

# Ambitious For Children

2016/17



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## An introduction from the Commissioner

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**Whether you're a parent, grandparent, carer or family member, professional, policy-maker or part of the wider community, you have a vital role to play in making England a great place for children to grow up in.**



**You also reap the rewards from doing so. This is the view I expressed in *Ambitious for Children* which set out my priorities for the next five years – the areas in which my work will catalyse demonstrable improvement for our nation's children.**

This is the first year of implementation of the plan, which I hope will inspire others to join us in achieving it. The activities outlined in it are being delivered against a backdrop of opportunities and challenges for children. For many, opportunities have never been greater. Yet children often tell us how complicated life feels for them with 24-hour communication, pressures from the consumer world, pressures on time and pressure to succeed. My work will highlight the importance of childhood and identify how and where services and support need to improve. It will also highlight how we can provide children with the best opportunities possible and design with others new approaches that put children's needs and best interests at the heart of everything that affects their lives. We introduce below, for example, new activities to embed a child-centred approach to everyday life, from providing support for Children in Care Councils to creating Child Friendly Cities.

Nationally and locally, I want an emphasis on improving the odds and life chances of the two million children who face the most complex challenges to become the defining mission of all of those who can make a difference and a core priority for Government and local authorities. I would like the public, voluntary and commercial sectors to sign up to the reforming zeal needed to break the cycle of disadvantage and systemic barriers that we know limit so many vulnerable children's lives.

From schools, social care and health, early years, the police and those involved in custody, I want to work with every public service to stretch every sinew in a combined mission to transform opportunities for the most disadvantaged children.

To help the Children's Commissioner to understand children's lives and effect improvement, the role has unique powers to capture data about children held by public bodies and to enter premises other than private homes to talk to children. I will be seeking to use these powers extensively. Over the coming year, I will work systematically to identify and improve the support children need to help them overcome and break the cycle of disadvantage. I want to ensure all children have the opportunities and support they need to flourish. Disadvantage is not inevitable and can be overcome. Our mission will be to change the odds for those most in need.

This year I will be ambitious for children and these are my commitments. I look forward to working with you to make them happen.

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**"Over the next five years I will advocate for positive change for all children and particularly those who are most disadvantaged. Every child has a right to the best childhood possible."**

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Longfield".

**Anne Longfield, OBE**  
Children's Commissioner for England

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## About the Children's Commissioner for England



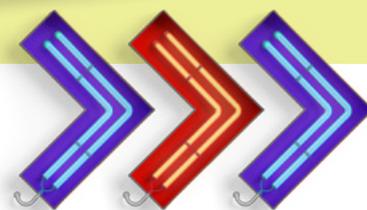
**“It’s usually adults who are asked for their views, so I thought it was good that young people were asked what we thought about things. We are the future generation so I think it’s important.”** Megan 16

The post of Children’s Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. Her remit includes listening to what children and young people say about things that affect them and encouraging adults making decisions to always take their views and interests into account. She has unique data gathering powers and powers of entry to talk with children to gain evidence to support improvement. The Children and Families Act 2014 strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner.

Anne Longfield is the first Commissioner to be appointed since the introduction of the new legal framework for the Commissioner to promote and protect children’s rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The 2014 Act also strengthens the Children’s Commissioner’s responsibilities towards children in care and other vulnerable groups.

The Children’s Commissioner’s unique powers enable her to help bring about long-term change and improvements for children, in particular the most vulnerable, including those who are in care. She is the ‘eyes and ears’ of children in the system and is expected to carry out her duties ‘without fear or favour’ of Government, children’s agencies, nor the voluntary or private sector.

The views, experiences and engagement of children and young people are at the centre of our work through advisory and expert groups; new digital and creative engagement; immersion visits to local areas; partnerships with Children in Care Councils and the views and experiences of children and young people who use the services we visit. We have also established the **Children’s Commissioner’s Young Team** which brings together the wider group of children and young people we regularly work with.



**Children have unique and expert perspectives on their own lives. In the coming year I will bring their experiences and opinions to the public debate, encouraging all those who have responsibilities for children to build a better understanding of their lives and views into decision-making. I will also act on this evidence to drive improvement for children.**

### Our Childhood

I have been delighted to agree a creative partnership with children's media organization, **First News**. Working together, we will be capturing and broadcasting a unique insight into what growing up in England today is like. **Our Childhood** will capture on film the life experiences of children, encouraging thousands of young people to make and upload their own video content to illustrate and curate what it means to be a child.



