's needs at the heart of decision-making.

Bibliography

The bibliography annexed to this report sets out published work to date. This includes key progress milestones such reports and statements but also gives chronological look at how the office has used blogs and resources to continually reinforce and further our strategy objectives.

The Children's Commissioner's priorities

The Children's Commissioner's commitment to children is clear. She advocates for them, listens to them, champions the needs of the most vulnerable children, is an expert policy voice, and has unique powers to understand children's lives fully.

The Children's Commissioner's strategic objectives for 2021-2024 are centred around every child, regardless of where they live and who their parents are, having access to brilliant services that meet their needs and help them become happy, successful adults. Across each pillar, shaped by the findings of 'The Big Ask', the Children's Commissioner has represented children's needs and shaped the policy environment. This has been done through a range of approaches such as feeding into Government consultations and legislation, being directly commissioned to complete work by Government, and by working across parties and organisations to represent children's views and drive change forward. All of which are delivered through the lens of the Children's Commissioner's core priorities.

- 1. An advocate for children** – so their interests are at the centre of policymakers thinking. The Children's Commissioner promotes children's interests and rights to ensure their needs are at the heart of Government thinking. The Commissioner makes sure that policymakers are aware of and take account of children's needs and priorities, particularly the most vulnerable and those in care.
- 2. A listener** – so that all children know they have someone they can call upon to make sure their needs are heard. The Children's Commissioner spends time with children where they live, play, or learn to better understand their experiences. By being curious about their concerns, she can make sure that children's voices are listened to. This genuine interest will ensure children feel heard, that their priorities do not go unnoticed and are a catalyst for change.
- 3. A champion for the most vulnerable children** – so that no child's needs are overlooked. Vulnerable children, children in care or in contact with social services, are central to all the work the office does. The Commissioner works to reform and shape a system that listens and responds to them, individually and collectively. Doing this will secure better outcomes and life chances for some of our society's most vulnerable.
- 4. An expert voice on children's policy** – so that we have practical solutions to improve children's lives. By using policy expertise to influence ongoing children's policy and being

commissioned to work on specific topics. The Commissioner uses their position to create change and improvement to children's lives through new and innovative policy solutions.

5. Using unique powers to request data on children – so we have an evidence-based approach to policy and children's lives. Unique statutory powers mean that the Children's Commissioner can gather data on children, analyse it and translate it into meaningful insights to influence policy. She can shine light on the issues which affect and matter to children the most.

The following sections provide a snapshot of some of the ways in which the office has measured its success against these priorities.

An advocate for children

Bringing children's voices to the centre of policymakers' thinking and advocating for their interests means facilitating ways in which they can have their say. Surveys are not the only way in which the office have done this but do play an important role in which children can share their views and opinions anonymously, in their own time, wherever they are in the country. These have shaped every aspect of our work, from The Big Ask, in which the scale of respondents has led to revisiting the data time again to reveal new analysis and continually sense check policy recommendations against our findings, to commissioning tailored research to interrogate our understanding further.

Across all our work we have included and advocated for the views of:

557,077

The Big Ask

15,825

The Big Summer Survey

3,564

Family Life survey

3,000

Family Services Survey

3,593

Opinium survey

2,005

Digital Childhoods

3,022

**Relationships, Sex and Health
Education**

1,702

**Care experience as a
protected characteristic**

253, 001

The Big Ambition

A listener

Being a listener means that as an office, we do not rely on just the data but ensure that our policy recommendations are evidenced by exploring the stories behind the figures. Our qualitative research includes visits, focus groups, roundtables, to name a few ways, to speak to children, their parents and carers, schools and frontline workers directly. Whether expressing what has gone wrong or what has gone right or just sharing their experiences, these interviews and conversations often expose not only the causes and drivers behind the issues but the practical solutions that come from the ideas of children themselves on how their lives could be made better.

To date, the Commissioner and her office have spoken with 2,086 children, parents and carers, and professionals directly. This figure is a conservative estimation based on external visits where a form of focus group has taken place and does not encompass overall face to face engagement with larger groups such as school assemblies, visits to holiday activity programmes, youth services settings and events.

Visits

This map illustrates visits undertaken by the Commissioner and her team from March 2021, where they have spoken first-hand with children or young people across the country.

This does not include the location of children or groups that have taken part in virtual focus groups, or where meetings have taken place in the Children's Commissioner's office, at ministerial offices or at Parliament.



A champion for the most vulnerable children

Our Help at Hand team not only helps the individual children who need it most, but also ensures that their experiences are used to inform the office’s research and policy work at a national level. The team are an integral part to the office’s championing of the rights of vulnerable children and young people, and making sure their voices and the challenges they face get heard.

From 1 March 2021 to 31 August 2022, the Help at Hand service received 1,254 referrals. Where Help at Hand intervened during this period, 77% of cases were resolved or partially resolved. From 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023, the team received 998 referrals. The team made positive impact in the vast majority (91%) of these cases where they made direct representations. Of this 91% where Help at Hand achieved some level of positive impact, 56% of enquiries were fully resolved and 36% of enquiries were partially resolved.

Percentages of Help Hand enquires by presenting issue

Figure 1: Percentages of Help Hand enquires by presenting issue, March 2021 – August 2022

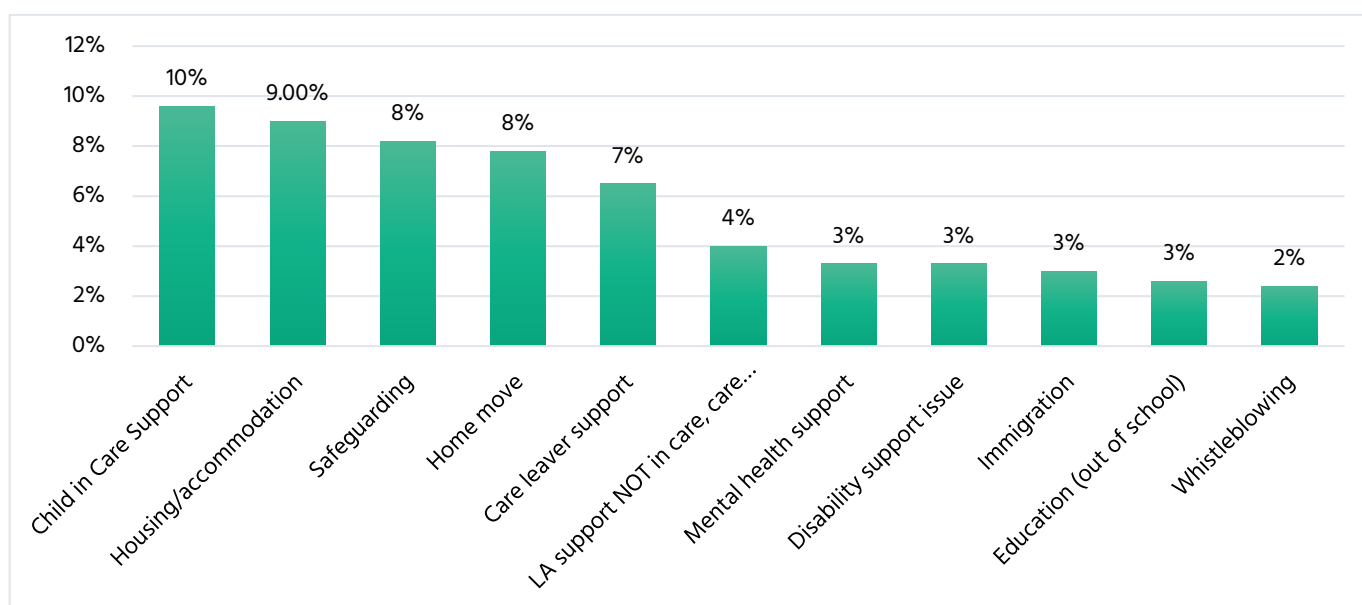
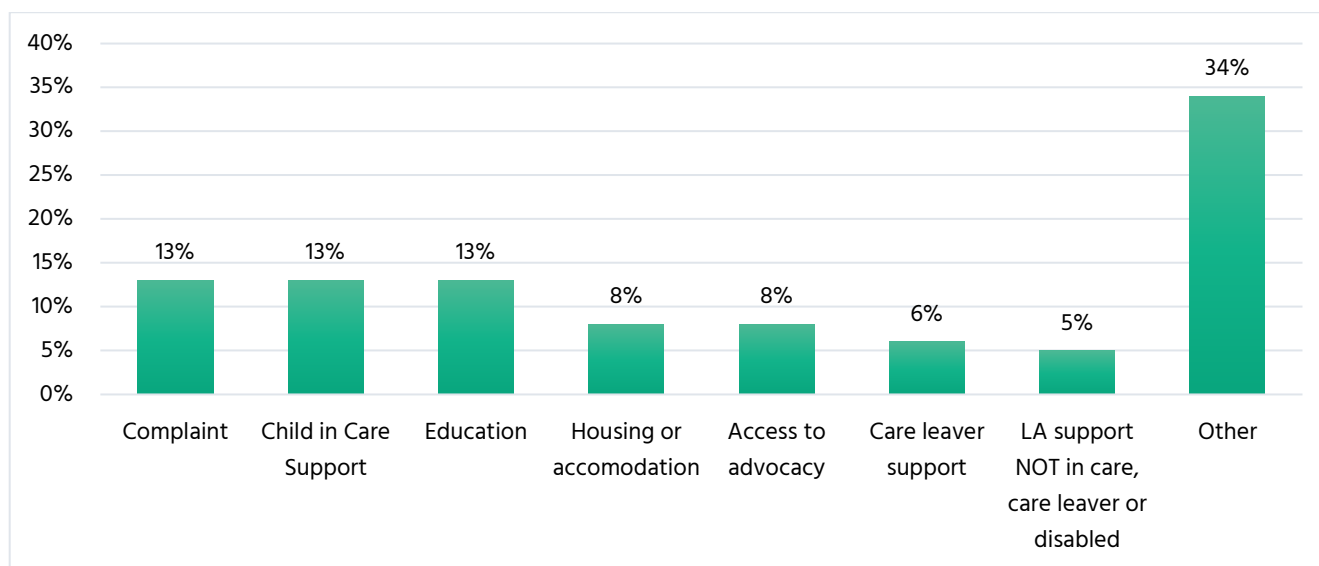


