

The Childhood Lottery

The hardest places to grow up in England

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CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

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Foreword from Dame Rachel De Souza



Every day in England, on average, about 1,600 children are born.

After a short time, something defining happens to those children. They leave hospital and travel home.

This will be the most important journey of their lives.

Where that journey ends, in what postcode, will define who they will become, because of what they experience and the variation in the services which will be available to them.

Young people know this better than anyone. I've spoken to many thousands of children across England. Whether we're in a school in Dewsbury or a skatepark in Norwich, one thing remains the same. They don't talk about government policy and deride Westminster debates – they tell the story of their lives through the places they live in, the services they turn to and the outcomes they see around them. That is the lens I wanted to look at childhood through.

Throughout my time as Children's Commissioner, I have used data to expose the greatest challenges facing children – from police strip searching children to young people trapped in hospitals. But this time I have not taken one measure or metric – I have looked at more than 160. This gives us a unique perspective, a ground-up view of children's lives and the challenges they face which allows the connections between education, health and safety to be seen.

I have called the report the Childhood Lottery, because of the enormous disparities I have found – both between places and within an area.

The differences are staggering.

In four local authorities, the total amount spent on youth services per teenager is the princely sum of £0, £421 less than in the highest spending local authority. Some areas of the country are sending nearly 90% of their looked after children to out-of-area placements, compared to the almost 20% in the areas making least use of these – although given this means being away from family ties, and friends, that is still worryingly high.

But what stands out is not merely these differences, but how much work there is to do to deliver a happy, healthy childhood in every postcode. I have made the difficult decision to highlight the 20 places where it is hardest to grow up. I want to be clear that this is not a review of the local authority, this is an assessment based on a wide range of measures looking at the challenges faced, the full range of services available and the outcomes we see.

We cannot shy away, though, from the fact that poor education outcomes, long health waiting lists or simply feeling unsafe converge in particular places. It is also no coincidence that as Children's Commissioner I have already visited many of them. I hope by presenting the data in this new way we can shine a light on the local, regional and national action needed to improve children's lives in these areas.

At the same time, I want to make clear that every single local area in England has work to do to make lives better for their children. This includes the 20 places where data show childhood is least hard, like Leicestershire, where access to Mental Health Support Teams is lowest in England. All regions are represented in the 25 places where the data shows childhood is hardest, including Middlesbrough in the north east, Bradford in Yorkshire and the Humber, Hounslow in London, Peterborough in the east of England, Liverpool in the north west, Somerset in the south west, Nottingham in the east Midlands, and Birmingham in the west Midlands. We have an opportunity to change this. The government is planning a once-in-a generation rewiring of the state to devolve power and spending to communities. I am putting forward a test for devolution: will it deliver for children? Will it ensure that children in every postcode can thrive? Will it reduce – end – the disparities shown in this report?

I visit children across England, to speak to them wherever they may be – YOIs, Tier 4 Wards to schools and youth clubs. Some of the things I have seen and heard recently have utterly disgusted me. Two weeks ago, based on some of the data in this report, I visited Middlesbrough, to hear from children in one of the most difficult places to be a child.

I have seen what it looks like for children to grow up in a difficult place. I have listened to a 14-year-old girl tell me about the crime statistics in her local area. Children should not have to know those statistics. Their parents should not have to talk about them over dinner to explain why children cannot play outside. Schools should not have administrative staff dealing with drug overdoses and racist thugs. Nowhere in England should 'a chase from the police' be a primary source of entertainment.

Devolution represents a chance to solve this. If it is truly a project to rewire the state, there may not be an opportunity so significant in a decade or more.

Giving power to local decision makers should lead to more responsive public services. This data shows that no two areas are the same. Local policy makers and those delivering services must be able to react to the challenges their children face to improve their lives.

For that to work, mayors and local decision makers must be given the right tools to improve children's lives including access to centrally held data, funding to accompany new responsibilities and clearly defined minimum standards.

And where these standards are not being hit, I have called for something that I have deliberately avoided for much of my time as Children's Commissioner. On the whole, I have resisted the call to reduce everything to funding; focusing as much on delivery of resources, and accountability for outcomes, as the quantity of them.

I cannot do that here.

The extent of failure is too great. I cannot see what I have seen, here and over my six years as Commissioner, and see the status quo as anything less than a national emergency. As such, I firmly believe that a national Children's Emergency Fund must be established, to bring services above a minimum level wherever they are found to be below par.

But the placement of greater power – and funding – in local areas must go hand-in-hand with greater local accountability. Every strategic authority should appoint a Deputy Mayor or designated leader for

children and families to drive improvements in outcomes for children across their region, convene local authorities where progress is falling short, and be empowered with the responsibility and resources to intervene when outcomes are not being delivered.

We cannot tolerate the status quo. Children care so deeply about where they live – that is why I have undertaken this work.

Local, regional and national decision makers need to take a hard look at this data and understand what they need to change so that they can start delivering for children.

Children are proud of their local area. They are generally proud of where they grow up, regardless of the challenges.

It is time that pride was reciprocated. It is time we all ensure that every child has something to be truly proud of.

Executive Summary

The Children's Commissioner has assembled 162 measures of children's lives, and used this to allocate scores to local authorities to help understand in which areas of the country it is hardest to grow up. These overall scores are not performance measures of local authorities, as they include things beyond their control – such as police force measures, and child poverty.

The data pulled together in the Childhood Lottery highlights the scale of challenges faced by children across all areas of the country and all areas of their lives. For example that:

- Over 1 million children (1,048,965) had active referrals to children and young people's mental health services in 2024-25.[1]
- Most pupils (55%) do not achieve a good standard in their English and Maths GCSEs (grade 5 or better in both) at the end of Key Stage 4.
- There are around 1 million young people in the UK aged 16 to 24 not in employment, education or training (NEET)[2]
- Approaching half (44%) of looked after children are placed outside their local authority area. Far too many care leavers (40%, plus 6% with unknown activity) are NEET. [3]
- 12% of children said they did not feel safe in their local area.

But more significantly it highlights the variation that exists across the country. The Childhood Lottery highlights the areas that scored highest – Cheshire East, Merton, and Surrey – and the lowest – Middlesbrough, Hounslow and Bradford.

This overall variation is closely related to poverty, but the relationship is not completely straightforward – there are some outliers such as Haringey which scores very highly despite being one of the poorest areas.

Similarly, while there is a north south divide, with children who live in the north of England more likely to face challenges growing up, every single region of the country features in the 25 lowest scoring areas.

Children are themselves aware of these differences, and their perceptions of their area are reflected in official measures – for example, in those areas where more children think they have unhealthy diets, the levels of childhood obesity are indeed higher.

The postcode lottery shows up in every area of children's lives

Children's own experiences will depend on how their needs interact with the challenges face in the area they live.

For example, when it comes to **Family**, children in Westminster (1,169 per 10,000 children) are much more likely to be placed in temporary accommodation than children in Hartlepool (1 per 10,000 children).

When it comes to **Education, Jobs and Skills** the report has found that:

- 8.3% of children in Blackpool are known to be missing from education, compared with just 0.03% of children in Lambeth.
- Exclusion rates represent one of the most variable metrics, ranging from 46 in every 10,000 children in Blackpool excluded from school, compared with just 1 in every 10,000 in Wiltshire.
- The unauthorised absence rate in mainstream schools varies from 1.2% in Trafford, to 4.5% in Knowsley.
- When looking at outcomes, the proportion of children who get a good pass (5 or better) in their English and Maths GCSEs, ranges from 70% in Richmond upon Thames to 31% in Knowsley.
- Access to post-16 educational provision varies from 2.2 settings per 1,000 children in Sutton, to 0.1 in Portsmouth. This variation is related to the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET): in the 10 percent of areas with the best post-16 provision, 2.6% of 16 and 17 year olds were NEET, whereas in the 10 percent of areas with the lowest post-16 provision this was 4.8%.
- The rate of children being NEET varied from a maximum of 7.1% in Derby to a minimum of 0.3% in Enfield.

In terms of **Community** and children's visions for a **Better World** the report finds:

- In Rutland, there are 61 playgrounds for its 7,800 children. In Redbridge, that number is just 6 per 10,000.
- Just 6.7% of children in Bedford feel unsafe in their local area, whereas 24.9% of children in Croydon feel unsafe.
- When it comes to policing, Merseyside police carried out 279 stop and searches per 10,000 children, by far the highest rate of any force, compared with 20 per 10,000 children in West Mercia, meaning children in Merseyside were over 13 times more likely to be stopped and searched than those in West Mercia.

When it comes to **Health,** both physical and mental, the variation continues.

- 19.6% of children in Hartlepool felt they did not have access to good healthcare, compared with 0.7% in Merton and 1% in Solihull. In Barking and Dagenham, 8% reported this, placing them in the bottom 10 for access to good healthcare. Barking and Dagenham also has one of the lowest levels of school nurse staffing, with just 1.1 FTE school nurse for every 10,000 children, placing them 6th lowest in the country. This compares with much higher rates of school nurse staffing in Greenwich (with 11.9 FTE per 10,000 children) and Halton (11.1 FTE per 10,000 children).
- 86% of Redcar and Cleveland's children saw a dentist in the last year compared to 39% in Hackney, which was among 25 areas where fewer than half of children saw a dentist.
- While Mental Health Support Teams cover 52% of pupils or learners in eligible provisions in England[4], this access is not split equally across the country. In Leicestershire, only 24% of children have access to this provision, compared with 99% of children in South Tyneside.

When it comes to **Children's Social Care**, the variations across the country are equally stark.

- For children in Tameside, 50% of looked after children had 3 or more social workers in the last year, compared with just 3% in Hartlepool.
- North Lincolnshire and Lancashire are placing 17.2% and 17.7% of children out of area, but this is as high as 89% in Westminster, who report the highest number of out of area placements.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report reveals that what children across the country feel to be true is in fact true. That it simply is harder to be a child in Middlesbrough than it is in Cheshire. The Commissioner has seen some areas where, because of either systemic failures or specific failures in one area, no child could reasonably be expected to thrive, and those that do thrive do so against the odds. The outcomes are shocking. That is an unacceptable failure.

The recommendations below set out how central and regional government should prioritise children's outcomes as decision making and power is devolved out of Westminster. Recommendations are presented in three sections:

- Children must be a priority for devolution: high standards for children, a state of emergency for children
- Making devolution work for children: accountability, responsibility, funding, data
- All levels of government must respond to children's needs: worked examples of what this means for school and college attendance, high needs placements, children at risk of harming others

Children must be a priority for devolution

High standards for children

The key test for success of devolution, for the Prime Minister, and for strategic authorities, is whether it leads to improvements in children's lives and the closing of the disparities in outcomes and access to services shown in this report. It is essential that every area both sets high standards for the children in its area and can evidence how it is delivering on those standards.

Recommendation 1: A Children's Test for devolution

Strategic authorities should adopt a children's test for the impact of their policies. This test should be based on a shared outcomes framework, adopted by all public services across an authority. The outcomes must cover the most significant problems facing children, including their access to good housing, their safety in their local area, or their chances of getting a good

job. The strategic authority should assess and publish each year whether outcomes have improved, and how far gaps have closed.

A state of emergency for children

This report shows unacceptable outcomes and levels of service delivery for children in too many parts of the country. In some areas, this must be considered a state of emergency. It is right to set high standards – but it is equally necessary to have measures in place for when an area is failing to deliver for its children, and for national government to be able to step in to drive improvement, until an area can demonstrate it has shown sufficient change.

Recommendation 2: Children's Emergency Fund

There should be a set of minimum standards for children's outcomes, and where these outcomes are not hit, local areas should be able to draw down on a national fund to deliver the services that children need, including, but not limited to: education, policing, health, and youth services. Where outcomes fall below this standard, action must be taken to bring together all relevant bodies to deliver for children, to develop a clear action plan for meeting those standards. Local areas must evidence how they will bring in expertise from high performing areas in order to deliver this plan.

Making devolution work for children

Additional resources are of limited use if they are not spent well, by people responsible for the outcomes of children. As such, a critical lever for addressing this state of emergency is clear accountability and responsibility. Without this there is a significant risk that children, and children's policy, will not be the a priority it needs to be for devolution to strategic authorities. A number of changes are needed.

Accountability

There is a significant risk that, as at national government level, children will not be prioritised by regional authorities even as they take on greater responsibility and have a greater role in children's lives.

Recommendation 3: A Deputy Mayor for children

Every strategic authority should have a Deputy Mayor for children, or designated lead for children. They should be responsible and empowered to deliver key new functions, particularly around the coordination of local authority services and regional delivery as set out below.

They should be held accountable against the Children's Test in their area. That should include setting out how they will meet the agreed set of outcomes for children, what measures they will use, and publishing an annual report of their performance.

Responsibility

One of the key challenges facing strategic authorities when delivering for children is the chaotic nature of administrative boundaries and overlapping requirements for services and local authorities to work together.

Recommendation 4: Align the footprints for all the services which touch children's lives

Central government should work with education, health and social care and policing to align the geographical footprints of DfE regions, ICBs, policing, Regional Care Cooperatives and fostering hubs at the Strategic Authority level. Future schemes should align with the newly homogenous footprints.

Recommendation 5: Review statutory working together duties

All statutory duties requiring local authorities, police, health and education to work together to commission and oversee services should be reviewed, with the default being that Strategic Authorities should – when they are sufficiently embedded – take on these statutory duties and streamline the boards and partnerships at the strategic level.

Funding

For devolution to be practicably effective, funding should be appropriately matched to devolved functions, and central government should develop clear multi-agency formulas, aligned with different stages of maturation for newly established strategic authorities. Learnings from more mature strategic authorities such as Greater Manchester should be drawn in developing this formula.

Recommendation 6: A centrally agreed multi-agency funding formula

ICB's, the DfE, the Home Office and MHCLG should work together to develop a clear children's funding framework, stepped in line with different levels of devolution, to ensure that shifts in power and responsibility are accompanied with the right funding to deliver the corresponding services. This must take into account the different level of need in different local areas, as well as their differing abilities to raise money locally.