### Growing Up Digital taskforce

My **Growing Up Digital taskforce** aims to help to transform the way children engage with the internet to improve children's digital learning; to provide better legal back up and online support; and new online rights linked to the **United Nations Convention** on the Rights of the Child.

I am excited to be working with **Children's BBC** to develop a new interactive way for children, parents, carers and teachers to learn about and champion children's digital rights. In addition to children participating in this work, an expert advisory group of parents has been established to input into it. I will also establish an expert panel to give parents advice on helping to keep their children safe online.



## Takeover Challenge

**Takeover Challenge** brings mass participation to the workplace enabling children to build their skills and get an insight into the world of work, and unleash the talents of children and young people onto organisational decision-making. Challenges in schools, hospitals, businesses, charities and the creative industries will take place throughout the year with young challengers leading the way.



## Growing Up North

**Growing Up North** will identify the challenges and opportunities faced by millions of children raised in the North of England. The project will focus on and promote the opportunities provided by the Northern Powerhouse and regional regeneration to dramatically improve the potential and aspirations for children who grow up in the north.



## Increasing website traffic

I will increase awareness of children's views and interests by **increasing traffic to our website** by 50%; increasing positive media coverage of our work by 30%; achieving a 100% increase in social media followers; and increasing the number of children who know about the Children's Commissioner by 20%.

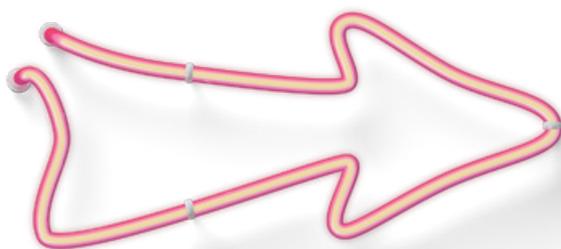
I am also committed to ensuring that 25% of children in care know about the help provided through our **advice service**, rising to 95% by 2018 and to ensuring that 200,000 children engage with my work digitally by 2018.



**Being ambitious  
for every child in care**



**Children who are in care will have had some of the biggest challenges as they set out on life but like all children, with love, bespoke support and encouragement they have a bright future ahead of them.**



Despite recent improvements, too many children in care move placements too often; too many leave care before they are ready to; and too many suffer from the high turnover of social workers. Many also say that they are not consulted when decisions are made about them and do not receive the therapeutic support they need.

Over the next five years I am seeking to instigate a seismic shift in ambition for all children in care which puts the child, continuing and constant relationships, and a focus on recovery at its heart.

I will publish the State of the Nation for **Children in Care**, the national survey of the views and experiences of children in care to increase understanding of the challenges these children face and indicate to policy-makers and practitioners practical solutions.

I will publish an annual **Stability Index** which will not only improve knowledge about the number of unsettling placement moves children in care experience also dramatically increase the ability to assess the experience of care.

I am also delighted to relaunch **Help at Hand**, our helpline for children in care and those living away from home. Available by phone and online, the service provides expert help and representation for children.

All young people in secure training centres and children's homes will be able to access the service through a number already inputted into phones and children in care will start to be given the number on arrival into care.

**By the end of the year 25% of children in care will know about the service, increasing to most children in care next year.**



I am working with young people to improve communication and the quality of contact between children in care and social care staff. A **'Children's Pledge'** will be launched in the autumn to establish standards of courtesy and professionalism for professionals working with children in care.



**#CICCMeeTups** is my new programme of activity to meet and support regional gatherings of Children in Care Councils (CICC). Held in a different region each month, it provides a focus for the regional CICC community and helps connect CICCs across the country through social media and the web. Members of Children in Care Councils will join me to meet with decision-makers and Parliamentarians.

**In the summer** my work will focus on pathways to employment for children in care through apprenticeships. From this summer onwards, I will be using my powers of data collection to establish a gold standard dataset which will, over time, help to identify the drivers of need for children in care and in need. The dataset will combine information from central and local government to improve understanding of the issues facing children and services to help them overcome the challenges they face.