Figure 2: Percentages of Help Hand enquires by presenting issue, September 2022 – August 2023



Help at Hand Review

The office undertook a review of the Help at Hand service in 2022 that included a consultation with over 70 children and young people in the service’s remit. The review made several recommendations regarding raising the profile, accessibility, and impact of the service. Following the implementation of some of recommendations of the 2022 review including updating and improving the service’s online presence, there was a notable growth of 22.8% in enquiries in the five-month period following the Review.

Help at Hand also entered into a data sharing agreement with Ofsted, which means the team now receives details of any children’s homes that have a provisional rating of inadequate. The team then tries to ensure that all of the children affected are offered advocacy by their local authority. Between April and June 2023, of the 656 children’s homes inspected by Ofsted, 84 (13%) had a final inspection judgement of inadequate. In response, the Help at Hand contacted the Director of Children’s Services responsible for each child residing in those homes to ensure they had access to advocacy.

An expert voice on children’s policy

The determining of our success at being an expert voice on children’s policy is centred on our performance against our strategic policy areas – the areas in which we have been successful in generating and furthering our policy priorities and influencing of government. However, government is not our only stakeholder, our online presence analytics show that the work of the office is increasingly being viewed and sought as an influential voice on children’s policy by different audiences.

Children’s Commissioner’s website

The below table shows our website views, pre-March 2021 to the equivalent period after. The total page views have shown a significant increase. This can in part be attributed to campaigns such as The Big Ask but what the data also shows is that we have seen an increase in how individuals use our content, viewing on average 4.6 pages on each visit as opposed to 1.68 before.

Website analytics, comparison between: 1 March 2019-28 Feb 2021 and 1 March 2021-28 Feb 2023

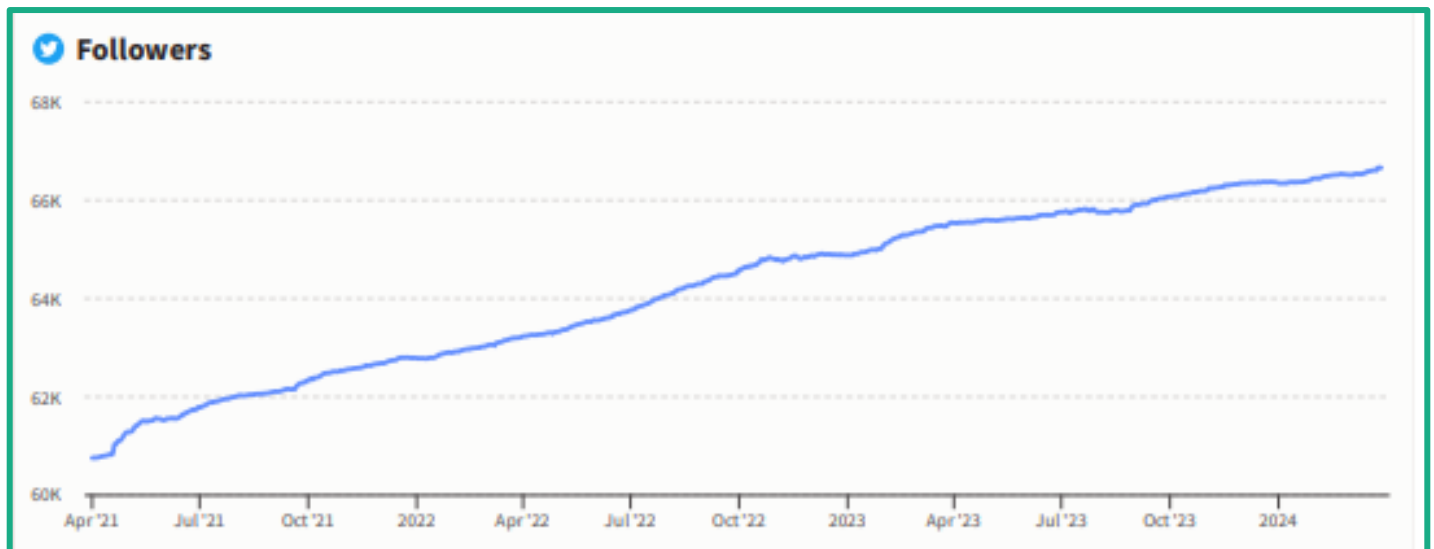
	1 March 2019- 28 Feb 2021	1 March 2021-28 Feb 2023
Users (number of users to initiate at least one session)	747,538	969,894
New Users (number of first-time users to initiate a session)	746,193	968,231
Pageviews (total number of pages viewed in a single session including repeated views of a single page)	1,665,579	6,252,705
Unique Pageviews	1,405,319	2,636,300

(number of pageviews, counting each page once even if it was viewed multiple times within a single session)		
Pages / Session (Average number of pages per single session)	1.68	4.80
Average Session Duration	00:01:22	00:05:51

Note: Some users have do not track settings set in their web browsers, use VPNs, or additional anti-tracking functionality so these figures give us a picture but not the full extent of traffic and analytics for the website.

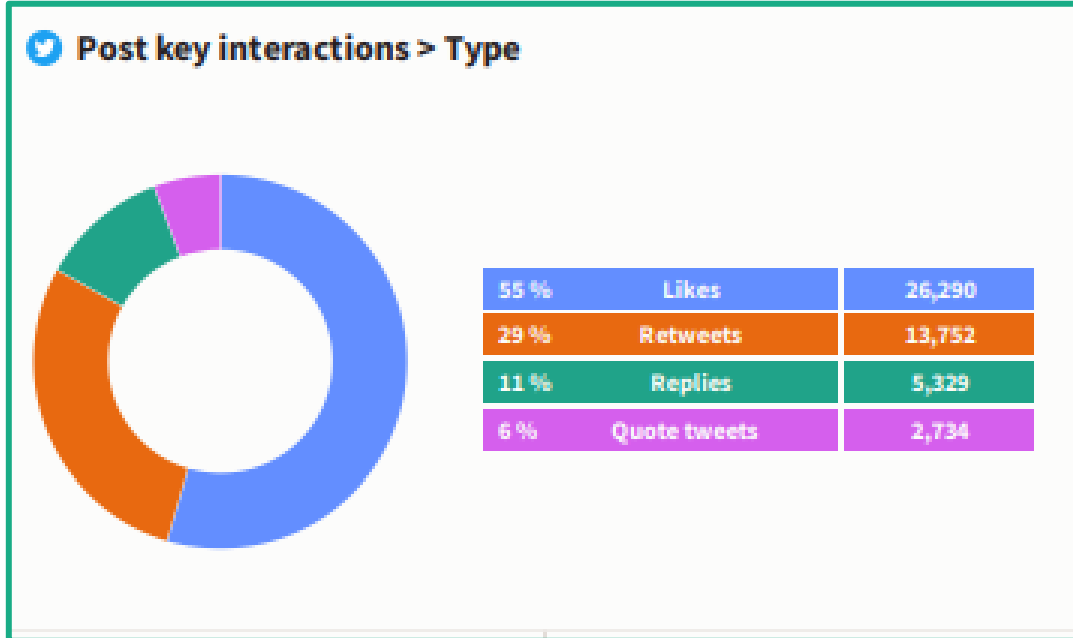
Social Media

The Children’s Commissioner X (formerly Twitter) account has also seen a steady increase in followers since March 2021 to a current total over **66.6k**.

