

GIVING ALL CHILDREN  
**A VOICE**

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THREE YEAR STRATEGY  
2024-2027



“

During my tenure, I want my work to improve the chances of every single child, whatever their early standing in life, wherever they are, from the inner city to the most remote corner of every county in England.”



That quote is from my first day as Children's Commissioner on 1 March 2021. Three years on and we have made great strides, reaching more than a million children, young people, parents, carers and professionals. From The Big Ask to The Big Ambition, we have heard from children and young people in every local authority in England – 10% of all children in the country - using what they told us to drive change to improve the outcomes of every child, wherever they live and whatever their background.

Every day I hear from children and young people about the barriers and challenges they face getting support to help them, particularly those with additional vulnerabilities and those in care. These conversations have shaped and informed my work and that of my office, spurring me on every day over the past three years - and they will continue to inspire me for the next three.

This strategic plan, which takes us to the end of my term as Children's Commissioner in 2027, is driven by children have told us, focused around the areas where I believe that my unique independent position and statutory powers can achieve the biggest changes.

Over this period my mission, underpinning all of my strategic priorities, will be to make sure every child feels

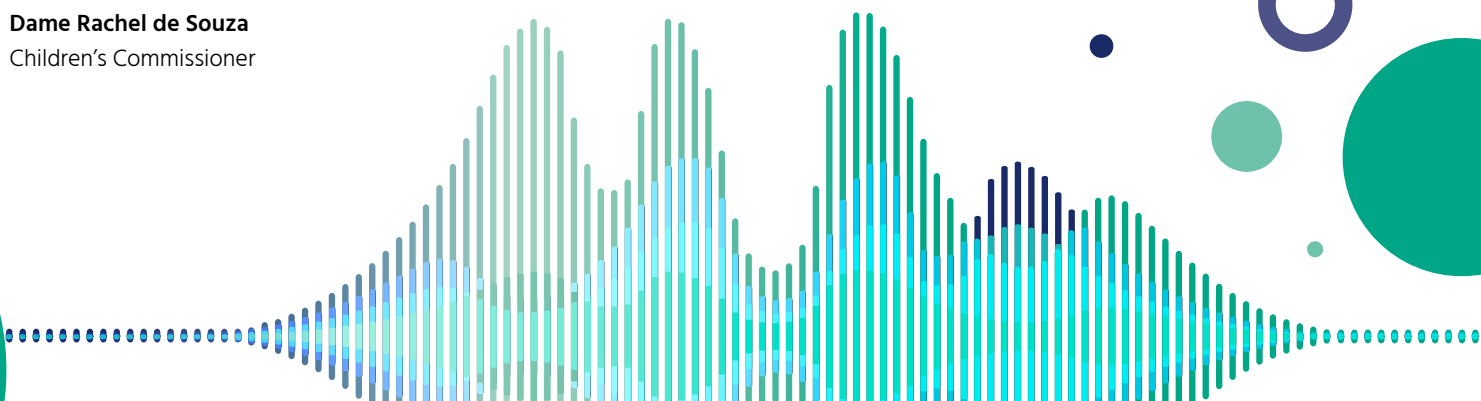
listened to by the adults that make decisions about their lives; that they are empowered have their say and use their voices to drive change. I have called on our political leaders to match the level of ambition that children that have for themselves, creating effective, caring public services and policies that deliver the support that children have told us they need – and always listening to their voices and experiences.

Building capacity and capability will be key to delivering on this mission. Whilst this objective in my plan is focused on how my team will do this to deliver for children, I strongly believe that it is essential objective for all. Everyone who works with children has a collective responsibility to work together, taking an active role in creating an agile and inclusive system that puts children's needs and voices at its heart.

I am grateful to all the organisations, statutory agencies and policy makers who have worked with my office and I to bring about change since 2021, and for their dedication to the task at hand. There is so much more to do – and I look forward to working further with them to make it happen.

Finally, most importantly, my thanks goes to the million children we have interacted with since 2021. Your voices, views and experiences are at the heart of this mission.

**Dame Rachel de Souza**  
Children's Commissioner



## ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

The post of Children's Commissioner was created following a recommendation made by Lord Laming in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry. The role was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for understanding what children and young people think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to always take their best interests into account. The Commissioner's statutory remit includes unique data gathering powers and powers of entry to talk with children and gain evidence, to enable her to help bring about long-term change and improvements for children.

The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner, and gave her special responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social care services. She also speaks for wider groups of children on non-devolved issues including immigration (for the whole of the UK) and youth justice (for England and Wales).

Dame Rachel de Souza began her tenure as Children's Commissioner on 1 March 2021. This strategic plan marks the halfway point through her six-year term. As well as a team of staff, the Commissioner is supported in the delivery of her strategy by her Advisory Board, Audit and Risk Committee and children and young people advisory and participation groups.

The Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand service provide support and advice for children in care, leaving care, living

away from home or working with children's services. Their casework is also used to inform policy work at a national level alongside In My Opinion (IMO), a platform for teenagers in care and for care leavers to share their experiences and stories.



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## OUR APPROACH



### Champion for children

Champion the rights of all children, amplifying their voices and making sure that their interests and needs are at the forefront of government thinking, political debate and policymaking.



### Listen

Engage with children in their environments to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and employ our statutory powers to gather data and conduct interviews, to ensure children's perspectives and concerns are not only listened to but understood.



### Advocate

Advocate for the needs of vulnerable children, especially those in care or in contact with social services; reforming and shaping a system that is attentive and responsive to both their individual and collective needs and where all children have an equal opportunity to succeed.