# Seeing a major reduction in children being harmed and neglected

## Tackling child neglect and sexual abuse are two of the most important issues that society faces.

**Whilst major gains have been made in recent years, too many children remain unprotected without the adults around them seeing or adequately acting on the harm they are at risk of or currently experiencing. I will help to ensure public bodies, charities and communities do all they can to protect children from harm.**

My ground-breaking work to investigate child **sexual abuse and neglect** will continue. It will include researching, identifying and securing support for effective new models and alignments of services and professionals around vulnerable children, including the police, health services, schools and local authorities and making recommendations to drive down child sexual abuse and reduce the long-term harm it causes.

The evaluation of the **See Me Hear Me** model of child-centred prevention and protection which is currently being piloted in three local authorities will be published in the autumn.

After visiting Iceland and hearing of its success first hand, I am keen to see the development of the **Barnahus** model in the UK. The 'children's house'

brings together professionals under one roof to gather evidence and provide support to children who may have been abused, reducing the risk of re-traumatising them through the process and dramatically increasing the rates of prosecution of perpetrators. Three pilots will begin next year and I will be working with the police and partners to identify more areas to follow.

I will investigate barriers to the effective monitoring of the prevalence of **Female Genital Mutilation** to improve practice so that more children who are at risk get the help they need.

In May, I published a **lightning review of mental health support for children and young people** which showed that over a quarter of referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are turned away - this includes 14% with life threatening conditions. Where they are accepted for treatment, many face long waiting lists of up to six months. Further research will focus on mental health and vulnerable children this year.



In June, in partnership with NSPCC, I published evidence of the **negative impact of viewing pornography on children**. I will continue to highlight ways to equip children with the understanding they need to overcome harm that viewing pornography may cause and to reform the industry to protect children.





**The Children's Commissioner has brought together Police and Crime Commissioners and Government officials to explore ways of piloting the Icelandic Barnahus approach to helping children who have been sexually abused in England.**

Positive childhoods

Ambitious for children in care

Reducing children being harmed

Reducing inequalities for children

Children at the heart

## Reduce inequalities for children and break the cycle of disadvantage



**In spite of enormous gains for some, one in four children in the UK lives in relative income poverty; an estimated 500,000 families are 'just coping,' and many more have limited life chances because of the need and disadvantage they face. I am determined to help change the odds for vulnerable children to help them overcome disadvantage and boost life chances.**

I will put forward proposals to **improve life chances for disadvantaged children** in the early years.

I will help to ensure **young carers and their families get more support** as they grow up by identifying how they can be better supported so that their outcomes improve.

A lightning review this summer will investigate and **promote the role of school nurses** in a bid for all disadvantaged children to get the health support they need.

I will also look at way in which **children of prisoners** can be helped to build and maintain positive relationships with their parents so that their futures are less likely to be affected by having a parent inside.

My programme of visits to meet and hear from **children at risk and in trouble with the law** including those in custody and rehabilitation will continue. My aim is to help further reduce the number of children in custody through improved prevention and to encourage the provision of services that actively promote the life chances of children who have been in contact with the criminal justice system through improved education and mental health support.

I will investigate how **disabled children in residential homes and hospitals** are supported.

I will work with **Children's Commissioners in Greece, France and other European countries** to help unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees to be reunified with their families where legally possible. I will also continue to highlight and promote positive practice to support unaccompanied children arriving in England.



**Children's lives do not always fit the rigid structures of Government however well-intentioned those structures may be. As a result, policies often do not have the impact they should have. Governments – national and local – and their partners often struggle to meet the needs of children in a connected way and children's needs and views are often overlooked by decision-makers. I want to help ensure that children's views and experiences drive national and local agendas.**

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Throughout the year I will gather good practice that improves the lives of children in different cities and regions. In 2017, national events will share and showcase this good practice and begin to build a network of child-friendly cities and towns.

I will also develop and pilot new models of children's participation for schools, charities and local councils. **Children Create** will help involve children in decision-making about the things that matter to them.

The UN has set out ambitious recommendations to further children's rights following the periodic review of the UN Convention on the **Rights of the Child** to ensure the UK's compliance. I will monitor and put forward positive proposals to support implementation.





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