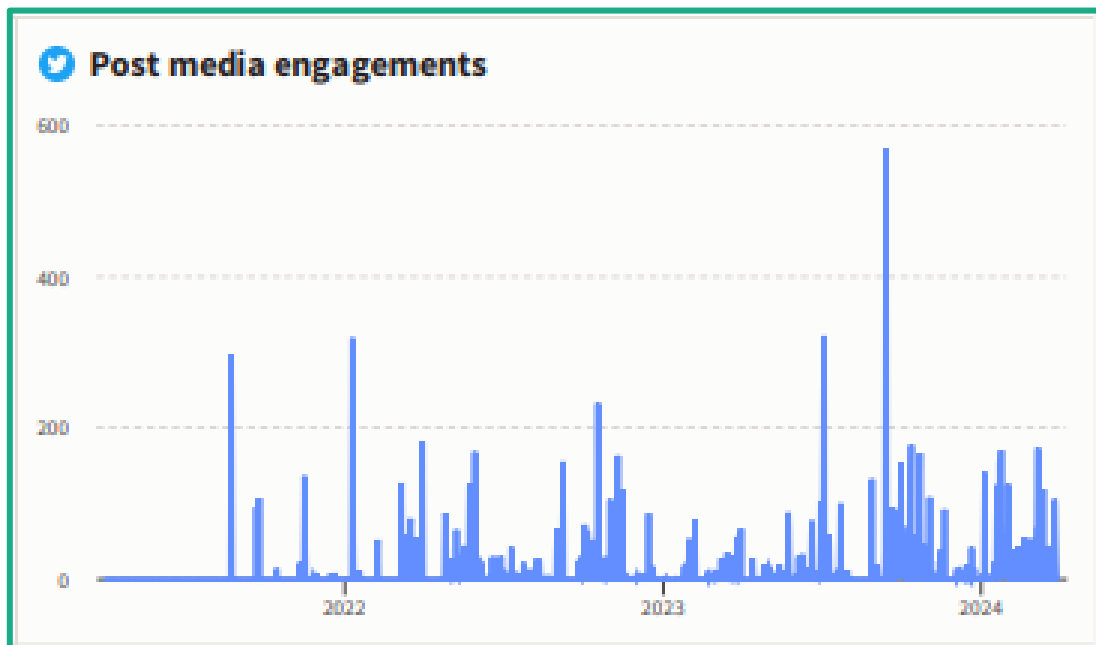


The approximately 1,730 posts made in this period generated over **8 million** impressions (the number of unique users that see our content).

Post interactions: 1 March 2021 – 28 March 2024



Post Engagements 1 March 2021 – 28 March 2024



Children’s Commissioner’s newsletter

Over the past year alone (20 November 2022 – 19 November 2023), the office has also seen a steady increase in subscribers to our newsletter to **12,261** with an unsubscribe rate of just 0.31%.

Number of subscribers: 20 November 2022 – 19 November 2023

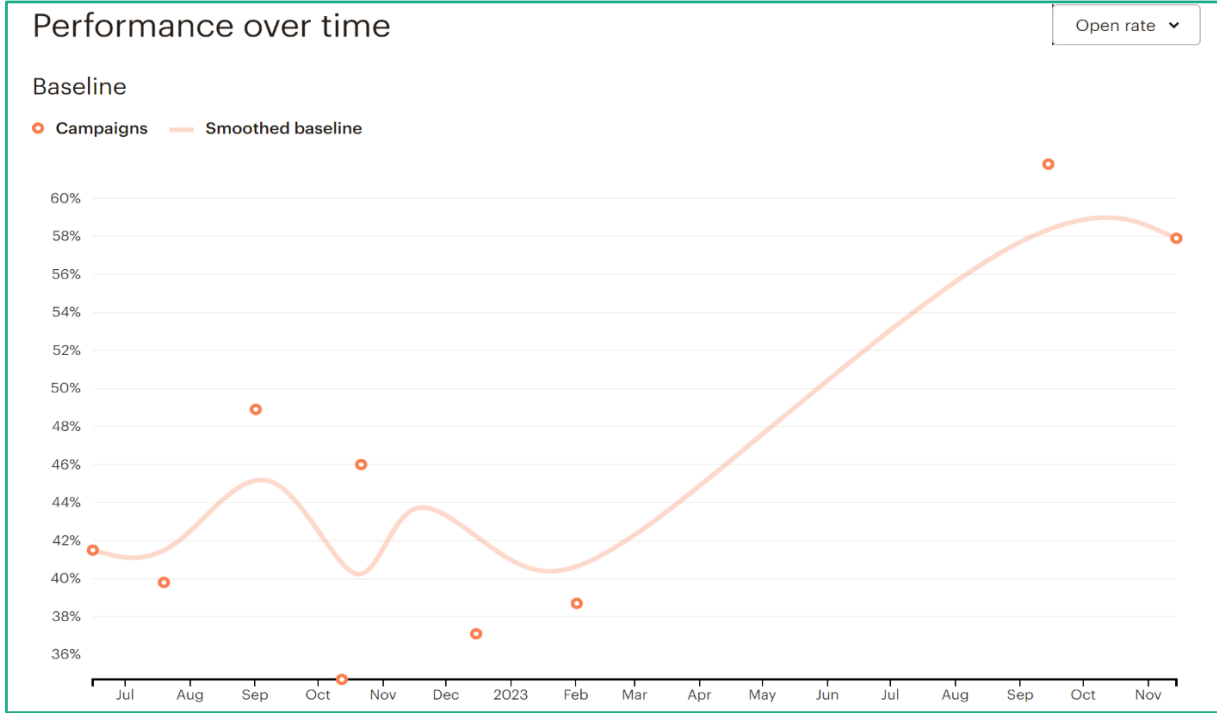


Over this period, this has translated into **60,657** newsletter emails being sent promoting our work.

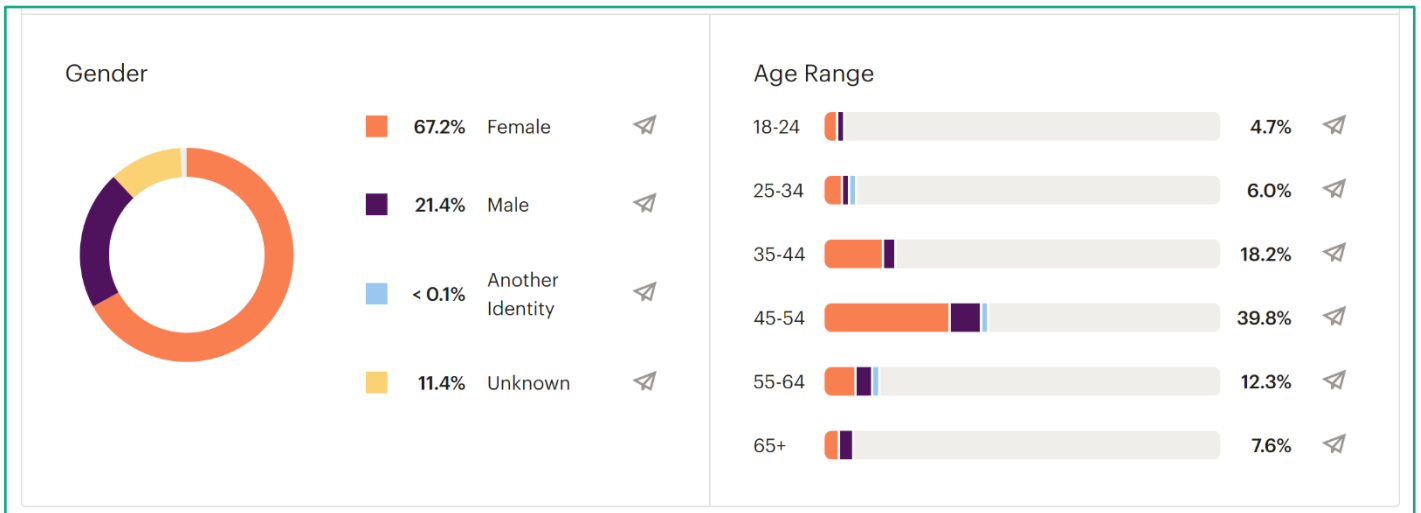
Number of emails sent: 20 November 2022 – 19 November 2023



Email Open rates: 20 November 2022 – 19 November 2023



Audience demographics: 20 November 2022 – 19 November 2023



Using unique powers to request data on children

The office's Research Team regularly draws on statutory powers conferred to the Children's Commissioner and her office in the Children Act (2004). The following powers have been the basis of much of the work produced by the office over the last three years, collecting data on a range of topics from several different organisations and public bodies. This data collection enables the production and publication of novel analysis across all the priority pillars which has subsequently guided the policy and advocacy work undertaken by the office.

