**We Need To Talk: The Children’s Commissioner’s report on access to speech and language therapy**

We recommend that you read the report in full to understand the whole picture; we have produced this summary to enable you to easily cut and paste key facts into your own documents and communications.

**About the report**

* The Children’s Commissioner for England is Anne Longfield. Her role is to promote and protect the rights of children, especially the most vulnerable.
* Independent from Government and answerable to Parliament, the Children’s Commissioner has been given unique powers to deliver the role, including the power to gather data from public sources.
* For this report – [We Need to Talk: Access to speech and language therapy](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/we-need-to-talk/) – data was collected from 144 upper tier local authorities (LAs) and 181 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs).
* The data request asked about spending on speech and language services between 2016 and 2019.

**Key findings – national**

* Over half (57%) of areas in England saw a real-terms reduction in reported spending on speech and language therapy over the last three years.
* There was enormous variation in reported spending between areas in England, with the top 25% spending at least £16.35 per child, and the bottom 25% spending 58p or less per child.
* Only half of areas are jointly commissioning speech and language services, despite the expectations of the SEND reforms.

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| **Key findings – regional**  If you are based in the following regions you may wish to highlight:  **East of England**   * CCG spending on children's speech and language therapy is lowest in the Midlands and East region.   **East Midlands**   * Local authority spending on children's speech and language therapy in the East Midlands is the lowest in the country. * CCG spending on children's speech and language therapy is lowest in the Midlands and East region.   **North East**   * Local authority spending on children's speech and language therapy in the North East is below average.   **South West**   * Local authority spending on children's speech and language therapy in the South West is below average.   **West Midlands**   * Local authority spending on children's speech and language therapy in the West Midlands is the second lowest in the country. * CCG spending on children's speech and language therapy is lowest in the Midlands and East region.   **Yorkshire and the Humber**   * Local authority spending on children's speech and language therapy in Yorkshire and the Humber is the third lowest in the country.   You can find the full regional breakdown on pages 16-17 of the report. |

**The Children’s Commissioner’s central recommendation is:**

* A renewed government strategy for addressing SLCN, with the appropriate funding to support it. The strategy should:
  + Make sure that areas are held to account for the support they provide to children, by collecting expenditure on an on-going basis. If this is not achieved within the next two years the Children’s Commissioner intends to repeat the exercise and publish the figures for each LA and CCG.
  + Require that all areas have a joint strategic plan which assesses the level of SLCN in the area, outlines the joint commissioning plans to meet that need and details how they will assess the outcomes.
  + Enable and share best practice.

**The Government response**

“Communication support particularly benefits from a joint commissioning approach. The NHS Long Term Plan recognises the importance of speech and language therapists and proposes that local areas design and implement models of care that are age appropriate, closer to home and bring together physical and mental health services… We are keen to work with the Children’s Commissioner’s Office on the issues of expenditure data.” Caroline Dinenage, Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care

**Opportunity for action: Send the Children’s Commissioner’s report to your local children’s lead**

* The NHS Long Term Plan states that local areas will design and implement models of care which will provide holistic care across local authority and NHS services, specifically mentioning speech and language therapy.
* NHS England are creating a network of children’s leads across the 44 sustainability and transformation partnership (STP) areas who will lead the scope and design of appropriate models of care for children and young people.
* You could contact your local children’s lead and ask to meet with them to discuss the findings in the Children’s Commissioner’s report and what it means for new models of care in your area.

**Key quotes**

*“I often hear from parents and those working with children about how speech and language therapy, when delivered well, and at the right time, can make all the difference.”* Anne Longfield, Children’s Commissioner for England (Introduction to [We Need To Talk](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/cco-we-need-to-talk-june-2019.pdf))

*“The downward trend in spending in more than half of areas is deeply worrying, when a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the RCSLT and I CAN showed that 59% of parents already have to fight to get the support their child needs.”* Kamini Gadhok, CEO of the RCSLT ([RCSLT press release](https://www.rcslt.org/news/commissioner-applauded-for-revealing-postcode-lottery-of-spending))

*“Early intervention is key, but schools are finding it harder and harder to access specialist help from speech and language therapists, as both school budgets and local authority budgets are cut. Investment is vitally needed to enable these crucial experts to continue their work.”* James Bowen, Director of Policy at the National Association of Head Teachers ([NAHT comments on Children’s Commissioner report](https://www.naht.org.uk/news-and-opinion/press-room/naht-comments-on-childrens-commissioner-report-into-speech-and-language-therapy/))

*“Children requiring access to Speech and Language Therapy should not be the victims of a postcode lottery. Children only get one chance at school, and sufficient provision of SLT can ensure a child gets the very best start in life.”* Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union ([NEU press release](https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/childrens-commissioner-report-speech-and-language-therapy-services))

*“It is absolutely vital that we invest in support for children and families, and speech and language therapy is one vital part of that.”* Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (Comments quoted in [the Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/speech-language-therapy-children-location-school-england-anne-longfield-postcode-lottery-a8952536.html))