Data

The Childhood Lottery demonstrates that too often we do not know even the most basic things about children at a local level – such as how many of them visited a GP. Without this data, services are trying to deliver blindfolded. Without this data across areas, local and national governments are not able to make informed decisions or understand the impact of their decisions in the way they should.

No matter where decisions sit, they must be informed by recent, high quality, local data about the children whom they will impact. Every local area has different challenges, and understanding them is key to ensuring targeted support is delivered in the right places. A number of changes would help.

Recommendation 7: Minimum local data standards

Central government should implement data standards for strategic authorities, setting out what data they should collect, hold, and share with central government. That data should form a key part of their Children's Test.

Recommendation 8: Implement Single unique ID

To support that, the Department for Education should introduce a single unique identifier for all children without delay.

Recommendation 9: Fill the gaps in evidence

Central government should start to gather and publish data on children in families with no recourse to public funds (the Home Office), and GP use by children (the Department for Health and Social Care). The Department for Health and Social Care should re-commission the prevalence survey of children and young people's mental health.

All levels of government must respond to children's needs

Devolution to strategic authorities provides a number of specific opportunities to improve outcomes, boost access to services and improve service quality, particularly for vulnerable children. In particular regional government is well placed to provide and coordinate services for children with very high needs, where there is a low incidence at a local authority level, and to coordinate services that involve multiple services.

This section uses core issues identified by the Childhood Lottery to explore how the government could leverage devolution effectively for children.

School and college attendance

This report highlights that there is substantial variation in the attendance of children, the number of children missing education, and the support they are receiving with their education. There is therefore a role for Strategic Authorities in tackling these challenges, while being held to account by national government for their performance.

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on attendance:

- **Recommendation 10:** The government should introduce a new statutory duty for Strategic Authorities to collaborate to tackle attendance between health, education, social care and police.
- **Recommendation 11:** Strategic Authorities should include children's school and college attendance as a key outcome in their 'Children's Test'.
- **Recommendation 12:** Strategic Authorities should jointly commission shared services for children at highest risk of missing education or persistent absence.

High needs placements

This report has highlighted that there is real variation when it comes to the number of looked after children placed far away from home, reflecting the challenges that many local authorities face in providing sufficient accommodation for their children in care. The Children's Commissioner's work has consistently highlighted that there are some children for whom this sufficiency challenge is particularly stark – those children with the highest level of need, and for whom specialist placements, which might include those where children are deprived of their liberty are required.

This plays out in very harmful ways – such as the children who end up being placed in illegal children's homes, because no registered setting will take them.

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on high needs placements:

- **Recommendation 13:** Strategic authorities should have a joint responsibility for commissioning high needs placements for children, including places in Secure Children's Homes on both a welfare and justice basis, places for children deprived of their liberty under the revised section 25 of the Children Act, and children who are currently deprived of liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court alternative accommodation for children on remand, and children in need of step down provision from inpatient mental health settings.
- **Recommendation 14:** Government to introduce a new statutory duty for the strategic authority to work together across health, local authorities, and police to avoid detention wherever possible, commission suitable placements, and support timely discharge from detention.

Children at risk of harming others

This report shows that children have very different experiences when it comes to their interactions with police – with hugely varying rates of stop and search being used across the country – as well as varying levels of support for children who are at risk of being drawn in to criminality.

There are a range of different agencies with responsibility for preventing children committing violence towards others. Children's services have a duty to safeguard children, including from extra-familial harms, police and youth justice services will carry out a range of diversionary activity for children, mental health services will work with some children who pose a risk to others, and the Prevent duty

exists to prevent terrorism, and receives many referrals for 'violence fixated individuals'. Yet the Children's Commissioner's work on children who are referred to Prevent shows that many of them will bounce around the system, without receiving any intervention.[5]

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on children who may harm others:

- **Recommendation 15:** Hold a streamlined set of statutory duties to work together with health and policing to prevent children from causing harm.
- **Recommendation 16:** Strategically commission services for children at highest risk of causing harm.
- **Recommendation 17:** Develop a workforce plan across the area for professionals who work with these children, including using devolved skills and post-16 budget to create appropriate pathways into work.

Introduction

The Childhood Lottery is the Children Commissioner's landmark dataset.[1] It sets out key measures and outcomes for children across 162 metrics. The data tells a compelling, local story about childhood in England, including children's own views on their experiences.

The dataset is split across the Commissioner's pillars of work, and looks closely at how each metric may impact children's experiences of childhood across the following categories:

- Health: Children's health services and outcomes
- Care: Children's social care services and outcomes
- Community: Policing, youth justice and services available to children in the places they live
- Schools, jobs and skills: Schools, post-16 and educational outcomes
- Family: Housing, poverty and family life
- Better world: the environment, play, children's voices and citizenship

High-quality data metrics have been plotted to an interactive map, filterable by pillar, metric and local authority to help children, families and decision makers learn more about what might be making childhood harder in their local area, as well as what is working well for children.

Data can never tell the whole story but in order to obtain the fullest possible picture, data has been collected from a wide range of sources. That data is presented at a local authority level but is not a measure of local authority – or local authority children's services' - performance. In part that is because the data presented is often drawn from services across differing boundaries, such as Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and police areas.

The metrics also include demographic measures, such as child poverty, which not only do local authorities lack the tools to fundamentally address but which also have a direct impact on a local area's ability to deliver services. Instead, the data illustrates how children experience childhood in every part of the country.

[1] The interactive maps, full dataset and methodology details in an evidence annex are available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/the-childhood-lottery/

You cannot choose where you are born, or the needs you are born with, and so children experience variance based on a combination of their needs and the services available in their local area.

The Commissioner has worked to explore what this may mean for children's lives in the context of national policy change which shifts the focus towards devolved power and has used to data to make a series of recommendations about how the system can best harness the opportunities presented by these changes to improve children's lives in every postcode, and crucially to reduce the stark differences experienced by children across England.

1.1 Devolution will have an impact on children's lives

The Government is looking closely at how services are delivered across England and is currently moving towards a more devolved system which strives to move power, funding and decision making into local and regional systems. The *Rewiring the State* policy position has made clear that devolution should be the default approach when considering how to reform services. This brings about real opportunities to empower services to improve services for their unique local populations. However, as this report sets out, every local area is starting from a different point, with different challenges and priorities. Of the 20 mayoral strategic authorities, only 70% currently have a Mayor in place, the other 6 have yet to elect one. There are 56 local authorities (37%) that are not covered by a strategic authority at all. Building up capacity across the country will be a necessary foundation for delivering any of the recommendations set out in this report.

The starting point for policy areas is also different. In some cases the outcome of centralised and national policy making is deep differences and inequality between areas. In others, a lack of direction centrally, or weak coordination at a regional level, mean children miss out on key services or face more severe challenges than they should.

1.2 About the data

The Children's Commissioner has assembled 162 measures of children's lives. Of those, 96 have been given a score to reflect whether the impact on children's lives is good or bad. In some areas, such as the number of young carers identified by a local authority, these cannot straightforwardly be described as good or bad so they are presented but have not been given a score. Other metrics, like police force data on child protection, are very much performance measures, but do not exist or do not yet exist across the country to allow a fair comparison from place to place.

The data comes from the Children's Commissioner's own data requests and analysis, along with data from the Department for Education and 10 other public bodies. Most metrics involve novel analysis, for example to turn a number into a rate per 10,000 children, and 42 metrics are new data gathered by the Commissioner and published here for the first time.

The largest number of metrics – 78 - cover children's outcomes, while 19 cover the quality of services for children and families, and 64 cover access to services, including what services know about children and young people.

All 153 top-tier local authorities are included in at least some of the analysis. Bury and Nottinghamshire are excluded from many measures due to not returning data to the Children's Commissioner by the deadline, and they and the Isles of Scilly and City of London, with small numbers of children, are excluded from overall analysis and many individual measures.

Too much data is missing: the 5 worst data gaps

This report relies on the fact that many public bodies produce useful evidence on a range of outcomes, service use and quality measures. Where gaps exist, the Commissioner's statutory data powers have allowed light to be shone on some areas. However, there are some critically important areas where information is still not collected or published by government, which makes both planning service delivery and holding areas to account for that delivery much more challenging.

This is an issue which exists across every pillar of childhood. In particular, the Childhood Lottery does not include data on the following, simply because it is not recorded or published:

- **Number of youth workers:** there is no mandatory registration of youth workers and youth workforce statistics are not routinely collected, so there is no national or local data on the scale of youth work.
- **Number of children with no recourse to public funds (NRPF):** The Home Office does not record how many visas are issued with the NRPF condition.
- **Number of children who visit their GP**: NHS England has no plans to break down its monthly statistics on GP appointments by age group of patients.
- **Number of children on council housing waiting lists**: only an estimate is available from MHCLG of the percent of households including under 18-year-olds, and no local data.
- **Number of children with a probable mental health condition**: NHS England discontinued the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey in 2023.

Even where data does exist, it might not always be consistently shared. Many of the measures included in this report are not local authority measures – many are owned by police forces or Integrated Care Boards and are not always consistently shared with local authority children's services.

1. Childhood is a postcode lottery

The data pulled together in the Childhood Lottery highlights the scale of challenges faced by children in England. At a very simple level, there are outcomes and levels of service for children that are poor nationally. For instance:

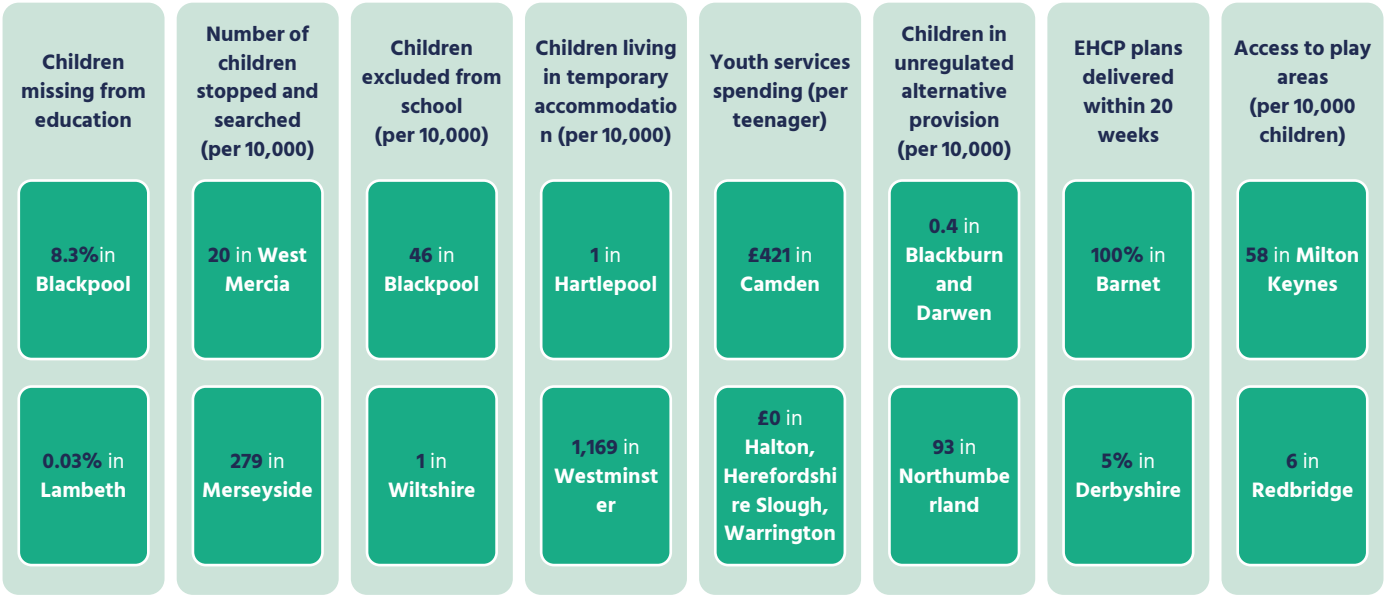
- Over 1 million children (1,048,965) had active referrals to children and young people's mental health services in 2024-25.[6]
- Most pupils (55%) do not achieve a good standard in their English and Maths GCSEs (grade 5 or better in both) at the end of Key Stage 4.
- There are around 1 million young people in the UK aged 16 to 24 not in employment, education or training (NEET)[7], among whom are too many 16 and 17 year old children: 46,520 known to local authorities in England to be NEET, 32,100 with unknown activity,[8] and the Children's Commissioner estimates an additional 42,000 students were enrolled in colleges in England but severely absent from them.[9]
- Approaching half (44%) of looked after children are placed outside their local authority area. Far too many care leavers (40%, plus 6% with unknown activity) are NEET.[10]
- 12% of children said they did not feel safe in their local area.

There are also some positives to take from the data. Only 2% of children responding to *The Big Ambition* survey disagreed they felt loved and cared for by the people they lived with, showing the importance of family as a positive part of almost all children's lives.

While the national picture is concerning, what this report reveals is perhaps even more worrying. Because when those metrics are broken down by local area, they show that children's outcomes, their access to services, and the quality of services they receive vary hugely across the country. The data shows that children experience a childhood lottery.

2.1 The childhood lottery exists in every aspect of children's lives

This childhood lottery reveals itself across all the Commissioner's pillars of work, in all areas of children's lives: education, housing, health, policing and youth services. The graphic below highlights some of this variation:



See evidence annex for more details including sources

This chapter will reveal these variations in greater detail, but it is clear that again and again, across every pillar of The Childhood Lottery, the data illustrates shockingly large differences between local area delivery and outcomes. This variability goes beyond local services adapting their provision to meet local needs, it is so extreme it clearly represents unacceptable unfairness in access, quality and outcomes. The charts below illustrate the extent of this variation across metrics.