Requests made under 2E of the Children Act

- (2) The Children's Commissioner, or a person authorised by the Commissioner, may at any reasonable time enter any premises, other than a private dwelling—*
 - (a) for the purpose of interviewing a child, or*
 - (b) for the purpose of observing the standard of care provided to children accommodated or otherwise cared for there.*
- (4) A person who enters premises under subsection (1) may interview any person present on the premises who works there.*

This statutory power has allowed the office to undertake visits and interviews in settings that would otherwise be inaccessible. These locations include the youth secure estate, hospitals and mental health facilities, hotels and intake centres where unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are being housed, residential children's homes and special schools.

These visits are essential for the office's advocacy work, and to ensure that children are being appropriately safeguarded, but they are also critical for research, as interviews in these settings ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable and often overlooked children are central to our publications.

One example of this is the 'Family contact in youth custody' annex of Part 2 of The Independent Family Review (2022). As part of this work, the office conducted a series of unannounced weekend visits, under Section 2E of the Children's Act 2004, to six youth custodial settings in England and Wales: three YOIs, 2 SCHs and 1 STC. Through the course of the visits, the team spoke to children and staff, to understand children's experiences of maintaining relationships with their families and wider social networks from

secure settings. The office also observed the extent to which establishments provided safe and supportive environments which replicate the protective effect of family life.

A further example is the visits and focus groups that were conducted as part of The Big Ambition. These covered less often heard or harder to reach groups, including: children in care living in a residential children's home, children in care living in unregulated accommodation, children in the youth justice system, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children in a secure mental health setting.

Requests made under 2F of the Children Act

2F - Provision of information to Commissioner

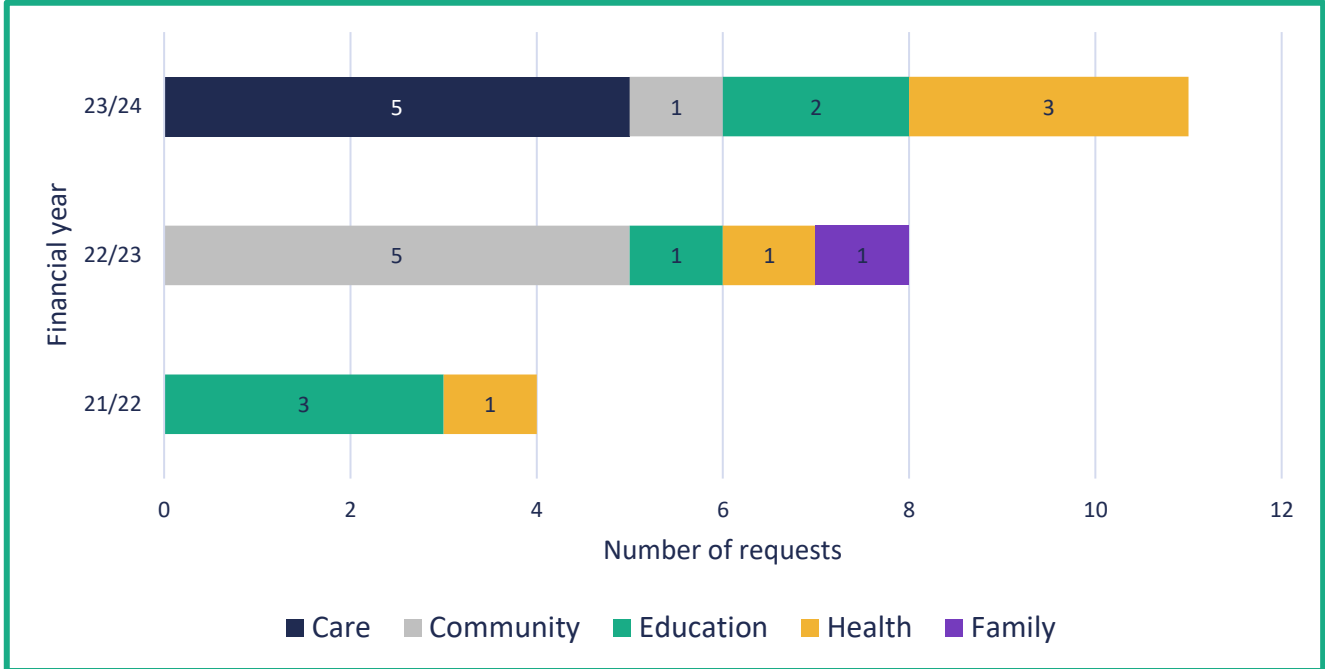
(1) Any person exercising functions of a public nature must supply the Children's Commissioner with such information in that person's possession relating to those functions as the Commissioner may reasonably request for the purposes of the primary function or the function under section 2D.

Data collection under section 2F has fallen into three broad categories:

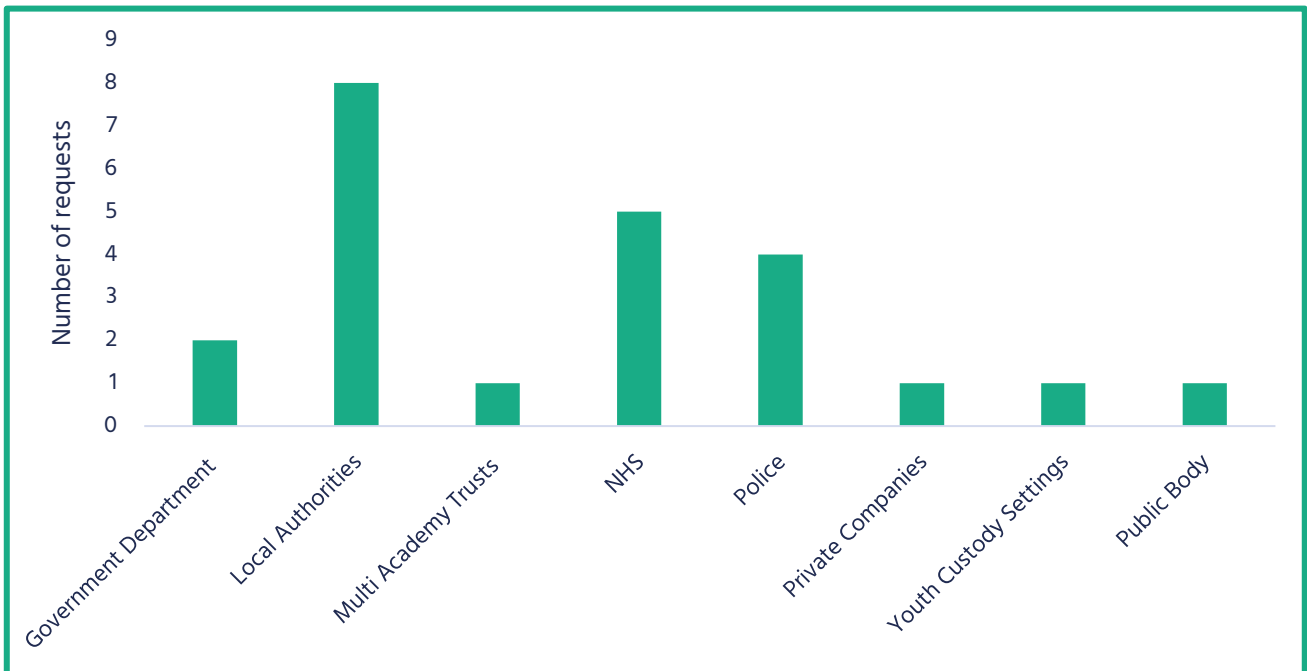
- Planned requests relating to specific projects or programmes of work as set out in the annual business plans
- Reactive or more informal requests for information to be shared in response to current events or for operational purposes
- Regular data sharing agreements with agencies that compile relevant datasets

The first of these covers the majority of data collection work undertaken by the office over the last 3 years. In total, **23** individual data requests have been sent using 2F. A breakdown of these by year, recipient and pillar is shown below.

2F Requests by pillar: 1 March 2021 – 31 March 2024



2F Requests by Recipient: 1 March 2021 – 31 March 2024



The benefit of this type of request is that it allows the office to conduct analysis that would not be possible elsewhere due to limited oversight of multiple data sources, or limited resource or appetite within the organisation that owns the data.

