



We Need To Talk: Access to Speech and Language Therapy RCSLT response

The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, has today published [We Need To Talk: Access to Speech and Language Therapy](#). The report examines the amount spent on speech and language therapy for children aged 0-17.

The report's findings include:

- Over half (57%) of areas in England saw a real-terms reduction in spending on speech and language therapy over the last three years.
- Enormous variation in 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.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes the report. This unprecedented research adds substantial weight to the conclusions of the [Bercow: Ten Years On](#) report: that services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England are inequitable and inaccessible.

While some variation in spending would be expected to meet local needs, the low levels of spending in some areas – as low as 58p per child - and the resulting postcode lottery for children with SLCN and their families, is unacceptable.

Moreover, 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.

What needs to happen?

The RCSLT is grateful to Anne Longfield for using her unique powers to shine a light on this urgent issue. Today we join with her in calling on the Government to:

- Develop a renewed government strategy to ensure the necessary help for children with SLCN is in place across the country.
- Hold areas to account for the support they provide to children with SLCN.
- Require that all areas have a joint strategic plan in place which assesses the level of SLCN in their area, and outlines the joint commissioning plans to meet that need.
- Enable and share best practice.

The upcoming spending review and development of an NHS Children and Young People's Transformation programme present opportunities to make these changes a reality. We stand ready to work alongside the Children's Commissioner, Government departments and other stakeholders to bring about the changes needed to improve access to speech and language therapy for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

For more information please contact caroline.wright@rcslt.org



The Children's Commissioner and children with speech, language and communication needs

This is not the first time that the Children's Commissioner has drawn attention to the importance of children and young people's speech, language and communication:

- In July 2018 the Children's Commissioner's [annual study of childhood vulnerability](#) identified children with speech and language difficulties as part of a vulnerable group in their own right.
- In February of this year, [Keeping Kids Safe](#), a report on gang violence and criminal exploitation, reported that speech and language therapy was the intervention most often raised with the Children's Commissioner in the course of the research.
- Last month (May 2019) [Far Less Than They Deserve](#), a report about children with learning disability or autism living in mental health hospitals, highlighted the need for continued and joined up support in the community from a multi-disciplinary team, including speech and language therapy.

We remain grateful to Anne Longfield for her continued commitment to standing up for the rights of the most vulnerable children, including those with speech, language and communication needs.