Figure 1: Variation across local authorities in all 10 metrics which are measured as rates per 10,000

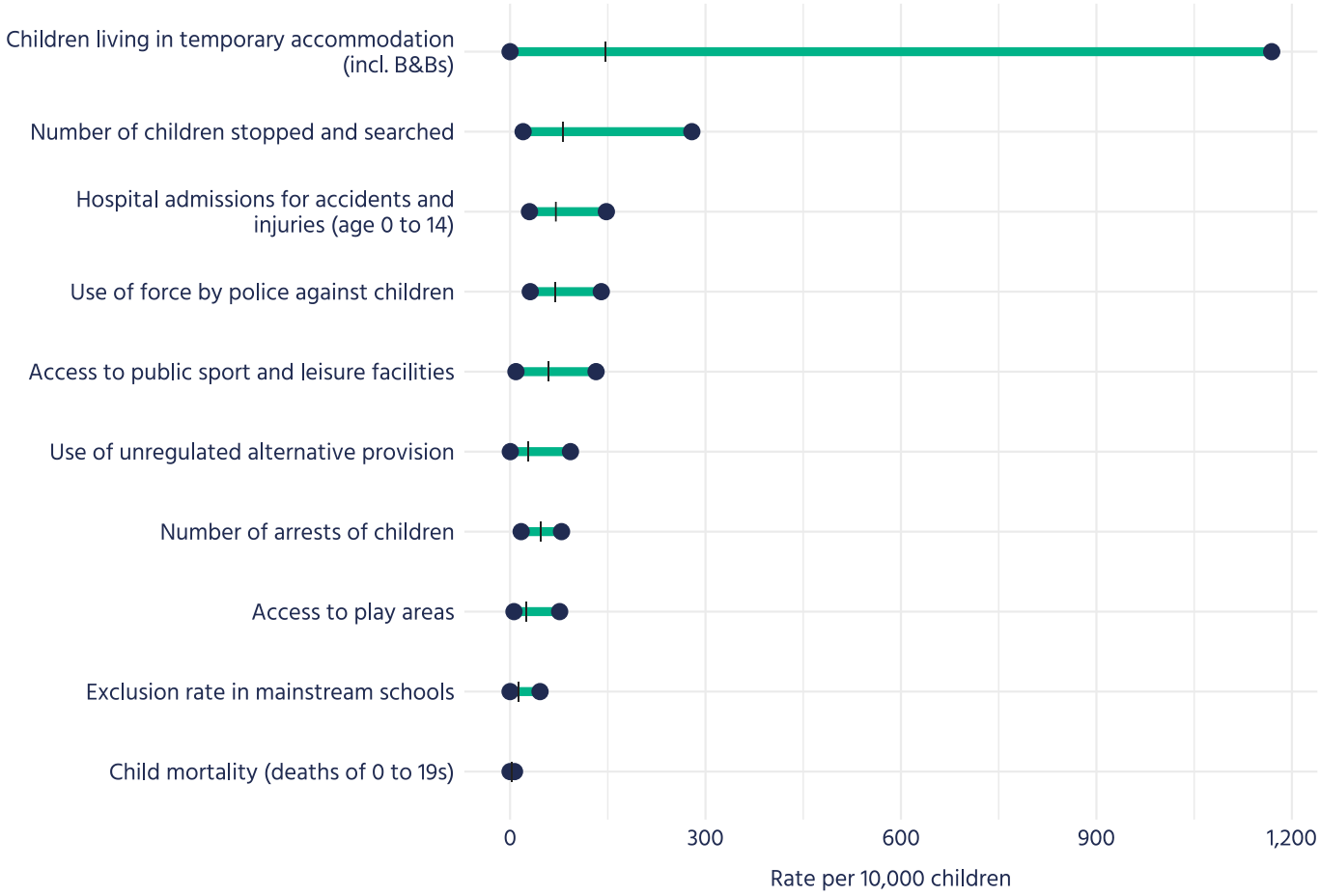
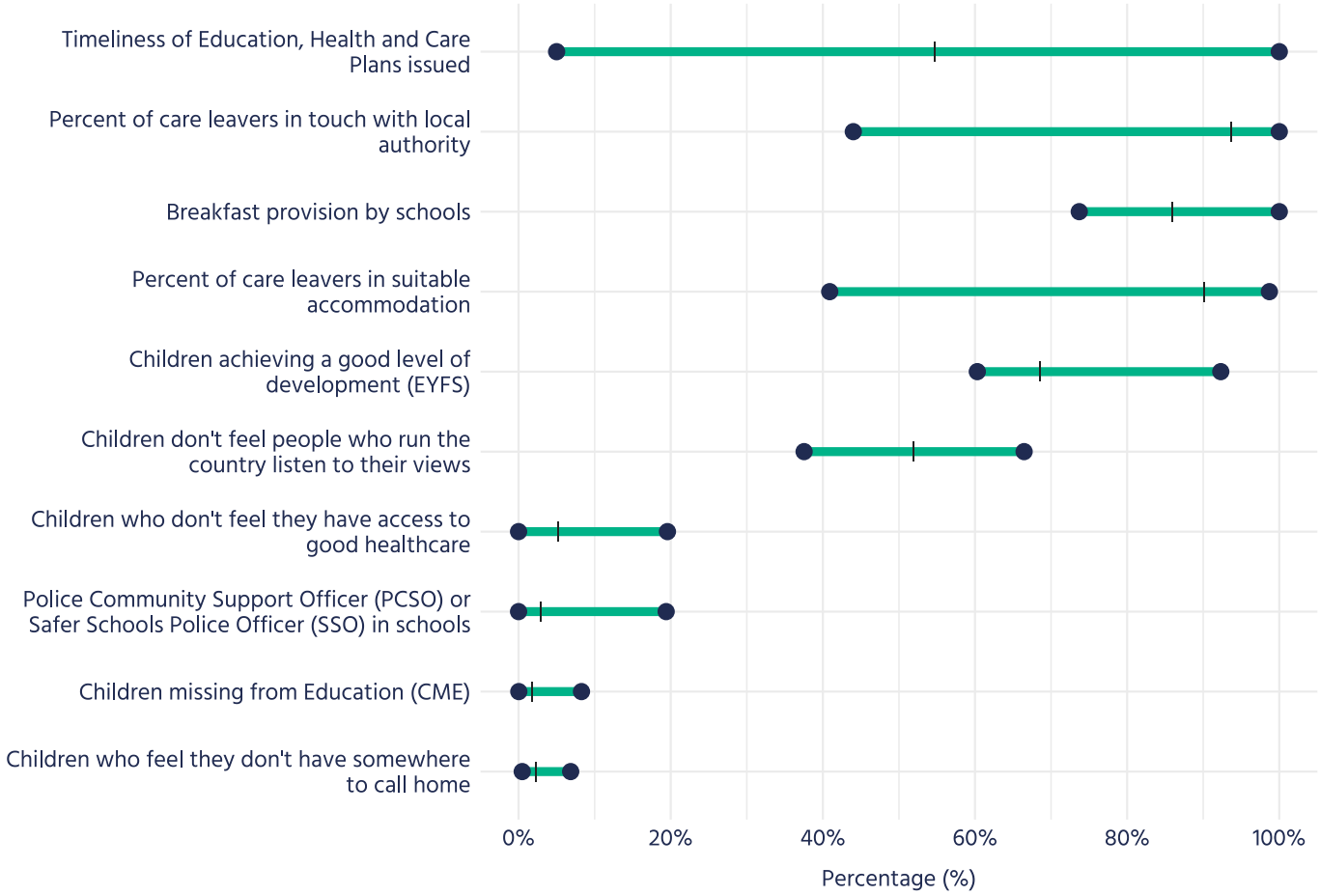


Figure 2: Variation across local authorities in 10 of the metrics which are measured as percentages



Note: Children's Commissioner's office analysis of data from multiple sources, see evidence annex for details of methodology. Metrics ordered top to bottom from highest to lowest maximum value. Vertical bars show mean values.

2.2 Children in some parts of the country are more likely to have challenging lives

To help to understand the variance experienced by children, The Childhood Lottery has assigned an overall score to each local authority showing where life can be more challenging for a child (Table 1 and Table 2). The lower the score, the more difficult childhood is likely to be, and the more difficult it is likely to be to deliver high-quality services. The full dataset detailing how every metric contributes to these overall scores is available on our website.

Bury and Nottinghamshire have the highest levels of missing data due to not responding to the Children's Commissioner's data request. Total scores of councils with 20% or more missing metrics (26 or more out of 128) are not shown, including these two areas.[2] Other areas with missing data will have lower scores, as missing scored metrics have been given a score of zero.

[2] City of London and Isles of Scilly are also excluded.

Table 1: The most challenging places to be a child

Local authority	Score out of 960 (higher is better)	Number of missing scored metrics
1. Middlesbrough	408	1
2. Hounslow	460	0
3. Bradford	471	0
4. Nottingham	472	0
5. Halton	475	0
6. Peterborough	477	2
7. Leicester	492	2
8. Liverpool	498	0
9. Sunderland	501	0
10. Medway	503	0
11. Somerset	504	0
12. Portsmouth	509	1
13. Salford	519	0
14. Knowsley	521	0
15. Blackpool	523	0
16. Oldham	525	1
=17. Southampton	526	3
=17. Tower Hamlets	526	2
19. Plymouth	529	0
20. Tameside	532	0

Local authorities with 20% or more metrics missing (Bury, City of London, Isles of Scilly and Nottinghamshire) have been excluded from the overall scores above. Missing metrics include both scored and context measures.

Table 2: The least challenging places to be a child

Local authority	Score out of 960 (higher is better)	Number of missing scored metrics
1. Cheshire East	730	0
2. Merton	714	1
3. Surrey	708	2
4. Richmond upon Thames	707	2
5. Hertfordshire	703	0
6. Cheshire West and Chester	698	0
7. Haringey	689	0
8. Leicestershire	685	0
=9. Central Bedfordshire	677	0
=9. Wokingham	677	0
=11. Oxfordshire	676	1
=11. York	676	0
13. Bracknell Forest	674	1
14. North Tyneside	672	0
15. Trafford	670	0
16. Gloucestershire	668	0
17. Kingston upon Thames	667	3
18. Hammersmith and Fulham	666	1
19. Sutton	664	3
20. Hampshire	661	0

Local authorities with 20% or more metrics missing (Bury, City of London, Isles of Scilly and Nottinghamshire) have been excluded from the overall scores above. Missing metrics include both scored and context measures.

In each area, what drives the overall score is different. While every metric is equally weighted, meaning challenges in just one area of children's lives cannot drive a low overall score, local areas may have a large number of areas where children face an average or below average level of challenge. In other areas, smaller numbers of stark challenges are the reason for low overall scores.

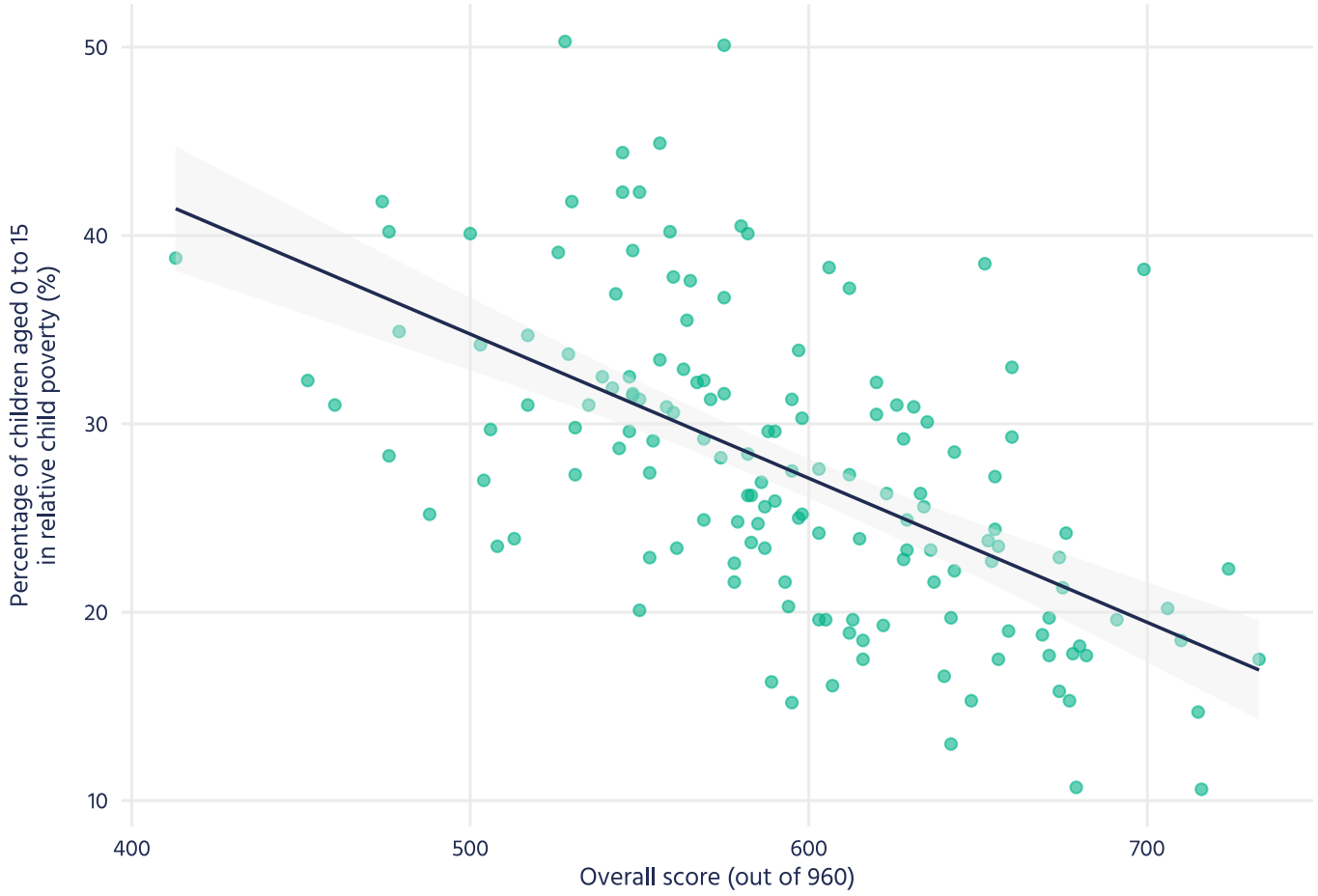
2.3 What makes these areas harder to grow up in?

This section explores some of the geographic or other factors which could be driving some of the variation.

Is this a poverty lottery?