The office has produced novel insights by joining multiple datasets, for example as part of the Looked After Children Missing Education (2023) paper which joins local authority data on their Looked After Children to DfE’s CLA return, thus identifying 1,718 children in the CLA return who were missing from the data provided by local authorities.

Similarly, these requests have allowed the office to build databases that do not exist elsewhere which contain high levels of detail on issues children’s rights are not being upheld. Examples of this include a list of all 16- and 17-year-olds who presented as homeless to their local authority in the last financial year; all cases of strip searching of children across English police forces; and all destinations of children across local authorities who are off-rolled from school.

In some cases, this work has prompted other organisations to collect or analyse their own data differently, for example, the Home Office will now routinely collect police-force data on strip-searching of children.

Reactive uses of 2F powers have included requesting live data updates on the number of children being accommodated by the Home Office in hotels which has allowed the office to make several visits to these children over the last year, to offer advocacy and to guide policy work relating to the Illegal Migration Act.

The office currently has standing data sharing agreements with 2F the legal basis which means that the following unpublished data is provided to the office whenever it is collected:

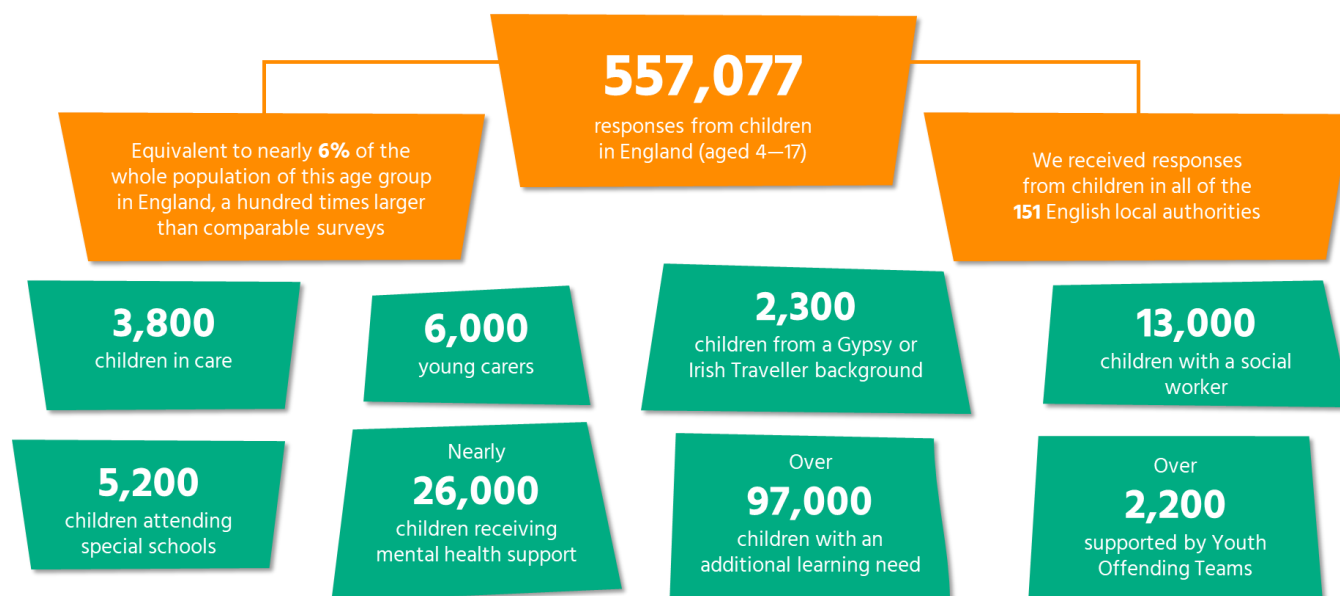
Organisation	Datasets
Department for Education	National Pupil Database Children In Need Census Children Looked After Census

	<p>School Census</p> <p>Alternative Provision Census</p> <p>Attainment records (National Pupil Database)</p> <p>Young Person's Matched Administrative Dataset</p> <p>Children's Social Work Workforce data</p>
Department for Work and Pensions	Annual Family Resources Survey
Ofsted	<p>Childrens homes provisionally rated inadequate</p> <p>Childrens homes contact details</p>

Strategic pillars

The objectives of the 3-year strategy have been shaped by what children and young people told us in **The Big Ask**. The office set out our aspirations for making England the best place in the world to grow up based on the seven priority areas that the survey highlighted. This research has given the office a unique data pool to draw on when setting business plan and project planning objectives.

The Big Ask in numbers



What children told us in The Big Ask

Better World

Children described an ambitious, socially conscious, and reforming vision of the world they want to live in. They wanted a society where everyone can succeed and said 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. Being treated fairly was another key theme that came up for children, with 1 in 5 children chose 'everyone being treated fairly'.

Children in care

For some children, care has given them new loving and supportive relationships around them. Nevertheless, it was clear that they are more likely to feel unhappy with their lives than other children. Their most pressing concerns revolved around how they were being cared for – including disagreements with decisions made about their lives by their corporate parents. Children in care predominantly wanted the things which many other children take for granted – like a stable, nurturing home, loving relationships and getting into and remaining in a good school. Their future worries were also magnified by the prospect of having to face early adulthood without the support networks most children have.

Community

A strong theme to come out of the Big Ask was children's desire to feel safe and confident in public spaces. One of the most frequently used words in The Big Ask was 'play.' Children said they wanted places for kids to play and have fun things to do. Yet some children wrote spoke concerns about safety. In particular, girls reported sexual harassment being a significant issue for them, affecting their confidence and happiness, and many spoke about the mental health impact of fearing sexual violence.

Children also said that the online world often does not feel safe. Children spoke about the threat of being contacted by strangers and about stumbling across distressing content without warning or context, which left them feeling ashamed and upset.

School

Children said they like school. Just 16% said they are unhappy with their life at school or college, and only one in ten are unhappy with their progress. During the pandemic children missed their friends, they missed their teachers, they missed activities, and they missed real classroom learning. Schools represented a place of learning but also a place of safety particularly for the most vulnerable children with the vast majority finding schools nurturing and supportive.

Children valued a good education as a life priority but also did not want that education to be wholly focused on academic subjects. A number of responses asked for vocational support and practical skills learning to be more widely available in schools.

Family

Family is of critical importance to children. The vast majority described a supportive environment at home, and many spoke warmly about the love and nurture they get from those at home. And they believe in family of all kinds – not just the nuclear family. Yet a picture emerged of children now seeing behind the curtain of adulthood, especially during lockdown, and absorbing the stresses and strains of their parents, siblings, and carers. Parents echoed this, talking about the pile-up of pressures at home and the ripple effect this can have.

Health and Wellbeing

Most children said they were happy. However, some children from across the country and social classes were worried about their mental wellbeing particularly how the online world was affecting them. Children wanted their needs to be taken seriously; to have someone to talk to when they have a problem, and to be able to engage in an environment which suits them without having to wait until the situation worsened.

Children also wanted good physical health, younger children in particular spoke about wanting to live healthy lifestyles and parents of babies and very young children wanted support to lay strong foundations for their child's mental and physical health.

Jobs and Skills

Children's top priority for the future was getting a good job or career. Children from every part of the country told us how ambitious they are for their futures and how they wanted to get on in life and succeed. Children felt that schools and employers should work together so that there are opportunities for children to understand the workplace and their options after education. They asked for: opportunities outside of school to participate in such as work experience and shadowing and a choice to pursue apprenticeships to give them the skills and training they need to get into work. Despite widespread education on careers and opportunities, children wanted some more guidance on how to get the right support to move into the workplace. Children with care experience need advice and support to raise their aspirations and guidance to achieve them.



A Better World

Children will feel listened to, and their views amplified.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

Putting children's voices at the heart of policy makers' agenda, particularly on issues which children tell the office they care the most about, including the environment and building a fairer society.

The office will work to achieve this through establishing two Advisory Boards – children and care leavers – who will engage with their peers and develop solutions to the most important issues to them. By asking children what they think, listening to what they say, acting on their views and making their priorities the office's priorities, the office will make sure children feel listened to.

Children's Advisory Board

The Children's Advisory Board was launched in December 2022, with children aged 10-15 years old joining from 10 schools across England. The voices, opinions and ideas of the children and young people on the Board have played a central role in shaping the office's work throughout 2023, advising on projects and running a survey of young people in their schools. Children from the Board also represented children across England on an international stage attending the children's meeting of the 94th session of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in February 2023 raising the issues facing children in England directly with the UN Committee.

