



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State

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For John,

I am announcing today that I have asked you to conduct an Independent Review of the Office, Role and Functions of the Children's Commissioner for England. I would like this review to make recommendations that would improve the impact and effectiveness of the role. I have asked you to undertake this review because of your wide practical experience of the realities of children's lives. I am most grateful to you for agreeing to lead it.

The education, health and wellbeing of children are vitally important for our society. This Government is committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and believes it is vital that children and young people have a strong, independent advocate to champion their interests and views and to promote their rights.

The role of the Children's Commissioner was created by the Children Act 2004 to ensure that children and young people's voices are heard, and I acknowledge the work that the previous and current incumbents have done to promote children's interests. It is now more than 5 years since the first Commissioner took up office but the role and remit have not yet been reviewed. There is a continued debate about the remit of the post as compared to international and devolved administration counterparts, the public profile of the post and the impact it has had.

The Government has committed, in our coalition agreement, to increase accountability and review the cost of quangos and, therefore, I agree with the broad consensus that it is now time to take stock of the office, role and functions of the Children's Commissioner for England through a detailed and considered review. This will provide an opportunity for the Government to consider the views of a wide range of partners on how government can best promote children's interests – including the voluntary and private sector, commissioners and providers of children's services, the

current and previous Children's Commissioners and from children and young people themselves.

I would like this review to take a wide-ranging and independent look at the office, role and function of the Children's Commissioner. You will determine how you approach the issues, but I set out here three key aspects that I would like you to cover.

The powers, remit and functions of the Children's Commissioner:

I would welcome your recommendations on how best to serve the interests of children and promote their rights. What impact has the role had? What changes would be desirable to bring the role into line with the United Nation's "Paris Principles" for human rights organisations? How does the role compare with the approach taken in other countries across the UK and internationally? How can the role be configured to ensure that children and young people are more aware of it, and to better demonstrate Government's commitment to the UNCRC? Should it have a stronger and more active focus on vulnerable children?

The relationship with other related functions supported by Government

I would welcome your views on the relationship with other government-funded organisations which cover similar functions, such as the interface with the Children's Rights Director within Ofsted. Is it helpful or confusing for government to support organisations with complementary functions?

Value for Money

Given the current financial climate and our commitment to increase accountability and reduce the cost of Arms Length Bodies, it is particularly important that the review provide an assessment as to the extent to which the Children's Commissioner's current remit, functions and resources provide value for money including an assessment against the technical, transparency and impartiality tests set by Cabinet Office. Does the Children's Commissioner need a dedicated Office to make a success of the role? How can any recommendations for strengthening functions or powers be achieved in a cost-effective way? You should also consider the recent restrictions placed on Government marketing and advertising, and their relevance to the budget and spending commitments of the Commissioner.

Conduct of the Review

You will determine how the review will be conducted. I know you will ensure maximum opportunities to consult are taken, and consider the broad spectrum of opinions on this issue and welcome your plans to issue a formal call for evidence. I would like you to consider, in particular, how best to engage children and young people in giving evidence to the review and commenting on your recommendations. You would be welcome to use the Department's Children and Youth Board as one way of achieving this.

I am conscious that there are a broad range of views about this role. Cabinet Office guidance recommends that consultation should last for a period of at least 12 weeks. Particularly with the school holidays approaching, I would suggest that you allow for

such an exercise as part of your review. I would welcome an update on your thinking by mid-October with a full report by the end of November. I will then consider your recommendations and the implications for any further action by Government, including any legislative change.

The current role and functions of the Office of the Children's Commissioner will of course continue during the period of this review.

The Department will provide you with the necessary professional and operational support for the review, including a small secretariat. The Review will have a budget of up to £50,000 to cover your own costs and the costs of any external consultation and analysis you commission.

I look forward very much to your findings. I will be placing a copy of this letter in House Libraries

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Gove', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

MICHAEL GOVE