These findings do not simply describe which areas are more and less deprived. Overall, the child poverty metric showing the percent of local children in poverty tends to be high in areas where overall scores are low (Figure 3). This is also true when looking at the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, including the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, against the Childhood Lottery's top and bottom scoring 20 local authorities. However, Cambridgeshire, second least deprived in the IMD, does not score in the top 20 on the metrics, thanks in part to poor recording of child vulnerabilities by police, poor timeliness in issuing EHCPs, and poor school placement instability for children in care, for example. And Haringey in London, one of the higher scoring local authorities, is among the poorest 20 local authorities as measured by the IDACI.

Figure 3: Local authorities with higher total scores tend to have lower rates of child poverty



Children's Commissioner's office analysis of various data, see evidence annex for details.

In every local authority there are children in high-income families and children in low-income families. More measures are needed to capture the experience of inequality within areas, like the disadvantage gap in attainment.[11]

Is there a north south divide?

Local authorities with high and low scores are spread across England (Figure 4) but scores are highest on average in the south and lowest in the north, with the midlands in between. Looking regionally, it is local authorities in the south east of England which have the highest average scores. However, two of the six highest scoring local authorities are in the north (the two Cheshire unitary authorities), and eight of the 20 lowest scoring local authorities are in the south.

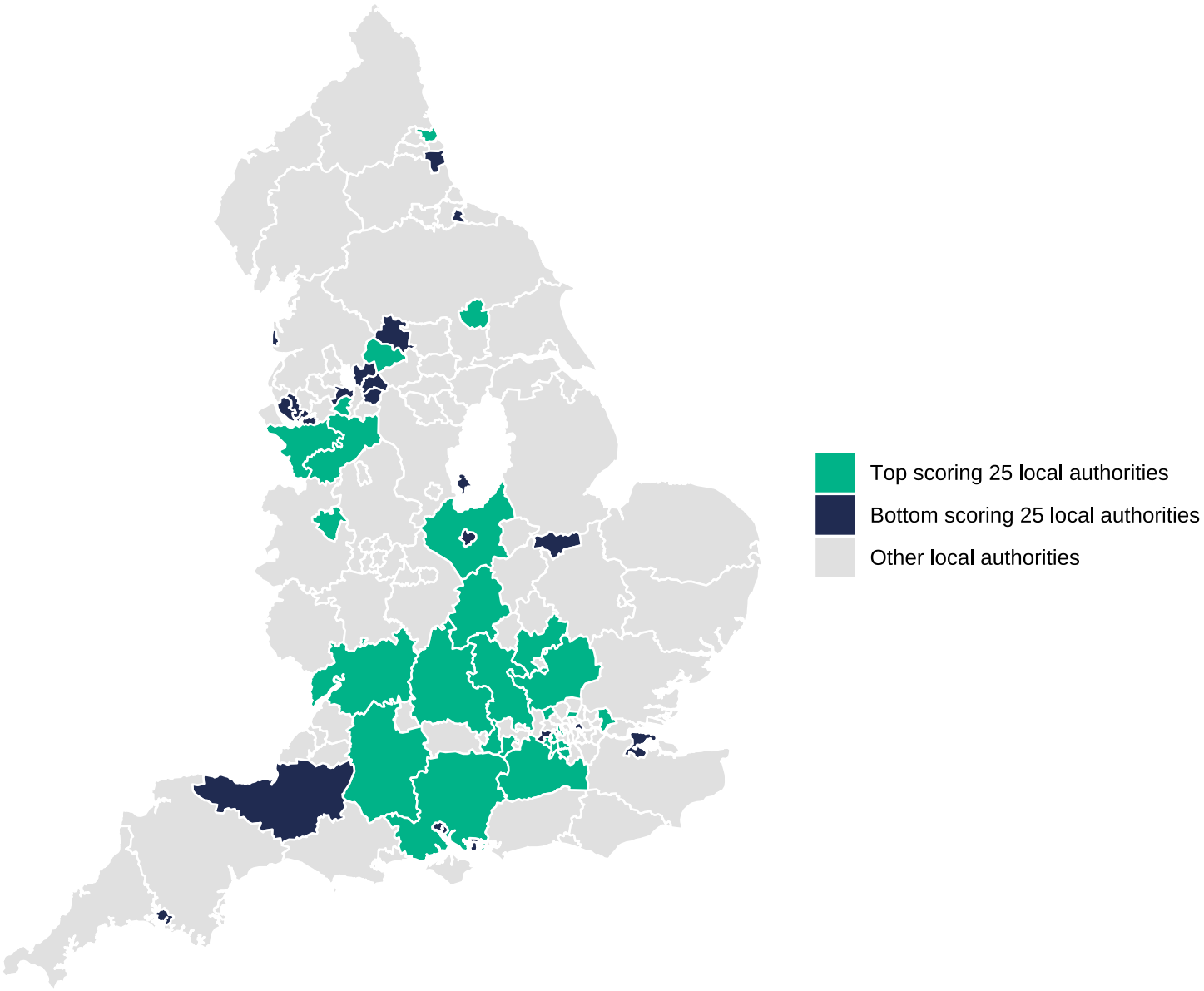
Table 3: Scores by region

Region	Mean score (out of 960)	Highest scoring local authority	Lowest scoring local authority
East Midlands	573	Leicestershire	Nottingham
East of England	599	Hertfordshire	Peterborough
London	609	Merton	Hounslow
North East	555	North Tyneside	Middlesbrough
North West	575	Cheshire East	Halton
South East	611	Surrey	Medway
South West	602	Gloucestershire	Somerset
West Midlands	588	Telford and Wrekin	Birmingham
Yorkshire and The Humber	582	York	Bradford

Note: Nottinghamshire, Bury, City of London and Isles of Scilly excluded due to high missing data.

Although the south east has highest scores on average, it contains some of the 20 lowest scoring councils, including Portsmouth and Medway. The reverse is also true: the region with the lowest scores, the north east, contains North Tyneside, which is among the 20 highest scoring areas. While London is mid-table among regions for average local authority score, the 10 local authorities that score lowest on childhood vaccination rates, and the rates of children living in temporary accommodation are all in London.

Figure 4: Map of England showing the local authorities with the highest and lowest overall scores from The Childhood Lottery.



Note: Nottinghamshire, Bury, the Isles of Scilly and City of London have been excluded from this chart (shown in white) due to large proportions of missing data.

How do rural and urban areas compare?

The Office for National Statistics considers 24 upper tier local authorities, from Cornwall to Northumberland, as rural, with the other 129 classed as urban. These rural areas had a higher average score – 601 compared to 589 out of 960 – indicating it may be easier to be a child in these areas. The extent of this difference was lower than the regional and north/south differences described above.

Are some areas consistently hard to grow up in across different aspects of children's lives?

Generally, local authorities were not uniformly challenging or not challenging for children to grow up in across pillars. The exceptions were Middlesbrough, which is in the lowest scoring local areas in all but one pillar. And Cheshire East, which is in the top 20 scoring areas across every pillar. More commonly, local authorities have a range of scores across areas of children's lives.

2.4 Children are aware of differences between areas

No two children will experience their local area in the same way, and so postcode lotteries exist even within local authorities. Children's responses so far to the Commissioner's survey *The Big Future* make this clear. When asked what would make their local area better, there are suggestions from children in every area, but also children who replied 'nothing' in every area. One child highlighted room for improvement in top scoring Cheshire East, and another their appreciation for their home town in bottom scoring Middlesbrough:

> *What would make your local area better?*
>
> *"If the area was clean and tidy. Everything could be improved in Cheshire East."*
> - boy living in Cheshire East, 13
>
> *"My local area is a very nice place "* – girl living in Middlesbrough, 11

Children's views, as gathered through the Commissioner's surveys, show they are conscious of the problems in their areas. These correlation coefficients at local authority level can be seen in the Childhood Lottery dataset. For example:

- Areas with higher percentages of children who don't feel they have a healthy diet are more likely to have higher levels of children who are overweight or obese (Figure 7)[3]
- Areas with higher percentages of children who don't feel safe in their local area are more likely to have higher levels of force used against children by the police[4]
- Areas with higher percentages of children who don't enjoy school or college are more likely to have higher mainstream school absence rates[5]

[3] r=0.51, a moderate association

[4] r=0.22, a weak association

[5] r=0.38, a weak to moderate association

2. The childhood lottery affects every aspect of children's lives

The data in every pillar of the Childhood Lottery reflects the profound differences across the country in the experiences children will have every time they interact with public services. The impact of this will depend on the needs of each individual child as well as the unique combination of services available to them in their postcode.

For example, Wokingham has low child poverty but also very low spending on youth services. Leicestershire has a high overall score across metrics, but the lowest access to Mental Health Support Teams of any area. Redbridge had the lowest rate of access to play areas but also one of the best levels of access to the list of services that the Children's Commissioner asked about, from advocacy to youth hubs and support groups. There is therefore work to do in every sector to reduce postcode lotteries so that every child's needs can be met in the place that they live.

This chapter illustrates that the interaction between children's needs and where they live is crucial to how they experience the childhood lottery.

3.1 Family life

Somewhere to call home

All children deserve to live and grow up in a safe and secure home, where they feel loved. Having somewhere to call home is a basic need for all children. A home is more than a physical space to sleep and is important for children's sense of stability. In *The Big Ambition*, the Children's Commissioner's survey of children in 2023-2024, children were asked to whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree (or 'I don't know') with the statement: 'You have somewhere to call home'. This question could be interpreted by children as the relationships as well as the physical space that the concept of home can represent. And yet nearly 7% of children in Hartlepool do not feel they have somewhere to call home, compared to only 0.5% of children in Tameside and South Gloucestershire.

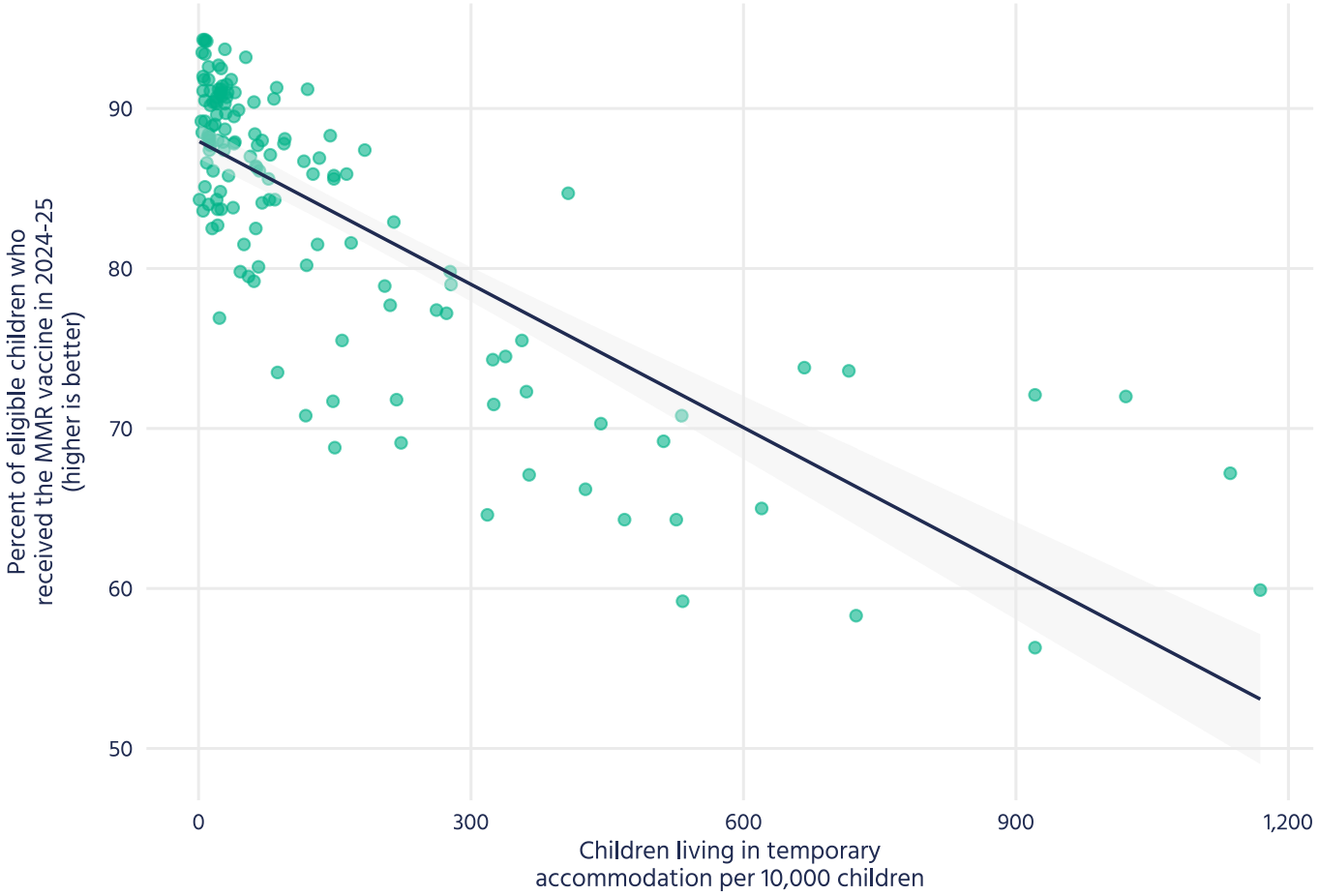
Use of temporary accommodation

The precarity of not having a stable living situation can have devastating impacts on children. For example, the Children's Commissioner has found a negative association between repeated house moves and GCSE scores.[12] For children and the services who support them, having high rates of children living in temporary accommodation can translate to challenges in accessing early help, in particular if they are required to move between local authorities regularly, as well as disruptions in schooling and health support.

The data shows that children in Westminster (1,169 per 10,000 children) are much more likely to be placed in temporary accommodation than children in Hartlepool (1 per 10,000 children). Other London boroughs make up the lowest scoring 10 areas, with Newham and Lambeth also having more than 1 in 10 children in temporary accommodation, which is perhaps unsurprising given the known level of housing need in London.