To end their yearlong programme, the Board produced a new activity pack to support children across England when moving from primary to secondary school, which was sent to schools in preparation for the new term.

Care Experienced Advisory Board

The Care Experienced Advisory Board made up of 18–25-year-olds (care leavers), was launched in March 2023 with their first board meeting looking at what can make the children's social care system better for

children in England. The Board has since discussed and shaped the office's thinking of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's recommendation to make 'care experience a protected characteristic', reforms to the education system, support for the transition to living independently and access to mental health services.

The Board are currently looking at support for care leavers in higher education with the aim of creating of a care leavers higher education handbook which aims to set a minimum standard that all higher education providers should be offering to support care leavers who attend their institutions. This will be published before the next academic term.

Climate change and the environment

COP26 in 2021 was an incredible opportunity for the office to showcase our finding from The Big Ask on what children thought about climate change, and their ideas and solutions. COP26 President Alok Sharma responded to the publication of the Big Ask, saying that he had heard young people's concerns and had "relayed that message to governments, businesses and organisations wherever I go."

The office produced a children's guide to COP26 and slides for schools and the Commissioner attended the summit in person to help facilitate conversations and to share what we have learnt about children's views on these issues. Highlights included 'Teach the Teacher' event with Mock COP – a youth led climate change campaign – in which young people delivered a lesson on sustainability and climate change to the Commissioner, senior officials from the Department for Education and other guests.

Following COP26, the office continued to explore ways in which to engage children and young people in climate and environmental issues. This has included visits to schools to see how teachers are being supported to teach about nature and their impact on the world around them including with the then Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey MP in a visit to her constituency.

The office rounded off its climate and environmental work for this strategy period looking at 'green careers'. Building on the success of 'Where can I go with Maths'. The office produced a series of career profiles for children to explore.

The Big Ambition

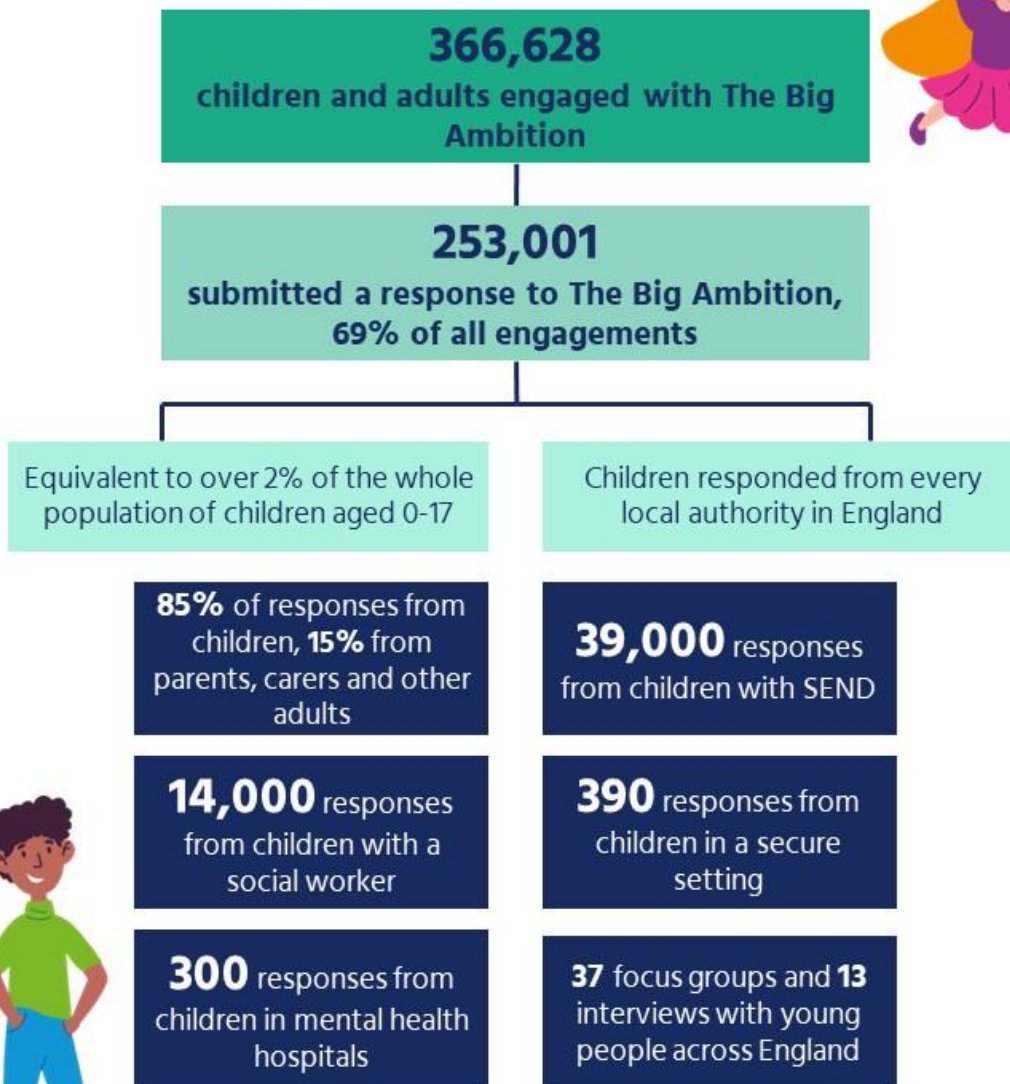
The Big Ambition was launched in September 2023 to ask children about their experiences, views and what they want government to do to improve their lives. Over 366,000 children and adults engaged with the online survey. It received responses for around 39,500 children with a special educational need and/or disability, and almost 14,000 children with a social worker. There were responses from every local authority in England, and from children of all ages. Alongside the survey, the office visited 40 locations focussing on groups of children who are harder to reach or who were less likely to be able to complete an online survey and hosted a series of policy roundtables to further explore the findings and emerging themes. In total, 15 roundtables were held between January and March 2024. These discussions brought together key policy and decision makers, experts, children, and the Children's Commissioner's youth ambassadors.

The final report and recommendations were published on 25 March and officially launched held at an event at the House of Commons. The report included:

- The Big Ambition for a Better World
- The Big Ambition for Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum
- The Big Ambition for Children's Social Care
- The Big Ambition for Education
- The Big Ambition for Families
- The Big Ambition for Health
- The Big Ambition for Jobs and Skills
- The Big Ambition for Safety from Crime
- The Big Ambition for Online Safety
- The Big Ambition for Youth Work



The Big Ambition in numbers



The Children's Commissioner's Ambassadors

The Children's Commissioner's Ambassadors programme was launched in December 2023 as part of our *The Big Ambition* campaign to give young people the chance to represent the views of their peers and children and young people across the country to Government and decision-makers. It is a one-year programme involving 16 Ambassadors aged 16 and 17 who have been chosen for their interest and passion to try to change issues that affect children and young people. They have already made a tremendous impact on our work including promoting *The Big Ambition* survey in their schools and communities, writing blogs, and co-hosting and participating in the policy expert roundtables and launch of *The Big Ambition* report.

The Ambassador programme will continue into the next business year with a new cohort of Ambassadors to begin their tenure in December 2024. Building on these programmes, we will codify our approach to participation and support others to listen and act on children's views.



Community

Children will have safe places to play and have confidence in the adults whose job it is to protect them.

Strategic Objective 2021-2024

Providing children with the time and space to play safely online or offline. Ensuring that children are supported to feel safe in their communities, particularly girls.

The office will contribute to achieving this goal through the Government commission on online safety, by placing children's voice and needs in the Online Safety Bill and aiming to shape the legislations passage. The biggest achievement in this space would be having a recognised role in legislation.

For creating safer communities, the office will work with and convene the NPCC and other organisations working with children to make sure that children trust and have confidence in the adults they turn to when they need help. Alongside this the office feeds into upcoming legislation, such as the Victim's Bill. And the office will advocate for children to have things to do in their local areas, feeding in to early stages of Government thinking in this space.

Online Safety

The office's achieved a momentous step forward in the passing of the Online Safety Act where the Children's Commissioner was enshrined in the legislation as a statutory consultee to Ofcom, overseeing the Codes of Practice which will be integral to the online safety regime.

This achievement reflected the extensive research and engagement undertaken taken by the office since 2021 to make the online world safer which has included:

- Commission by the then Secretaries of State at Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education in 2021 to explore how the online world can be made safer, both through the Bill and in advance of it. To understand the issues and how online platforms

can be made safer, the office consulted with children and young people through a series of focus groups and convened a workshop of 16-21-year-olds at the Department for Education.