### Engage and Influence

Spearhead effective and innovative policy solutions that will directly improve the lives of children and work with policy experts and leaders in the design, implementation and evaluation of children's policy.

## INFORMING OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy has been informed by more than a million children, young people, parents, carers and professionals we have heard from in surveys, focus groups, roundtable discussions, visits and interviews over the past three years. These have included:

### The Big Ask

Over half a million children told us how they felt about their lives coming out of the pandemic and their hopes and concerns for the future.



### The Big Summer Survey

Over 15,000 children told us about how they spent their summer holidays and who they would turn to for support with family life.



### The Independent Family Review

A survey of 3,000 parents with children 0-17 alongside an extensive programme of visits with family hubs, Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programmes, baby and toddler groups and schools and youth groups who told us about their experiences with specific types of family support.



### The Big Ambition

Over 366,000 children engaged with the survey and told us about what they feel needs to be done to make the lives of children in England better.



## OUR MISSION

Promoting and protecting the rights of all children; using their voices to affect change for a bright future.



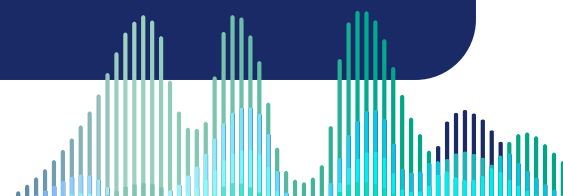
Make sure every child feels listened to by the adults that make decisions about their lives

Empower children to have their say

Improve the design and delivery of children's policy and services

Drive change that keeps children safe and able to thrive

Build capacity and capability



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### **Make sure every child feels listened to by the adults that make decisions about their lives**

We will share existing data and use our statutory powers to reveal systemic issues and new insights that will increase knowledge and understanding on the issues that matter to children and their solutions to how their lives can be made better. We will reach out to children and young people across the country to ensure our data is representative of their perspectives on an ever-changing world and the challenges they face.

We will do this by creating an open survey function on our website for children to share their views and ideas with us anonymously and at any time. We will drive improvement to advocacy access and standards for children in care or involved with social services through increased our Help at Hand service, outreach, and work with stakeholders.

### **Empower children to have their say**

We will stand up for the right of all children to have their voices heard in national debate. Using our unique convening powers, we will facilitate ways in which children can share their views directly with policymakers and create resources for children of all ages and backgrounds to demonstrate how their feedback and voice drives change.

We will do this by creating resources for all new publications where we have used data from what they have told us. We will conduct visits, focus groups and interviews in every local authority, continually ensuring our work is truly representative of children and young people from across England.

### **Improve the design and delivery of children's policy and services**

We will champion reforms that improve the consistency in service provision to ensure no matter where a child lives, joined up services will provide the highest standards of care, with a child-up rather system-down approach. We will strive for a system where no child or family falls through the gaps in a siloed system and struggles to support themselves.

We will do this by ensuring government responses or commitments are made to all our policy recommendations. We will increase the level of responses to government consultations and parliamentary inquiries. These will be tracked in a consultation tracker and published on our website.

### **Drive change that keeps children safe and able to thrive**

We will use our role, overlooking the whole sphere of education, health, and social care and our credibility as an authority regarding children, to promote enhanced data collection practices and call for a consistent unique identifier that will protect and support children and their families from their earliest years.

We will do this by creating a central database for the children's data we hold grouped by local authority and parliamentary constituencies for all partners and stakeholders to use. We will meet with every ministerial department to address the barriers to effective data sharing.

### **Build capability and capacity**

We will work with a collective purpose as a team, acting in a collaborative way both within our office and with wider stakeholders, and ensuring the quality of our outputs. We will foster a creative, agile and inclusive working environment, delivering value for money by making use of innovative technology and resources and constantly looking for ways to improve how we deliver our work.

We will do this by implementing a people strategy that demonstrates our commitment to equity and inclusivity. This will include a care-experienced guaranteed interview scheme and flexible working arrangements for kinship carers. We will commission regular internal audits of our operations to continually ensure we are meeting the highest standards of governance and best practice.



## OUR PILLARS

In the delivery of our objectives our ambitions for every child will guide our thematic work:



### Better World

Every child is treated fairly irrespective of where they live, who they live with or their background in all aspects of their life. All children feel empowered to speak out about issues that they care about and have their thoughts, feelings, views, and ambitions not only listened to but translated into meaningful change.



### Children's Social Care

Every child involved with children's social care is truly listened to; has a loving and stable home; and access to a safety net of support that continues beyond 18. Any child who needs secure care receives it in an integrated, homely environment.



### Community

Every child feels safe in their home, school, relationships and local area and is prevented from being affected by violence and criminality. Child victims of crime receive specialist care and support and feel safer after an interaction with the justice system.



### Family

Every child grows up in a loving and supportive family, who has what they need to support them, including high quality support in the early years. No child grows up in poverty



### Education

Every child is able to access a brilliant education and attend a school every day. When children need additional support to engage in education, it is easy to access with children with special educational needs receiving excellent, joined up healthcare, social care and education.



### Health

Children's ill-health is prevented, and additional help is provided as early as possible. This includes high-quality mental health support in schools and communities and excellent, joined up healthcare, social care and education for disabled children and children with special educational needs. Children with the most acute needs living away from home receive loving and caring support



### Jobs and Skills

Every young person, no matter their background, is equipped with the life skills they will need as adults and given the support they need to secure their dream job through access to high-quality careers advice, information, and guidance which is tailored to their interests





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