The evidence indicates that children living in temporary accommodation may be less likely to receive support which impacts other areas of their lives significantly. For example, as the graph below demonstrates, there is a strong correlation in the data between high rates of children living in temporary accommodation and low uptake of childhood vaccinations (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Relationship between rate of children living in temporary accommodation and uptake of childhood vaccinations.



Note: each dot represents a local authority. See evidence annex for details of sources and methodology. Children's Commissioner's office analysis of UK Health Security Agency, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Office for National Statistics data.

Pen portrait 1:

Sula is 6 and lives in Hounslow with her mum, aunty and brother aged 11. The Childhood Lottery has found that Hounslow can be one of the hardest places to be a child. However, when Sula responded to the Children's Commissioner's Big Ambition survey, Sula strongly agreed with the statement that her family has everything they need to support them, as did many of her friends. In fact, only 4.2% of children in Hounslow disagreed with this statement.

Sula's mum knows that vaccinations are important, but when Sula was a toddler, her mum was not able to access childhood vaccinations for Sula in Hounslow because she couldn't access the vaccination centre on public transport or find information about what support may be available. This is an issue across Hounslow, where only 71% of children have had their childhood vaccinations. This rate is lower than 132 other local authorities and may be worsened still by low uptake among her neighbouring local authorities. London boroughs make up all ten of the local areas with the lowest vaccination rates, ranging from 56% in Kensington and Chelsea to 66% in Greenwich.

Child poverty

Child poverty is also extremely variable around the country with 10.6% of children in Richmond upon Thames in poverty, compared to 50.3% in Tower Hamlets on the other side of London. Poverty can affect children's outcomes in a range of ways, as the Children's Commissioner's research has shown[13], and many of the levers to address it are determined centrally through tax and benefit policy. But access to certain services can help, such as free food provided in school clubs – yet while 52% of schools in Tower Hamlets offer free food, only 37% of those in Hackney do, even though in both areas around half of children live in poverty. An area of low child poverty, Windsor and Maidenhead, is bottom of the table on free breakfast provision in schools, despite the help with the cost of living that this service would give its disadvantaged families.

3.2 Education, Jobs and Skills

All children have a right to education, and to be able to pursue that education as far as their ambition will take them.

Children missing education

The starting point for that is for them to be in school, yet the number of children missing from education (CME) is more highly variable across the country than almost any other measure.[6]

Children missing from education are at higher risk of becoming victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Local authorities have a legal duty to make arrangements to identify, as far as possible, the identities of children in their area who are missing out on education.

The Childhood Lottery has found that 8.3% of children in Blackpool are known to be CME, compared with just 0.03% of children in Lambeth on the other end of the scale[7].

EHCP Plans and SEND support

There are a range of reasons that children might be missing from education, but not getting the right support at the right time for any additional needs can be a factor. An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is a statutory plan for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) whose needs cannot be met through ordinarily available provision. Government guidance says the Education, Health and Care needs assessment and plan must be completed within 20 weeks from the date of the initial request, unless certain conditions occur. Across all local authority areas the average percentage of completed EHC plans within 20 weeks was just 55%. Four local authority areas reported a 100% completion rate: Barnet, Bracknell Forest, Wandsworth, and Windsor and Maidenhead. The ten local authorities with the lowest completion rate all delivered less than 10% of

[6] Children Missing Education are defined as children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. This includes children who are awaiting a school place and children in receipt of unsuitable education.

[7] It should be noted that the Children's Commissioner's 2024 report Children Missing Education: the unrolled story found inconsistencies in the use of the term CME between local authorities, hampering attempts to collect reliable data and making it more difficult to work cross-border to identify and support these children (Link).

their EHCPs within the 20-week timeframe, with Derbyshire and Devon both reporting just a 5% completion rate. It is perhaps therefore notable that 55% of EHCPs are completed on time in Blackpool, which has the highest rates of CME, compared to 89% in Lambeth which has the lowest rates.

As with every measure, that only tells a partial story. The timeliness of completing an EHCP plan does not tell us about their quality, whether the support identified in them was delivered, or whether it worked.

Exclusions

Some children may miss a period of education following exclusions. Exclusions are a necessary but regrettable part of education. When exclusion does need to happen, it is generally a sign that something has gone wrong – after all, no child is ineducable. Exclusion can also be associated with a wide variety of social factors – like the fact that poorer pupils are excluded at a much higher rate than their more affluent peers.[14] Exclusion rates represent one of the most variable metrics, ranging from 46 in every 10,000 children in Blackpool are excluded from school, compared with just 1 in every 10,000 in Wiltshire. It is notable however that Tower Hamlets, which has the highest percent of its children living in poverty out of any local authority, has an exclusion rate of just 2 in every 10,000 children.

When permanent exclusion does happen, it must be met with support, and no child who is permanently excluded should lose out on their education as a result. Children who are excluded should find themselves either in another school, or a high-quality registered Alternative Provision provider.

Unregistered alternative provision

However, the use of concerning unregistered Alternative Provision, which operate outside the oversight of Ofsted or the Department for Education, is highly varied across the country. There are 92.7 placements in unregistered AP settings per 10,000 children in Northumberland, compared with just 0.4 per 10,000 children in Blackburn with Darwen. Given the risks to children and the higher rate of complex needs in children who may need to access alternative provision, this enormous postcode lottery creates real concern about options for children in Northumberland and other high-rate local authorities such as Knowsley (85.1 per 10,000 children) and Wiltshire (81.9 per 10,000 children).

High use of unregulated alternative provision could indicate that children in that local area do not have sufficient regulated options which meet their needs. It is not right that if you are a child with unique needs which cannot be met in a mainstream school setting, where you are born could be the

difference between receiving a regulated and registered education and an unregistered, opaque and potentially unsafe one.

Pen portrait 2:

Billy is 11 and he lives with his mum and his dog in Northumberland. Billy has significant SEND needs which cannot be met in mainstream education, and so he requires 1:1 tuition in an alternative provision (AP). Billy likes going out for walks with his dog and visiting the library.

Unfortunately, there is no registered AP in Northumberland which can meet Billy's needs. His mum doesn't want him to miss out on an education all together so has felt she has no choice but accept a place for Billy in an unregistered AP. As a result, Billy receives just 5 hours of education a week, as opposed to the 32.5 hours he would receive in a mainstream school, and there's no guarantee that his tuition is provided by a qualified teacher.

Northumberland is among the top 20 local areas for having access to parks and play areas nearby, so Billy enjoys taking his dog out in the local area, and there are 5.2 libraries available for every 10,000 children in Northumberland, making them second best in England. Billy enjoys visiting his local library regularly, and his mum feels that this helps to supplement his education provision.

School absence

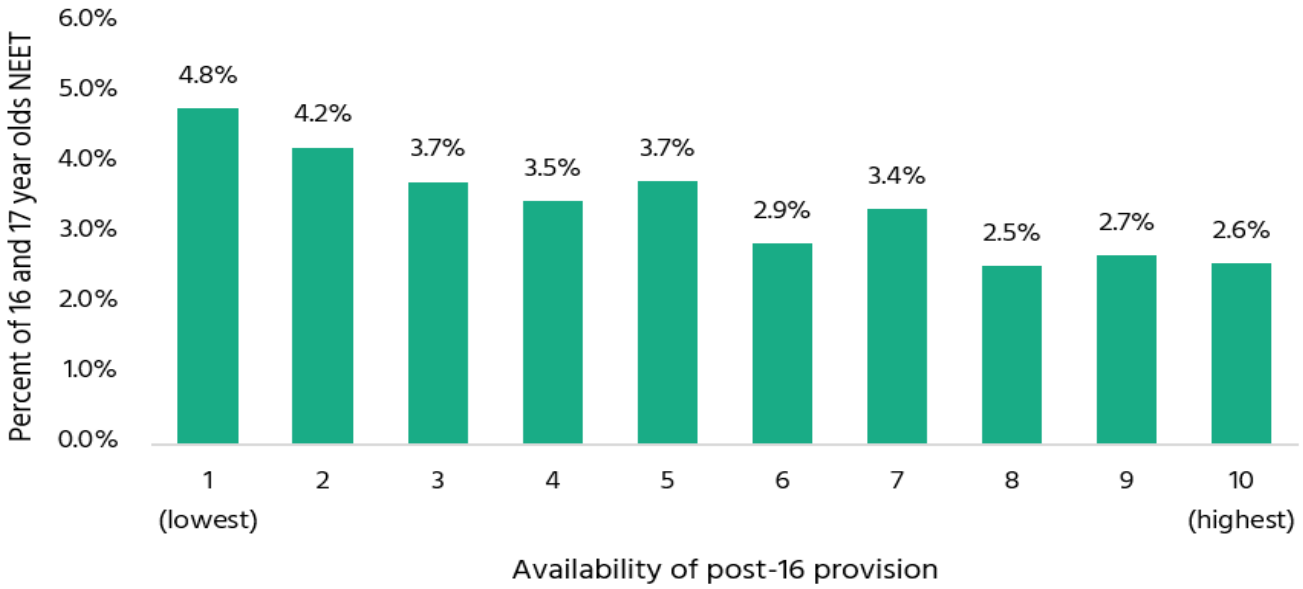
Children missing from regulated education are at the sharp end of a deeply concerning school absence crisis that the Commissioner has consistently highlighted in her work, which is also very varied across the country. The unauthorised absence rate in mainstream schools varies from 1.2% in Trafford, to 4.5% in Knowsley.

Post-16 provision and NEET status

Once children are in school, they still face a postcode lottery in terms of the options they can pursue. One of the most variable metrics is access to post-16 educational provision in their local area, whether that is a school sixth form or an FE college – from 2.2 settings per 1,000 children in Sutton, to 0.1 in Portsmouth.

This variation is related to the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET): in the 10 percent of areas with the most post-16 provision, 2.6% of 16 and 17 year olds were NEET, whereas in the 10 percent of areas with the lowest post-16 provision this was 4.8% (Figure 6). Correspondingly, in Portsmouth the NEET rate was 5.5%, but only 1.4% in Sutton. Overall, the rate varied from a maximum of 7.1% in Derby to a minimum of 0.3% in Enfield.

Figure 6: Percent of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET by availability of post-16 provision in local authority, by decile



Note: see evidence annex for details of sources. Children's Commissioner's office analysis of Department for Education and Office for National Statistics data.

Education outcomes

Perhaps the most striking postcode lottery in terms of children's education is the outcome they receive at age 16. It becomes more stark at the higher levels of attainment. For instance, when looking at the proportion of children who get a good pass (5 or better) in their English and Maths GCSEs, it ranges from 70% in Richmond upon Thames to 31% in Knowsley.

3.3 Community and Better World

The Children's Commissioner's Community and Better World pillars cover the things that children have to do in their local area, and how safe they feel within it.

Having fun things to do and space to play is a quintessential piece of a happy, healthy childhood. Yet the variance in the data of children's access to play spaces paints a stark picture about the reality of how the postcode lottery shows up in children's everyday lives. It is important to note that lower tier authorities provide some playgrounds, though this dataset focuses on the 153 upper tier local authorities.

Play areas

In Rutland, there are 61 playgrounds for its 7,800 children. In Redbridge, that number is just 6 per 10,000, and little better at 7 per 10,000 children in Harrow and in Liverpool. Children in Redbridge, Harrow and Liverpool are therefore more than 10 times less likely than their peers in Rutland to have a play area in their local area, in which to run, play, spend time with their friends and make childhood memories.

In a world where children are increasingly spending time inside using screens, it is more important than ever that children have designated free to access spaces within their communities where they can be physically active. The geographical make-up of different local authority areas will present unique challenges in how they provide play areas for their local children. It is more challenging for London local authorities with a high density of housing and infrastructure and less outdoor space in which to develop play areas, yet it can be done: inner London boroughs Islington and Southwark are in the top 20 on this measure.

Youth services

Spending on youth services is equally critical for ensuring that children are able to enjoy their local areas and can also play a role in diverting children away from potentially harmful activity. Yet this measure was also very variable across the country. Camden reported the highest spend at £421 per young person. But four local authorities reported zero expenditure on youth services: Halton, Herefordshire, Slough and Warrington. Middlesbrough and Wandsworth did not have any information available due to data quality concerns. Of the 147 areas with data available, the total budget for youth services in 2024-25 was around £456m. The median annual spend per teenager for the local authorities that provided data was £92.

Feeling safe

As well as having fun things to do in their local area, children need to feel safe where they live. But yet again this is highly variable across the country. 6.7% of children in Bedford feel unsafe in their local area, whereas 24.9% of children in Croydon feel unsafe.

Stop and search

For all children, but particularly those who are involved – or suspected of being involved – with criminality, their relationship with police is a critical element of their feeling of safety within their community. The police use of stop and search stands out as the most variable Community metric and one that matters deeply to the children it affects[8].

It is therefore troubling that there is such substantial variation in the use of stop and search powers on children. In the same year, Merseyside carried out 279 stop and searches per 10,000 children, by far the highest rate of any force, compared with 20 per 10,000 children in West Mercia, meaning children in Merseyside were over 13 times more likely to be stopped and searched than those in West Mercia.[9]

The data on this metric is split by police force – as there are only 44 police forces across England and Wales, of which 39 are in England, these do not therefore align with 1:1 with the 153 local authority areas (see evidence annex for further information on this issue).

[8] Stop and search is the name given to a number of powers that police have to search children, adults or vehicles in public, when they have reasonable grounds to believe that certain crimes have been committed.

[9] Note: stop and search is recorded based on the location of the search rather than the area that the child lives in.

While stop and search may be a necessary part of policing procedure, it is still clear that it can have a profoundly damaging effect on children. This is even more true when it comes to the use of strip search, although relatively low numbers of children are now subject to strip searches so local data is not part of the Childhood Lottery dataset.

There are wider debates about how the use of stop and search interacts with the levels of crime in an area, some of which may be driven by factors beyond the control of the police. However, other measures are more clearly about police performance, for example the extent of recording of children's vulnerabilities when a child is stopped and searched – it is notable that Merseyside, as well as carrying out the highest rate of stop and searches, is also one of the 22 police forces that recorded 0 out of 8 characteristics of children (such as whether they are looked after) who are stopped and searched.