- Based on the views of these young people, the office delivered a set of recommendations to strengthen the Online Safety Bill, four of which were accepted by Government in their rewrite of the Bill in March 2022. These were: full coverage of pornography sites under the Bill; a specific reference to the role of age assurance in protecting children online; strengthened powers for Ofcom to direct companies to scan for child abuse content on private messages; and a new offence of 'cyberflashing'.
- The Commissioner convened a series of roundtables of the social media and adult industries. The roundtables, which were attended by then Secretaries of State and Ministers across DCMS, Education and the Home Office, focussed on what more companies can be doing now ahead of online safety regulation to keep children safe online. This included in-depth discussion about the role of age assurance in protecting children from harmful content. Eight major platforms shared information with the Commissioner about children's use of their platforms and their estimation of children's exposure to harmful content. One tech firm who attended the roundtable announced a trial of improved age assurance methods on their social media platform.
- The office worked with children and young people to publish a guide for parents – "The things I wish my parents had known" – about sexual harassment and abuse online. The guide covered issues including pornography consumption, intimate image sharing and sexualised bullying. This was the most downloaded document on the Children's Commissioner's website last year, and the office has also received positive feedback from schools on its use in lessons about consent and respect online.
- A relentless campaign of lobbying through briefings to parliamentarians through every stage of the Bill's passing and keeping children's voices at the centre of debate through broadcast and print media.

Pornography

As part of online safety campaign, the office sought to understand the impact an unregulated online world was having on young minds and principally 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.

Findings from the young people and pornography report in January 2023 were reported widely in the media, including BBC R4's Today programme, ITV's Loose Women and BBC News at Six. It was also the subject of sustained media interest, with continued requests for interviews from high-profile national outlets, including with ITV's This Morning consumer programme to discuss our findings.

Peer on Peer Abuse

The findings from the office's research into pornography built a compelling case to explore the most serious possible consequences of unrestricted access to pornography in childhood – abuse. The office carried out unique analysis of hundreds of documents relating to the investigation of sexual violence between children, to understand more about the role that pornography plays at the sharpest end of child abuse cases. Using our data collection powers under the Children Act 2004 we collected 379 transcripts of video-recorded interviews with children who have been harmed and children who have harmed another child. These are interviews which are conducted under the Ministry of Justice's Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings (ABE) guidelines, where the recording is intended to be played as the witness's evidence in court.

In addition, we collected data, including paediatric safeguarding medical reports and referral forms from 123 Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC) – which are a specialist medical and forensic service for anyone who has been sexually abused, raped or sexually assaulted. In 50% of these documents – from

one police force and from one Sexual Abuse Referral Centre – we found reference to specific acts of sexual violence commonly found in pornography. We also examined a sample of these documents and found instances of both police and children drawing direct links between incidents of abuse and the abuser’s exposure to pornography. Importantly, this analysis was based on children’s own testimonies where they explained in their own words how pornography has impacted them personally.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

The office has contributed to National Police Chiefs Council task-and-finish group on combatting sexual violence through education. The group builds on Year 1 of the NPCC VAWG framework, with a focus on the prevention of harmful sexual behaviour in schools. The office also 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.

Victims Bill

When abuse does occur, the Victims and Prisoners Bill needs to ensure that every child victim of crime is entitled to support from specialist services which support them to safety and to understand the justice system. The Commissioner has 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 and the office has been working with incredibly brave victims and survivors of abuse to ensure their voices are heard in the development of this legislation, including the refreshed Victims Code of Practice in which we have brought together senior leaders to discuss how children’s needs and voices should be reflected in the Victims Code and roundtable discussions at the Ministry of Justice to input on how criminal justice agencies need to communicate the code to child victims. Through this work we hope to highlight the barriers children face to reporting crimes, the challenges of navigating the criminal justice system, and their experiences of support. Alongside this work, the office has proactively supported Daisy’s Law and was pleased to see this in the updated Victims Bill.

The office has also responded to the consultation on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme Review, to support an expanded definition of ‘crime of violence’ which includes other forms of child

sexual abuse, including online-facilitated sexual abuse, as well as amending the eligibility criteria for the scheme to include non-contact offences.

Policing

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 2023 alongside recommendations to improve data monitoring and collection when strip searching powers are used. There was significant media interest in this work with over 60 pieces of coverage including a Sunday Times splash and an exclusive BBC news package. National media led with the report over a period of three days and the findings raised as an Urgent Question in Parliament and debated in the House of Lords. Following our report, the College of Policing has agreed to review its guideline and we received a commitment from Government to closely consider the other recommendations.

Youth custody

The office has conducted a series of visits to children in youth custody setting to monitor welfare and 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. The office 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 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.



Family

Children will grow up in loving stable families, whatever form that takes, with services that empower them.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

Reframe the narrative on family and the services that should be provided for them, so children are seen as part of a wider family unit. Highlight the need to focus on families and gain support for families right from the earliest years.

The office's Government commissioned Family Review will look at what services work and how the family unit should be viewed by policymakers. The office will convene partners, professionals, policy makers and parliamentarians, designing frameworks and solutions to deliver for every child throughout the Review.

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 and 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: 'Utilising data to improve children's outcomes'; 'Outcomes framework; and Local integration of services'

The Family Review became a defining project for 2022, with more than 30 pieces of national media coverage and widespread commentary around the themes of family diversity, outcomes and service provision. Messages on the benefits of a stable family and creating positive familial relationships in the public services that support them have become a golden thread throughout all of the CCo communications since. Primarily, this was driven by four additional Family Review annexes (on military families, siblings separated in care, mental health institutions and youth custody), but also through our proposed reforms for childcare, work with the Government to steer its SEND and children's social care reforms and most recently in the Children's Commissioner's response to the Illegal Migration Bill

As March 2024, the office is still waiting on the government's response to our recommendations. In the interim, the office has continued to champion messages on the benefits of a stable family and creating positive familial relationships in the public services that support them.

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.



School

Every child will attend a fantastic school, every day, engaged and ready to learn which helps them all to leave school being able to read and write, as well as providing any additional support needed.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

Helping all children to succeed in school, particularly those with additional needs. Ensuring there is the right provision for children with special educational needs and a focus on support for those at risk of falling behind.

The office will contribute to achieving this goal through participation in the Attendance Action Alliance, our own policy work, using our influence to shape the design, delivery, and evaluation of Government policy. The office will feed into the upcoming Schools Bill and track the progress of the implementation the SEND Review. This will be done by making sure we contribute child-focussed, positive solutions to existing and emerging issues facing children.

Attendance

The office has 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); the Department for Education'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 November, the office published its 'Missing children, missing grades' report looks at the relationship between school attendance and academic attainment. Our research showed that school absence has become endemic in Key Stage 4. Over the last couple of years, over a third of all pupils in Key Stage 4 were either persistently or severely absent for at least one year. Our findings confirmed the strong link between absence and attainment with just 5% of children who were severely absent over Year 10 and 11 reaching the standard of passing 5 GCSEs. The office shared this report with MPs and Lords from all sides of the house with the Labour Party using the report to form the basis of their response to the King's Speech. The report provided a plan for system reform which was also informed by a series of regional roundtables on school attendance speaking with multi-agency leaders in Birmingham, Dudley, Westminster, Croydon, Hull, and Northeast Lincolnshire.

In January the office continued to keep the spotlight on attendance, starting the new year with a guest blog on tips for parents whose children who are struggling to attend school and a blog looking at the latest statistics from the Department for Education on the Autumn 2023 term. While the data showed an improvement on those persistently absent - 20.1% compared with 24.2% of pupils the previous year – this still shows that a fifth of children are regularly absent from school.

At the end of January, the office hosted a roundtable with Vicky Ford MP to talk about a Private Members Bill she is introducing to make the attendance guidance statutory. This would require schools to promote regular school attendance and require local authority services to work together to reduce absenteeism. While legislation would be an important step, we know from our attendance audit that attending school every day means not only services working together to address the barriers but also making sure that schools are great places for children to be. Throughout the last quarter of year the office have been visiting schools across the country to learn about what makes an effective pastoral support offer, as well as several focus group conversations with home educating families and local authorities as part of our research on the journeys out of school. The latter of which informed my response to the Government's call for evidence on home education.

Children missing from education

Complementing the office's drive to 100% attendance has been the exploring the drivers and causes of poor attendance and those that go missing from education completely. Far too little is known about

who these children are or how to help them, so the office has been conducting a bold programme of work exploring how children end up out of education, the consequences, and the possible interventions.

This has included a focus on children in care where in March 2022, the office found that 1,363 looked after children (2.7%) were missing from school. Children who are looked after are disproportionately more likely to not be in school. This research also showed that unaccompanied children seeking asylum, male children, older children, children with special educational needs, and children without stable care placements were more likely to be missing.