If a child is suspected of being involved in criminality, to the extent that they are being stopped and searched, the Children's Commissioner's view is that there should always be a safeguarding response, including consideration of whether they are being criminally exploited. It is therefore notable that while most local authorities report having a targeted youth group for children who are at risk of criminal exploitation, 13 do not – including St. Helens which is in Merseyside where children experience high rates of stop and search.

3.4 Health

Every child has the right to the best possible health, yet the Childhood Lottery shows that both in terms of their access to healthcare and their health outcomes children's experiences across the country vary dramatically.

Access to healthcare

All children should be able to access high quality, timely services for both their mental and physical health no matter where they live or their level of need. The NHS does not publish any statistics, national or local, on children's use of GPs; this is one of the most concerning data gaps that the Childhood Lottery has identified. This is particularly concerning given children's views, from *The Big Ambition* survey, suggest they have very different experiences of accessing healthcare depending on where they live. The deepest postcode lottery among the health metrics is the percent of children who feel they have access to good healthcare. When asked whether 'you can access good healthcare

when you need it', 19.6% of children in Hartlepool disagreed, compared with 0.7% in Merton and 1% in Solihull.

Data on children's use of dentists – and the state of their teeth – is better. It shows that around 5 million children did not visit the dentist in the last 12 months, as guidance says they should. This was one of the least variable measures, but still shows large and unacceptable differences between areas, with 86% of Redcar and Cleveland's children seeing a dentist in the last year compared to 39% in Hackney, which was among 25 areas where fewer than half of children saw a dentist.

Access to mental health services

The Children's Commissioner's annual mental health briefings show the differences between ICBs in the median wait for treatment – from a minimum of 6 days from referral to second contact in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, to 118 days in Hampshire and Isle of Wight. They also show the large range in spending on children's mental health services per child, with North West London spending the most - £2,410 per referred child in 2024-25 - and Kent and Medway spending the least - just £569.[10]

Mental health support teams

Another metric where we see a high degree of national variance is in children's access to mental health support teams. Children's mental health requires holistic support, and increasingly schools are expected to deliver support for children who require mental health care. Mental health support teams (MHST) are a service designed to provide low level and early intervention support to children and young people in mainstream education, and as at spring 2025 they cover 52% of pupils or learners in eligible provisions in England. This access is not split equally across the country. In Leicestershire, only 24% of children have access to this provision, compared with 99% of children in South Tyneside[11]. Given the 17,235 children in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland ICB with active mental health referrals, it is not the case that Leicestershire children are not in need of access to additional support.[15]

[10] As the boundaries of ICBs do not match local authority boundaries, these important metrics cannot be included as scored measures in the Childhood Lottery, but are described in the evidence annex.

[11] Highest and lowest scoring local authorities - the Isles of Scilly, where 100% of children have access to the provision, and the City of London, where 8% of children have access to the provision - have small populations of children.

Pen portrait 3:

Lyla is 15 and lives in Leicestershire, where only 24% of schools in the area are covered by a Mental Health Support Team, he will face an uphill battle to access one. She lives with her mum, dad and younger sister aged 3. When starting secondary school Lyla began to struggle with anxiety. As there is limited access to MHST in Leicestershire, she was not able to access support for this when it began, and the anxiety has now worsened to the extent that Lyla struggles to attend school.

Had Lyla grown up in a different local authority, for instance South Tyneside, she would have benefitted from the fact that Tyneside has 99% MHST coverage. This may have allowed Lyla to be supported sooner, before things got worse.

Support for disabled children

Being able to access healthcare matters to every child, but in particular is important for children who have complex health needs or disabilities. In 2024–25, Hartlepool had one of the lowest rates of spending on children with disabilities as a proportion of overall children and young people's expenditure in England, at just 0.6%, compared with 8.5% in North Yorkshire. This may help explain why many children in Hartlepool don't feel that they have access to healthcare when they need it. Spending never paints the whole picture, but it is essential that local authorities work together with ICBs to understand the health needs and disability populations among their children so that they can provide the services they may need.

School nursing

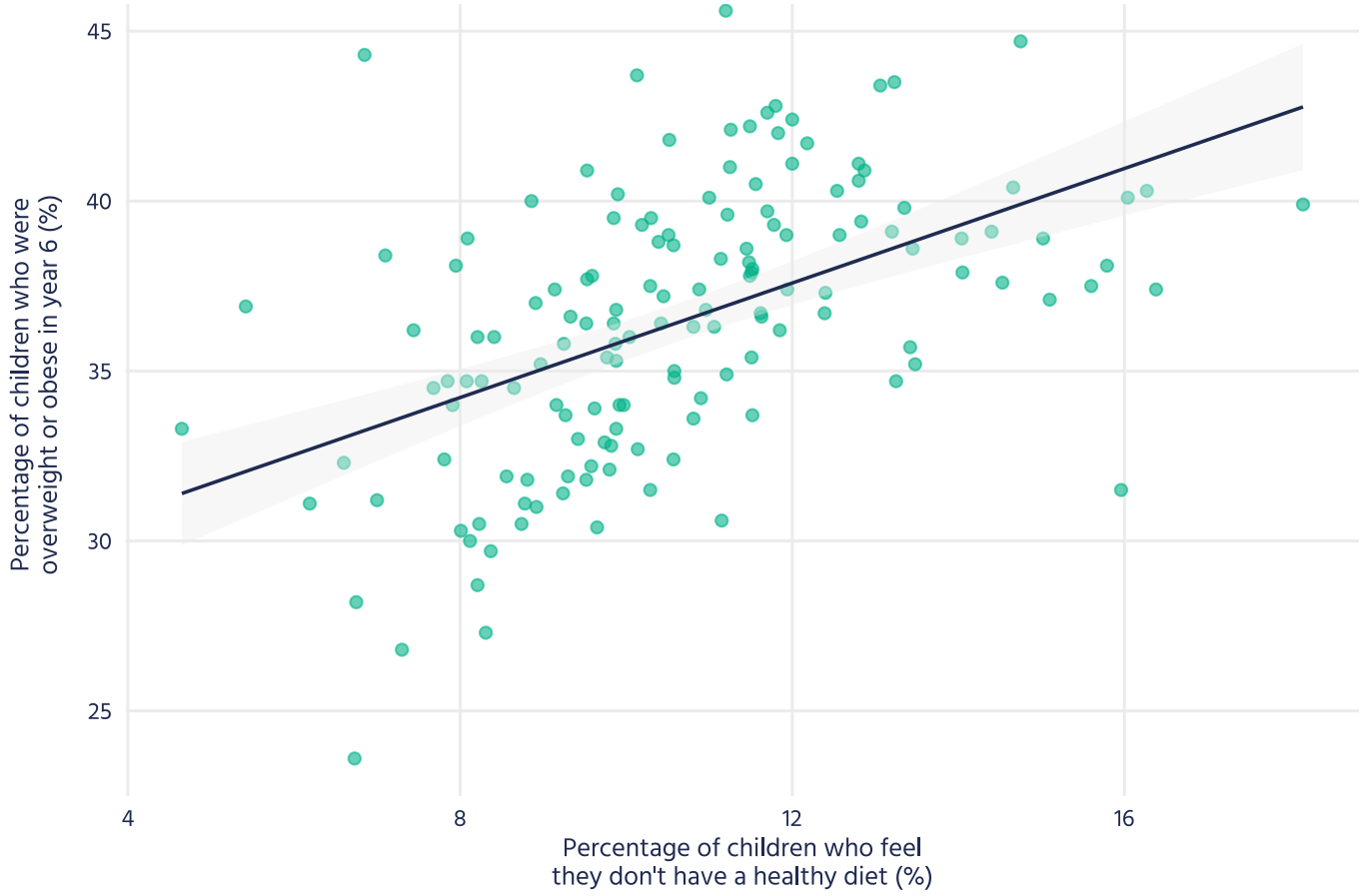
For children, being able to access healthcare as a part of their daily lives and routines is essential for both health promotion and treating ongoing conditions. Barking and Dagenham, where 8% of children disagree that they can access good healthcare when they need it, placing them in the bottom 10 for this metric, also has one of the lowest levels of school nurse staffing, with just 1.1 FTE school nurse for every 10,000 children, placing them 6th lowest in the country, compared with much higher rates in Greenwich (with 11.9 FTE per 10,000 children) and Halton (11.1 FTE per 10,000 children).

Healthy diets

Children's perceptions also vary notably when it comes to their perceptions of whether they have a healthy diet – and areas which have higher rates of children disagreeing that they have a healthy diet

also have higher levels of childhood obesity (Figure 7). In the 10 percent of areas with the highest rates of childhood obesity, 12.4% of children disagreed with "You have a healthy diet". In the 10 percent of areas with the lowest rates, this was 8.2%.

Figure 7: Childhood obesity and children's perceptions of whether they have a healthy diet



Note: see evidence annex for details of sources. Children's Commissioner's office analysis of data from Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and the Children's Commissioner's survey The Big Ambition.

3.5 Social Care

Children in social care need and deserve safe, stable and loving homes which can meet their needs and help them to flourish. This support should meet children wherever they are in their care journey and extend into their early adulthood as care leavers so that they can receive the help and guidance every young person needs.

Children with Child in Need plans

Every local authority should be able to provide help and support for the children in their local area who need it, and no two local authorities will face the same challenges. When a child is deemed in need of support from social care services, they are often first placed on a Child in Need plan, a multi-agency support plan produced after a child is assessed as requiring support to meet their health or development needs, or to prevent significant harm.

The number of children on Child in Need plan can therefore give us an indication as to the level of need a local authority is facing, or potentially the level that they are identifying as meeting their thresholds for needing support. Hartlepool has one of the highest rates of Children in Need at 636 children in every 10,000, compared with Essex, a much bigger geographical local authority which has 178 children in need in every 10,000 children. The resources and support which Hartlepool needs to ensure it meets all of the needs of their children will be different to that of Essex, and also of smaller local authorities with lower rates of children in need such as the Isles of Scilly (16 per 10,000), City of London (69 per 10,000) and Rutland (177 per 10,000).

Social worker instability

The metrics relating to children's social care showed no exception to the pattern that there are clear postcode lotteries in existence across England. The most variable metric was social worker instability, where children in social care experiences three or more social workers in one year. In 2025, 24% of children had three or more social workers within the year indicating high social worker instability. Across the 152 local authorities that provided social worker data the average percentage of children looked after who had high social worker instability was also 24%.

This percentage is substantially higher for children in Tameside, where 50% of looked after children had 3 or more social workers in the year, compared with just 3% in Hartlepool. It is not acceptable that

a looked after child in Tameside is more likely to experience a fragmented approach to support, where they are less likely to build trusting relationships which allow them have their wishes and feelings heard and reflected in social work decisions, simply because of where they live.

Out of area care placements

When a child is taken into care, where they live and who they live with often changes very quickly. It is essential that, every single time it is safe and possible to do so, other important stable factors in children's lives are maintained such as their school, connection with other family members, siblings and friends, by placing the child as close to home as possible. It is therefore deeply shocking that the local authorities with the lowest figures for this, North Lincolnshire and Lancashire, are still placing 17% and 18% of children out of area respectively. All other local authorities where the data is available are placing more than 1 in 5 children out of area. This is as high as 89% in Westminster, who report the highest number of out of area placements.

This issue does not exist in isolation for each local area. Each will have its own structural challenges, for example Westminster is an urban area with limited physical housing options, and the midlands have a lower number of specialist or secure placement options available for children with complex needs.

3. Conclusion and next steps

This report has revealed that what children across the country feel to be true is in fact true. That it simply is harder to be a child in Middlesbrough than it is in Cheshire. The Commissioner has seen some areas where, because of either systemic failures or specific failures in one area, no child could reasonably be expected to thrive, and those that do thrive do so against the odds. The outcomes are shocking. That is an unacceptable failure.

On top of that, it is clear that children in every part of the country face deep, unacceptable, and avoidable challenges compared to their peers. That a child in Croydon is more likely to be scared walking home from school than a child in Bedford will be. That a child in Redbridge will be less likely to have somewhere to play than a child in Milton Keynes. That a child in Westminster will be more likely to grow up facing multiple house moves and instability than a child in Hartlepool. That perhaps most damning of all the children in the care of the state, where we should have the most consistent and high standards, will be vastly more likely to have to change social workers in Tameside than in Brighton and Hove.

Behind every single data point in this report is a child. The Commissioner has personally spoken to thousands of children over the last year, and heard from hundreds of thousands more via her surveys. When areas are unsafe, that is not a point on a dashboard, it is children being the subject of racist abuse and violence on the way to school. When local services fail, it is not a failure to hit KPIs, it is a child on the phone to their school with their parents dead in the other room.

What the Commissioner has seen constitutes a state of emergency for some children. Children are being systemically failed across the country, with some areas where this failure is particularly acute.

The current approach to policy making has failed children growing up in places like Middlesbrough, Bradford, and Halton. The Prime Minister has rightly acknowledged that a key failure of policy making over recent decades has been the inability to tackle deep disparities across the country. Part of his answer to that challenge is greater devolution of power to local areas. Particularly to combined, or strategic authorities.

That mission, reducing the unacceptable inequality between areas, could not be more urgent. This report has set out the scope and scale of the challenges facing children across the country. The recommendations that follow set out how central and regional government should prioritise children's

outcomes as decision making and power is devolved out of Westminster. Good growth in every postcode will only come with good childhoods in every postcode. That will not simply happen as a result of devolution, it must be bake into how devolution happens from the very beginning.

It is not enough to read this report and recognise that the level of delivery is insufficient. What is needed is a national response that matches the level of state failure and child distress. The state of our delivery for children is now a national emergency, and must be treated as such.

4.1 Children must be a priority for devolution

The data in this report has shown something incredibly powerful. Not only are children's lives significantly harder in some parts of the country than others, children themselves are often keenly aware of that. The first part of ensuring that devolution works for children is making sure that children are both prioritised by local decision makers and that the impacts of those decisions on children are understood.

4.1.1 High standards for children

The key test for success of devolution, for the Prime Minister, and for strategic authorities, is whether it leads to improvements in children's lives and the closing of the disparities in outcomes and access to services shown in this report. It is essential that every area both sets high standards for the children in its area and can evidence how it is delivering on those standards.

Recommendation 1: A Children's Test for devolution

Strategic authorities should adopt a children's test for the impact of their policies. This test should be based on a shared outcomes framework, adopted by all public services across an authority. The outcomes must cover the most significant problems facing children, including their access to good housing, their safety in their local area, or their chances of getting a good job.

All of these challenges will require different departments to take radically different approaches – from planning, housing, transport, police and more - to tackle the challenges and to take ownership of delivering on these outcomes. The strategic authority should assess and publish each year whether those outcomes have improved. In areas where children face greater challenges than elsewhere in the country – worse outcomes, worse access to services, lower

quality services – strategic authorities should report on how far they have closed the gap for children in their area.

4.1.2 A state of emergency for children

This report shows unacceptable outcomes and levels of service delivery for children in too many parts of the country. In some areas, this must be considered a state of emergency. It is right to set high standards – but it is equally necessary to have measures in place for when an area is failing to deliver for its children, and for national government to be able to step in to drive improvement, until an area can demonstrate it has shown sufficient change.

Recommendation 2: Children's Emergency Fund

There should be a set of minimum standards for children's outcomes, and where these outcomes are not hit, local areas should be able to draw down on a national fund to deliver the services that children need, including, but not limited to: education, policing, health, and youth services. Where outcomes fall below this standard, action must be taken to bring together all relevant bodies to deliver for children, to develop a clear action plan for meeting those standards. Local areas must evidence how they will bring in expertise from high performing areas in order to deliver this plan.

4.2 Making devolution work for children

Additional resources are of limited use if they are not spent well, by people responsible for the outcomes of children. As such, a critical lever for addressing this state of emergency is clear accountability. Without this there is a significant risk that children, and children's policy, will not be the priority it needs to be for devolution to strategic authorities. A number of changes are needed.

4.2.1 Accountability

In the current legislation governing strategic authorities, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, areas will have several 'areas of competence': transport and local infrastructure; skills and employment support; housing and strategic planning; economic development and regeneration; the environment and climate change; health, well-being and public service reform; public safety; culture; rural affairs and coastal communities.

All of these issues affect children deeply, and yet children are not mentioned in the Act at all. There is a significant risk that, as at national government level, children will not be prioritised by regional authorities even as they take on greater responsibility and have a greater role in children's lives.

Recommendation 3: A Deputy Mayor for children

Every strategic authority should have a Deputy Mayor for children, or designated lead for children. They should be responsible and empowered to deliver key new functions, particularly around the coordination of local authority services and regional delivery as set out below.

They should be held accountable against the Children's Test in their area. That should include setting out how they will meet the agreed set of outcomes for children, what measures they will use, and publishing an annual report of their performance.

4.2.2 Responsibility

One of the key challenges facing strategic authorities when delivering for children is the chaotic nature of administrative boundaries and overlapping requirements for services and local authorities to work together.

That has a particularly damaging effect on the children facing the greatest challenges in their lives – who often rely on multiple services at the same time. In terms of the way public bodies are organised:

- There are 153 local authorities with children's social care responsibilities – many of which are going through reorganisation. In addition, there are 6 Regional Care Cooperatives where local authorities work together to deliver care.

- There are 39 police force areas, with plans to reduce these down to 10, 36 Integrated Care Boards, responsible for planning, commissioning and overseeing most NHS services, which are also in the process of being reorganised.
- Overlayed on those there are 9 Job Centre Plus areas and 39 Local Skills Improvement areas across which skills and training planning is coordinated.
- There are also approximately 1,000 multi academy trusts covering around half of schools, with others run by local authorities. There are nine regional directors working within the Department for Education, and Ofsted operates regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams

The 20 strategic authorities, now up and running, do not necessarily map on to these areas of coordination or public service delivery. In addition, there are a range of specific duties which require many of these bodies to work together in order to commission and have strategic oversight of various services which affect children. These include:

- a multi-agency safeguarding partnership which includes local authorities, police and health[16]
- MAPPA arrangements including police, probation, youth justice[17]
- the Prevent duty[18] and statutory guidance[19]
- the Serious Violence Duty, which requires local agencies to work together to tackle serious violence[20]
- Health and Well-being boards[21]

While these administrative areas and overlapping duties and responsibilities is far removed from children's own experiences of public services, it has a very direct effect. At a minimum it means inefficiency and duplication. At worst, it means children are caught between two services who won't take responsibility, or simply slip through the gaps in support caused by a lack of coordination.

Recommendation 4: Align the footprints for all the services which touch children's lives.

Central government should work with education, health and social care and policing to align the geographical footprints of DfE regions, ICBs, policing, Regional Care Cooperatives and

fostering hubs at the Strategic Authority level. Future schemes should align with the newly homogenous footprints.

Recommendation 5: Review statutory working together duties.

All statutory duties requiring local authorities, police, health and education to work together to commission and oversee services should be reviewed, with the default being that Strategic Authorities should – when they are sufficiently embedded – take on these statutory duties and streamline the boards and partnerships at the strategic level.

4.2.3 Funding

For devolution to be practicably effective, funding should be appropriately matched to devolved functions, and central government should develop clear multi-agency formulas, aligned with different stages of maturation for newly established strategic authorities. Learnings from more mature strategic authorities such as Greater Manchester should be drawn in developing this formula.

Recommendation 6: A centrally agreed multi-agency funding formula:

ICB's, the DfE, the Home Office and MHCLG should work together to develop a clear children's funding framework, stepped in line with different levels of devolution, to ensure that shifts in power and responsibility are accompanied with the right funding to deliver the corresponding services. This must take into account the different level of need in different local areas, as well as their differing abilities to raise money locally.

4.2.4 Data

The Childhood Lottery demonstrates that too often we do not know even the most basic things about children at a local level – such as how many of them visited a GP. Without this data, services are trying to deliver blindfolded. Without this data across areas, local and national governments are not able to make informed decisions or understand the impact of their decisions in the way they should.

No matter where decisions sit, they must be informed by recent, high quality, local data about the children whom they will impact. Every local area has different challenges, and understanding them is key to ensuring targeted support is delivered in the right places. A number of changes would help.

Recommendation 7: Minimum local data standards

Central government should implement data standards for strategic authorities, setting out what data they should collect, hold, and share with central government. That data should form a key part of their Children's Test.

Recommendation 8: Implement Single unique ID

To support that, the Department for Education should introduce a single unique identifier for all children without delay.

Recommendation 9: Fill the gaps in evidence

Central government should start to gather and publish data on children in families with no recourse to public funds (the Home Office), and GP use by children (the Department for Health and Social Care). The Department for Health and Social Care should re-commission the prevalence survey of children and young people's mental health.

4.3 All levels of government must respond to children's needs

Devolution to strategic authorities provides a number of specific opportunities to improve outcomes, boost access to services and improve service quality, particularly for vulnerable children. In particular regional government is well placed to provide and coordinate services for children with very high needs, where there is a low incidence at a local authority level, and to coordinate services that involve multiple services.

As the government begins to work with strategic authorities and local authorities to devolve children's services, it is essential that every layer is clear on their responsibilities to deliver quality for children, and the corresponding accountability framework. This section uses core issues identified by the Childhood Lottery to explore how the government could leverage devolution effectively for children.

4.3.1 School and college attendance

This report highlights that there is substantial variation in the attendance of children, the number of children missing education, and the support they are receiving with their education. While attendance is an issue for an individual school, the Children's Commissioner's work with the Greater Manchester Attendance Alliance highlighted how attendance cannot be tackled by schools alone – a child's health, their home life, and potentially exploitation can all affect their ability to engage in education. There is therefore a role for Strategic Authorities in tackling these challenges, while being held to account by national government for their performance.

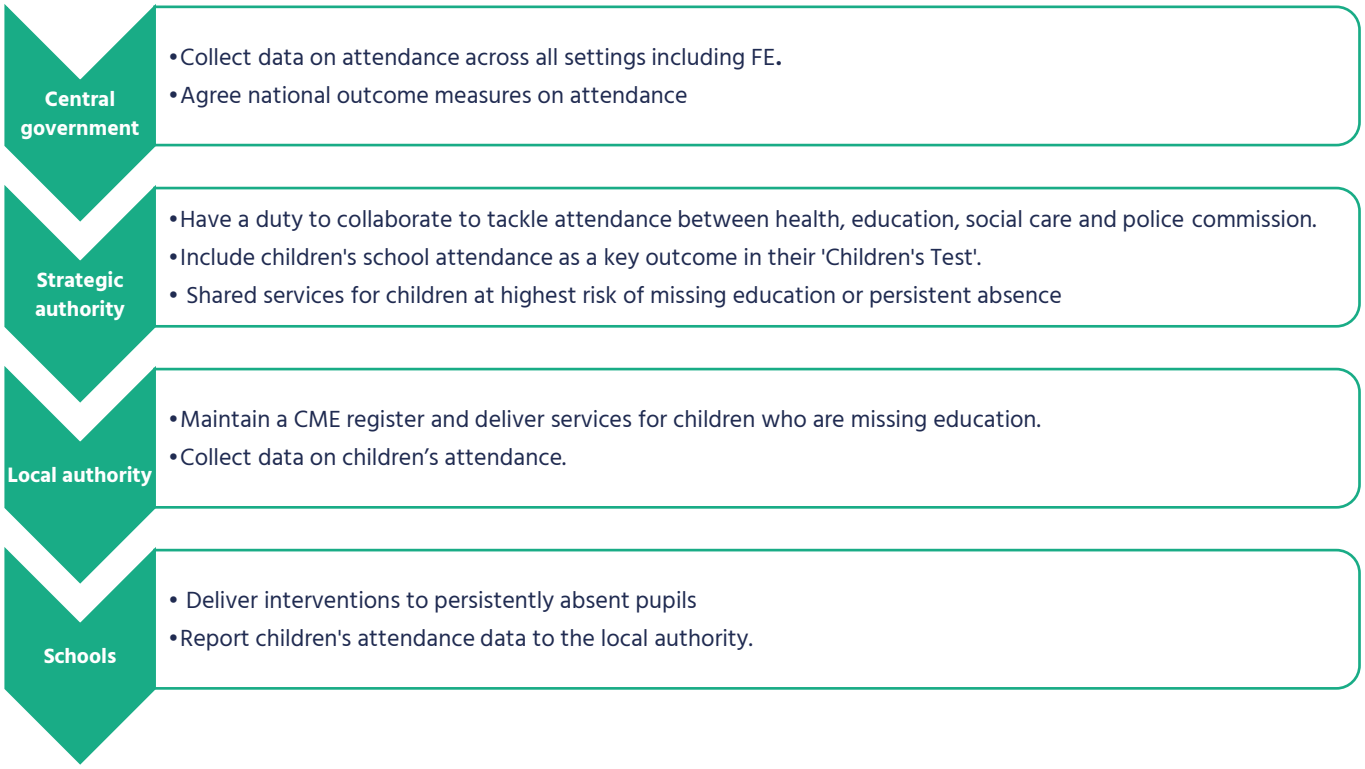
The following framework sets out which responsibilities and actions should sit with each layer of government, including the following new actions for strategic authorities.

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on attendance:

- **Recommendation 10:** The government should introduce a new statutory duty for Strategic Authorities to collaborate to tackle attendance between health, education, social care and police
- **Recommendation 11:** Strategic Authorities should include children's school and college attendance as a key outcome in their 'Children's Test'.

- **Recommendation 12:** Strategic Authorities should jointly commission shared services for children at highest risk of missing education or persistent absence.

Devolved levels of responsibility and intervention to tackling school attendance could look as follows:



4.3.2 High needs placements

This report has highlighted that there is real variation when it comes to the number of looked after children placed far away from home, reflecting the challenges that many local authorities face in providing sufficient accommodation for their children in care. The Children's Commissioner's work has consistently highlighted that there are some children for whom this sufficiency challenge is particularly stark – those children with the highest level of need, and for whom specialist placements, which might include those where children are deprived of their liberty are required.

This plays out in very harmful ways – such as the children who end up being placed in illegal children's homes, because no registered setting will take them. Some children who are accused of committing crimes end up being remanded into custody – which can have a devastating effect on their lives – because of a lack of suitable alternative accommodation. Other children end up 'stuck' in hospital because of the challenge of co-ordinating appropriate placements in the community, or packages of support at home.

There have been moves towards more of a regional approach, with the introduction of Regional Care Cooperatives which are in place across some of the country, although they do not always align with strategic authorities. There are some areas piloting alternatives to custodial remand, but these are not on the same footprint.

There are 13 Secure Children's Homes, but these are run at the local authority level, not the Strategic Authority level, and the 3 Young Offender Institutes and one Secure Training Centre in England are nationally commissioned. For children in mental health settings, some wards are commissioned nationally by the NHS (under 13 wards and medium secure wards) while other wards are moving towards Provider Collaboratives. This is a deeply confusing picture for commissioning placements for children with often overlapping needs.

The following framework sets out which responsibilities and actions should sit with each layer of government, including the following new actions for strategic authorities.

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on high needs placements:

- **Recommendation 13:** Strategic Authorities should have a joint responsibility for commissioning high needs placements for children, including places in Secure Children's Homes on both a welfare and justice basis, places for children deprived of their liberty under the

revised section 25 of the Children Act, and children who are currently deprived of liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court alternative accommodation for children on remand, and children in need of step down provision from inpatient mental health settings

- **Recommendation 14:** Government to introduce a new statutory duty for the strategic authority to work together across health, local authorities, and police to work together to avoid detention wherever possible, commission suitable placements, and support timely discharge from detention.

Central government

- Clear legal frameworks for depriving children of their liberty, including when children fall between the gaps of existing legal mechanisms such as the Children Act, the Mental Health Act, and youth justice legislation.
- Sufficient funding to strategic authorities to commission high needs placements
- Aligning the boundaries of regional care cooperatives and strategic authorities

Strategic authority

- Commissioning high needs placements for children, including places in Secure Children's Homes on both a welfare and justice basis, places for children deprived of their liberty under the revised section 25 of the Children Act, and children who are currently deprived of liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court alternative accommodation for children on remand, and children in need of step down provision from inpatient mental health settings
- Statutory duties on the strategic authority to work together across health, local authorities, and police to work together to avoid detention wherever possible, commission suitable placements, and support timely discharge from detention.