In February 2024 the office published my 'Lost in Transition - The destinations of children who leave the state education system' report which shined a new light on the vulnerabilities of children who left the state education system last year. For the first time, analysis has been carried out on the destinations, characteristics and educational histories of children who left state education. The report found that over 10,000 children left the state education system to destinations unknown to their local authorities in a year. Of the around 13,000 other children left the state education system for home education, these children were disproportionately more likely to have special educational needs or to come from disadvantaged areas. The report highlighted that in many cases parents are not opting for home education out of choice but rather a 'last resort' because they can't get the special educational support or mental health support that their children need.

SEND

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 office 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 on a series of policy recommendations and the Commissioner presenting evidence about the need for improved RSHE to the Women and Equalities Select Committee.



Care

Children in care will have the support to reach the same aspirations as all other children – a loving, stable home, a brilliant education, and grown-ups who love them into adulthood.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

The office has set out its vision for a children social care system, which we will continue to develop and champion, including a new approach, with a new, cross profession, 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, and no child growing up in an institution.

The office will contribute to achieving this goal by shaping the implementation of the Independent Children's Social Care Review, listening to children in care and making sure their voices are integral in our work and undertaking projects to devise practical solutions to the challenges they face.

Social care reform and improvement

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 has pushed for the government to focus on strengthening family relationships and investing in early intervention and 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.

The Children's Commissioner also gave evidence to the Public Services Committee to speak about the Government's Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, to represent children and young people's view and responded to Children's Social Care Outcomes Framework Consultation in September 2023 calling for a fully resourced strategy for nationwide improvement, so that every area is good or outstanding; improved cross-Government working; a Children Act that works for today and a clear and

cohesive alignment between the Children's Social Care Framework and SEND and Alternative Provision National Standard.

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 looking at '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. As well as conducting 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 included 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.

The office has also focused on what more can be done to support care leavers after they turn 18 which showed the foundations for all the things care leavers aspire to achieve are laid throughout their childhood, and their time in care. 'Vision for Care Leavers' sets out the office's 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. The office was glad to see the government's strategy made tangible commitments to care leavers, many of which the office had called for in its care leavers report.

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 overarchingly 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.

Recently the office also used its statutory data collection powers to collect data from local authorities in England to assess the extent of variation in the availability, quality, and effectiveness of advocacy

services across the country. This findings of which aims to inform a shift to an opt out model of independent advocacy.

Child in need plans

Children on child in need plans are the largest group of children supported by children's social care in England, these children are often highly vulnerable, and the problems faced by these children are incredibly varied. The range of challenges for children on child in need plans can vary – they might be a young carer, or being targeted for criminal exploitation, or have a parent struggling with substance misuse, or experiencing the domestic abuse of a parent, or they might be disabled. Getting the right support when children need it will not only help to make their lives happier and healthier but can also prevent things escalating to the point where a child might need to be taken into care.

In March 2024, the office published research which found the proportion of children in need with a child in need plan varied across local authorities. In one local authority, 70% of the children involved in children's social care were on child in need plans, while in another it was as low as 3.6% - suggesting a variation in thresholds for intervention across the country.

The report highlighted the need for consistent thresholds for assessment and support under section 17; improved data reporting to distinguish children who are being assessed for a child in need plan, from those awaiting an assessment, or who are on a child in need plan and better joined up support underpinned by a statutory duty to deliver universal early help provision.

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 office will shortly be publishing data that it requested in April this year on safeguarding practices across the hotels.

The office 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 and used multiple channels to raise these concerns about the impact of the Illegal Migration Bill (now Act) directly with the Home Office, in meetings with MPs and ministers, in parliamentary briefings and via multiple media statements, including two op-eds with the Times and a piece with the Sunday Times. The Rt Hon Theresa May specifically referenced the office's work in a Commons debate.

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 28 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. In November the office published a report which drew on data collected from the Home Office to show just how vulnerable unaccompanied children who were housed in contingency Home Office hotels are.

Homelessness

The office used its statutory to understand the numbers of young people who are presenting as homeless with findings in our report in November showing the numbers are concerning, with around 6,500 16- and 17-year-olds reported to be presenting as homeless last year. More concerning was that the majority of children accommodated were not taken into care, as statutory guidance is clear they should be. The office has raised this with the Department of Education and will continue to interrogate why this is not happening.

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 11,700 times.

It has grown over the past year with 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. Projects that care experienced young people have founded and participated in have including sharing 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.



Health

Children will grow up feeling happy, healthy and well, with access to support quickly and locally when they need it.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

Prioritising children's health and wellbeing, including mental and physical health, with a focus on increasing access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time. There should be Mental Health Support Teams in every school by 2025 and a 'Whole School Approach' to mental health. Children who need acute care should receive it whenever and wherever they need it most.

The office will contribute to achieving this goal through shaping the Government's Mental Health Strategy. Alongside this, the annual report on children's mental health services by CCG area will shine a light on NHS care. And, through convening partners, the NHS, professionals, police makers and parliamentarians the office will make sure children's health is a priority for everyone. In particular, through work with DHSC the office will aim to make sure Integrated Care Systems support children's needs. The office will also adopt a policy position on childhood obesity to help affect change.

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 office 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.

The start of February 2023 marked Children's Mental Health week where the office highlighted the importance of children's voice and access to advocacy services and Place2Be's Principal Educational Psychologist, Dr Julia Clements, shared tips and advice for parents and carers supporting their children's mental health. This was followed by the publication of the annual mental health report in March which showed shocking new statistics show that more than a quarter of a million (270,300) children and young people are still waiting for mental health support after being referred to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) in 2022-23. The analysis also uncovered geographical variations in waiting times across the country, from an average of 147 days in Sunderland to just four days in Southend. The recommendations from the report included a bold, strategic 10-year plan for children and young people's mental health, to ensure fewer children experience mental ill-health, and all who do receive excellent care.

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.

Waiting times has also been a recurring theme by the Children's Commissioner in visits to three children's hospitals – in Liverpool, Sheffield and London, where the Commissioner discussed children's health inequalities and innovations in health data infrastructure, as well as the worrying increase in STIs among children and young people which the Commissioner raised with the Chief Medical Officer, and through presenting evidence about the need for improved RSHE to the Women and Equalities Select Committee.

Vaping

In June 2023, the office responded to the Department for Health and Social Care's 'Youth vaping: call for evidence' consultation. In this report, the office drew together findings from The Big Ask to support existing research that the likelihood of vaping amongst children increases with age. When asked in the survey what the Government should do to make children's lives better, both children and parents mentioned vaping, its health risks, and the need to stop children from vaping, for example through enforcing bans. Parents also highlighted the need to prevent vapes from attracting children using packaging and flavourings, while children mentioned that vaping negatively affected their experiences at school.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders, such as bulimia, anorexia, and binge-eating, are serious mental health problems that can severely affect the quality of life of children and their families. In August 2023, the office's analysis found that the NHS is currently missing the 95% target of seeing urgent cases of eating disorders within the target time frame. The office contributed this, and its mental health findings to the Department for Health and Social Care's Major Conditions Strategy, calling for the merging of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan with other major conditions in this strategy and an urgent need to focus on children's mental health is not diluted.

Disability

Last month the office published its report on disability in childhood, which was submitted as evidence to the Cabinet Office's consultation on its Disability Action Plan. 'We all have a voice – disabled children's vision for change' showed clearly that young people of all backgrounds and abilities, right across the country, aspire to the same things. However, some children face additional barriers to achieving their

goals such including how they are treated by others and getting the right support consistently, and early on.



Jobs and Skills

Children will have access to the support they need to become successful adults, including helping them to get good jobs and have careers that fulfil their goals. They are ambitious for their futures as well as their present.

Strategic objective 2021-2024

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. The office will also focus specifically on care leavers and helping them to meet their ambitions.

The office will contribute to achieving this goal through establishing a care leaver's Advisory Board to raise the profile of issues facing care leavers. Alongside this, the office will work across the sector to improve the access to high quality careers education and making sure children and young people understand how they can feel more involved in achieving their goals and ambitions.

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. 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.

The office has published a number of guides and blogs through the main website and IMO including a guest blog by a member of team who shared their own tips for care leavers joining the workforce and most recently 'Empowering Young Ambitions: The Benefits of Part-Time Jobs for School Aged Children' exploring the benefits and opportunities for young people to get experience of jobs and build their skills.

Throughout January and February the office held a series of round tables and interviews with young people who have attending Alternative Provision (AP) schools to explore their employment outcomes and post-16 journeys. This will inform a report that will help us have a clearer understanding of what support is needed for AP schools to ensure better post-16 outcomes.

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