Local authority

- Retain statutory duties on sufficiency and towards all looked after children in their care
- Continue to collect and share data on children deprived of liberty

Neighbourhood

- Early intervention for children with mental health needs in neighbourhood health teams
- Support for children and families through Family Hubs and Young Futures hubs to avoid escalation of issues.

4.3.3 Children at risk of harming others

This report shows that children have very different experiences when it comes to their interactions with police – with hugely varying rates of stop and search being used across the country – as well as varying levels of support for children who are at risk of being drawn in to criminality.

There are a range of different agencies with responsibility for preventing children committing violence towards others. Children's services have a duty to safeguard children, including from extra-familial harms, police and youth justice services will carry out a range of diversionary activity for children, mental health services will work with some children who pose a risk to others, and the Prevent duty exists to prevent terrorism, and receives many referrals for 'violence fixated individuals'. Yet the Children's Commissioner's work on children who are referred to Prevent shows that many of them will bounce around the system, without receiving any intervention.[22]

The following framework sets out which responsibilities and actions should sit with each layer of government, including the following new actions for strategic authorities.

Recommendations for Strategic Authorities on children who may harm others:

- **Recommendation 15:** Hold a streamlined set of statutory duties to work together with health and policing to prevent children from causing harm
- **Recommendation 16:** Strategically commission services for children at highest risk of causing harm
- **Recommendation 17:** Develop a workforce plan across the area for professionals who work with these children, including using devolved skills and post-16 budget to create appropriate pathways into work

Central government

- The Home Office and Department for Education issue joint statutory guidance on children who pose a risk to others
- The Department for Education should review Working Together to Safeguard Children to be clear that risk of committing violence or harm to others should be a reason for a safeguarding referral to be made and for support to be offered.
- Home Office, Department for Education and DHSC to agree clear funding streams for children at risk of causing harm to others.
- Review the statutory duties to work together placed on local authorities, police and health as set out in chapter four.

Strategic authority

- Hold a streamlined set of statutory duties to work together with health and policing to prevent children from causing harm
- Strategically commission services for children at highest risk of causing harm
- Workforce planning across the region for professionals who work with these children, including using devolved skills and post-16 budget to create appropriate pathways into work

Local authority

- Retain duties under the Children Act to assess and support children
- Ensure children's services and youth justice services are working together to appropriately divert children from harmful behaviour

Neighbourhood

- Targeted youth work including voluntary and community sector for children at risk of being drawn into harm

5. Methodology

The aim of the Childhood Lottery project is to describe what it is like to be a child in each local authority in England, using data from the Children's Commissioner's term in office, which runs 2021 to 2027. The Children's Commissioner's office carried out a review of the latest available data on different areas of children's lives, defined by the Commissioner's pillars of work and including children's views and experienced gathered by the Commissioner. The Commissioner's young ambassadors advised on the project plans.

Types of metric

The 162 metrics cover physical and mental **Health**; **Family** measures covering early years, poverty and housing; **Schools and jobs and skills** metrics including attainment, SEND and post-16 issues; children's social **Care** including care leavers up to age 25; **Community** metrics covering children's safety, interactions with police, and youth justice; and **Better World** measures covering youth voice, leisure and youth services.

The 162 measures cover children's **access** to services (64 metrics); the **quality** of these services, including some spending metrics (19 metrics) and child **outcomes**, including some covering data and reporting issues (78 metrics). For example, one 'access' metric is whether the police force covered by a local authority offers legal advice to all children in custody as a default. One 'quality' metric is social worker instability, that is, a looked after child experiencing 3 or more social workers during a year. One 'outcome' metric is children's responses to the Children's Commissioner survey *The Big Ambition* on whether they enjoy school.

The metrics are also divided into three types according to data quality and whether local authorities can be scored and ranked into better or worse, in terms of how easy or hard it is to be a child in the area. These 96 **scored** metrics are shown on the interactive maps. They are high quality and widely available data where high or low values can be said to represent 'good' (a maximum of 10 points) or 'bad' (a minimum of 0 points). For example, high social worker instability is bad. Each scored metric has the same weight, for a maximum possible total score of 960.

The 32 **context** measures do not contribute to the scores but cover important areas of children's lives where quality local data are mostly available. For example, the number of young carers identified by a local authority. In this case, a high number cannot be said to be good or bad. In some cases these

measures would be scored if they were more complete or of higher quality, for example, access to public transport, and levels of physical activity. These data are provided for download but not shown in the interactive maps.

As part of the project the Commissioner has therefore published local data on 128 metrics – scored and context metrics - where local data are mostly available. The remaining 34 **narrative** measures cover topics like youth workers, where no data are available, and the number of children on council housing waiting lists, where a national total is available but not local data. The evidence annex highlights what is known and not known about these evidence gaps covering important areas of children's lives.

Local authority level focus

As the focus of the project is on what it is like to be a child in each local area, some potential metrics have been excluded as out of scope, such as higher education participation and Ofsted inspection findings. In line with this focus, only a few metrics and only one scored metric – youth services spending, as a proxy for the quality of youth services - cover local public service funding or spending.

Accountability for improving access to services, service quality and child outcomes is spread across a number of local services and central and local government. Three narrative measures (described in the evidence annex) are taken from the Children's Commissioner's series of annual mental health briefings, where ICB performance can be scrutinised in more depth, as it cannot be mapped to local authority areas due to different boundaries. A number of metrics apply data on police forces to the local authorities they cover, not as a comment on local authority performance in policing, but in the interests of describing what it is like to be a child in that area.

Data sources

Data come from a range of published and unpublished sources, detailed in the evidence annex, including the Children's Commissioner's own surveys, data requests and analysis (50 scored metrics), along with data from the Department for Education (22 scored metrics), with 10 other bodies providing the remaining 24 scored metrics. These are the Office for National Statistics, the Arts Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Ofsted, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the NHS, the UK Health Security Agency, the Home Office, and the Youth Justice Board.

Analysis

In some cases the Children's Commissioner's office has analysed published data, for example, to calculate rates per 10,000 children in an area – details are provided in the evidence annex for each individual metric. Specific inclusions and exclusions are detailed for each metric in the evidence annex,

Illustrative quotes are taken from the Children's Commissioner's research including early responses to the Children's Commissioner's survey of children in England, The Big Future. In some cases, these written comments have been edited for length or clarity.

Appendix: Summary of metrics

The following tables list, for each pillar of the Children's Commissioner's work, the 96 scored measures shown in the interactive maps, with the data sources.[12] These are the metrics where local data are available and can be ranked to show where it is hardest to be a child. Other measures, where data are not available or cannot fairly be ranked, are available to download as contextual measures, but not mapped, or are described in narrative form in the evidence annex.

Better world

13 scored metrics	Data source
Children don't feel people who run the country listen to their views	CCo
Children don't feel they can make a difference on issues that matter to them	CCo
Children don't feel they are treated fairly	CCo
Children don't feel they have fun activities near where they live	CCo
Access to a Youth Council	CCo
Levels of youth services spending	DfE
Access to play areas	ONS
Access to public sport and leisure facilities	ONS
Access to libraries	Arts Council
Access to youth hubs	CCo
Access to youth clubs or centres	CCo
Access to targeted support or youth group for LGBTQ+	CCo
Access to targeted support or youth group for Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT) children	CCo

Additional context metrics: Access to parks and play areas; Access to green space; Access to public transport.

Additional narrative metrics: Participation in arts, culture and entertainment; Number of youth workers.

[12] CCo: Children's Commissioner; DfE: Department for Education; Defra: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; ONS: Office for National Statistics; DWP: Department for Work & Pensions; MHCLG: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government; OHID: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities; UKHSA: UK Health Security Agency; YJB: Youth Justice Board.

Family

17 scored metrics	Data source
Children who don't live with people who make them feel loved and cared for	CCo
Children who don't feel that their family has everything they need to support them	CCo
Relative child poverty	DWP
Breakfast provision by schools	CCo
Free food provided in schools	CCo
Access to targeted support or youth group: children from low income families	CCo
Children who don't feel they have somewhere to call home	CCo
Children living in temporary accommodation (incl. B&Bs)	MHCLG
Households left homeless after prevention duties ended	MHCLG
Households left homeless after relief duties ended	MHCLG
Access to childcare (age 0 to 7)	ONS
Wrap-around childcare provided in school	CCo
Children achieving a good level of development (EYFS)	DfE
Access to child development reviews at 2 to 2 and a half years	OHID
Access to family hubs and children's centres	CCo
Access to a specialist or targeted support group for young carers	CCo
Schools with a dedicated staff member supporting young carers	CCo

Additional context metrics: Level of family support services funding; Identification of young carers

Additional narrative metrics: Foodbank use and household food insecurity; Household financial insecurity and low financial resilience; Number of children with a parent in prison; Number of children on council housing waiting lists; Number of children with no recourse to public funds.

Health

17 scored metrics	Data source
Child mortality rate	ONS
Children who don't feel they have access to good healthcare	CCo
Childhood vaccination coverage	NHS
Adolescent vaccination coverage	UKHSA
HPV vaccination coverage	UKHSA
Attendance at NHS Dental Visits	NHS
Children who feel they don't have a healthy diet	CCo
Children who were underweight in year 6	OHID
Children who were overweight or obese in year 6	OHID
Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children	OHID
Access to substance misuse services	CCo
Children who don't feel they have someone supportive to talk to	CCo
Access to Early Support Hubs (Mental Health Drop in)	CCo
Access to bereavement service	CCo
Access to Mental Health Support Teams	CCo
Inpatient hospitalisations for mental health	OHID
Targeted support or youth group: children with SEND or health needs	CCo

Additional context metrics: Low birthweight, Health Visitors (age 0 to 5) workforce; School nurse (age 5 to 19) workforce; Dental decay in 5-year-old children; Children in substance misuse treatment; Children with disabilities and health needs: DLA statistics; Children with disabilities and health needs: Children's Disability Register; Children with disabilities and health needs: LA spending

Additional narrative metrics: Exposure to poor air quality; Smoking and vaping, alcohol consumption and drug use; Sexually transmitted infections (STI) rates; Conception rate in under 18s; Access to sexual health services; Children with active mental health referrals; Average waiting times for mental health treatment; Average spend on mental health support per child; Children who had their mental health referrals closed before treatment; Number of children who visit their GP.

Schools, job and skills

19 scored metrics	Data source
Children who do not enjoy school	CCo
Children who do not feel they have supportive teachers	CCo
Child who do not know about money or life skills	CCo
Children Missing from Education	DfE
Targeted support or youth group for home educated children	CCo
Unauthorised absence rate in mainstream schools	DfE
Exclusion rate in mainstream schools	DfE
Unauthorised absence rate in state-funded alternative provision	CCo
Use of unregulated alternative provision	DfE
Timeliness of Education. Health and Care Plans issued	DfE
Access to a local authority Educational Psychology Team	CCo
Unauthorised school absence rate in special schools	DfE
Children who do not feel they have the same opportunities as other children	CCo
Children who do not know about good jobs for when they are older (primary)	CCo
Average Attainment 8 Score	DfE
Percentage getting a good grade in English and Maths (Pass 5)	DfE
Availability of post 16 provision	DfE
A level average scores	DfE
Young people not in education, employment or training	DfE

Additional context metrics: Electively home educated children; Level of SEN support in mainstream schools; Percentage of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in mainstream education, Children who do not know about apprenticeships, university options or career paths (secondary)

Additional narrative metrics: Diversity of subjects available at Key Stage 4; A level participation; Participation in Applied General courses; Participation in T level courses; Participation in Apprenticeships (under 19s)

Care

14 scored metrics	Data source
Use of out of area placements	DfE
Care placement instability	DfE
School placement instability	DfE
Social worker instability	DfE
Access to Children in Care Council	CCo
Access to specialist and targeted support for looked after children	CCo
Access to independent advocacy services for looked after children	CCo
Access to independent advocacy services for wider groups	CCo
Percent of care leavers in touch with local authority	DfE
Percent of care leavers in suitable accommodation	DfE
Percent of care leavers not in education, employment or training	DfE
Access to independent advocacy services for care leavers	CCo
Access to specialist and targeted support for care leavers	CCo
Specialist and targeted support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	CCo

Additional context metrics: Children in Need; Children on Child Protection Plans; Looked After Children; Unknown or unreported distance of placement from home; Social worker caseload; Social worker turnover; Looked after children's average Attainment 8 score; Access to a child contact centre; Number of care leavers aged 17 to 21; Number of care leavers aged 22 to 25; Number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Additional narrative metrics: Primary categories of need for entering care; Children's Social Care Ofsted Ratings; Reasons for ceasing to be a child in need; Accommodation in secure children's homes; Children deprived of their liberty; Homeless 16- and 17-year-olds; Deaths of children in need; Council Tax exemption for care leavers; Support workers in school for UASC.

Community

15 scored metrics	Data source
Children who feel unsafe in their local area	CCo
Children who feel unsafe online	CCo
Number of children who went missing	NCA
Access to Return Home Interview Services	CCo
Access to Child Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (CIDVA)	CCo
Access to Child Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (CISVA)	CCo
Targeted support or youth group: children at risk of sexual exploitation	CCo
Targeted support or youth group: children at risk of criminal exploitation	CCo
Victims of exploitation referred to the National Referral Mechanism	HO
Number of children stopped and searched	HO
Recording of vulnerability of children who are stopped and searched	CCo
Number of arrests of children	Home Office
Vulnerability of children recorded when in custody	CCo
Use of force by police against children	Home Office
Children offered legal advice in custody as a default	CCo

Additional context metrics: Police Community Support Office (PCSO) or Safer Schools Police Office (SSO) in schools; Time taken for an outcome in cases involving child victims

Additional narrative metrics: Number of child victims of crime; Number of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation; Number of children strip searched; Children offered legal advice in custody as a default; First time entrants to the youth justice system; Number of children in the secure estate; ; Inspection results of police performance in child protection; Joint Targeted Area Inspections; Criminal justice outcomes.

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