

Questions chosen by young people in the Ask Me What Matters Pilot (July 2026)

Ask Me What Matters is a national pilot that embeds care-experienced children and young people's own well-being priorities into everyday practice, ensuring their voices directly shape the support they receive. It involves incorporating questions about the things that are important to young people in conversations with social workers or personal advisers and capturing these insights and the actions that follow in local authority systems.

Introduction

For over a decade the Bright Spots programme has provided a unique insight into how children in care and care leavers feel about their lives in the areas that are important to them. Developed by Coram Voice in partnership with Professor Julie Selwyn at the University of Oxford, the Bright Spots surveys were co-produced with children in care and care leavers to measure what they felt made their lives good.

The Ask Me What Matters (AMWM) pilot builds on the [Bright Spots programme](#). Whilst the Bright Spots programme provides an effective point in time overview of how groups of children in care and care leavers are doing and allows services to respond to what they told them collectively, it does not allow local authorities to identify and act on how individual children and young people feel they are doing.

AMWM seeks to remove this gap. It ensures children and young people's voices are gathered regularly, recognised and used to shape the support they receive in real time.

AMWM is guided by three core principles:

1. **No voice without action** – Change will be based on what children and young people say matters most to them.
2. **Co-production** – AMWM works with local authorities to co-produce improvements with children and young people.
3. **Change to practice at every level** – From individual support to strategic decision-making.

AMWM aims to ensure that services for children in care and care leavers are shaped by what matters most to them, by:

- Embedding subjective well-being questions into everyday conversations
- Updating data recording systems so workers can capture and respond to young people's views
- Supporting practitioners and leaders to act on what young people say
- Co-producing improvements with young people at every stage

Four local authorities (Coventry, Dorset, St Helens, Surrey) have been working with Coram Voice over the last two years. There are three phases to the work:

1. Mapping and scoping

- Identifying which aspects of well-being matter most to young people building on insights from the Bright Spots programme about what is most strongly associated with well-being
- Reviewing existing recording tools and agreeing with young people how they want their workers to talk to them about the things that matter to them
- Scoping how to integrate new questions into everyday practice and recording tools (e.g. in care plans, pathway plans) to ensure they are used consistently

2. Embedding well-being priorities

- Co-producing action plans with young people
- Updating IT and case management systems
- Creating youth-led guidance for staff on how to talk to children and young people about the things that matter to them and how to record these conversations

3. Informing practice

- Training workers to ask about, record, and act on young people's views
- Developing AMWM guides, films, and peer learning resources
- Beginning to capture data in updated systems and using early insights to refine practice

This briefing focuses on Phase 1. It outlines the well-being areas that were chosen by local authority in partnership with their children and young people. Some areas replicate the Bright Spots questions; others have been jointly constructed by children and young people and local authorities.

Talking with young people about what matters to them

Identifying what children and young people want adults to talk to them about was an important part of the Ask Me What Matters pilot. However, it became evident early in the project that *how* workers talked with young people was just as important.

Children and young people highlighted the importance of 'curious conversations' - using thoughtful questions to get to know them and make them feel seen and heard. Children were clear that AMWM should not become a 'tick box exercise', but a meaningful way for workers to understand them and what matters to them as individuals.

All LAs have worked on guidance for workers, created in partnership with children and young people – see these examples from St Helens:

[Ask Me What Matters - YouTube](#)

[St Helens Listens](#) – see [AMWM children's visual tool resource](#)

Who talks to children and young people

Who asks the questions can significantly influence how children and young people respond, and this should be carefully considered when designing approaches. For example, the anonymous Bright Spots surveys explore levels of trust in workers and carers among children in care and care leavers. To minimise bias, these surveys are not administered by social workers, personal advisers or carers.

AMWM authorities were therefore asked to work with young people to identify what questions should be asked, who should ask them and in what context. This is important because young people need to feel comfortable and supported to be open and honest when sharing their views.

Across the four local authorities AMWM questions are mainly asked by social workers or personal advisers, but one local authority also plans to include Independent Reviewing officers. At the time of writing, St Helens and Surrey have gone 'live' with using the questions and collecting data. Coventry and Dorset are working towards launch.

7 Drivers of well-being

All the questions we explore in the Bright Spots surveys cover aspects of life that children in care and care leavers told us make their lives good. We also ask a set of core well-being questions that explore happiness, life satisfaction, whether the things you do in life feel worthwhile, positivity for the future and anxiety.

By using statistical and qualitative analysis of Bright Spots surveys responses we identified the areas that are most strongly linked to well-being. In our [From Surviving to Thriving](#) report we outline seven drivers of well-being for children in care and care leavers, based on over 27,000 survey responses. These are:

1. Emotional and mental health support
2. Family and friends
3. Trusted and supportive carers
4. Known and trusted workers
5. Feel safe and at home
6. Involved and informed
7. Opportunities to learn and grow



What questions did children and young people and local authorities choose to be asked?

- we have indicated whether each question is 'closed' (set answer options) or 'open' (requiring a free text response)
- we have indicated whether each question will be asked to children in care (CiC) or Care leavers (CL) or both

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Overarching well-being questions (6 questions and 2 inventories comprising an additional 19 questions)	How happy did you feel yesterday? (CiC & CL) [closed] How happy are you with your life at the moment? (CiC) [closed] How anxious did you feel yesterday? (CL) [closed] How positive are you about your future? (CL) [closed]	How happy did you feel yesterday, on a scale of 0-10 (CL) [closed] How positive are you about your future? (CiC) [closed]		Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) (CL age 15+) [closed] • I've been feeling optimistic about the future • I've been feeling useful • I've been feeling relaxed • I've been dealing with problems well • I've been thinking clearly • I've been feeling close to other people • I've been able to make up my own mind about things

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Overarching well-being questions				Stirling's Children's Wellbeing Scale (CiC age 8-15) [closed] 1. I think good things will happen in my life 2. I've been able to make choices easily 3. I can find lots of fun things to do 4. I feel that I am good at some things 5. I think lots of people care about me 6. I think there are many things I can be proud of 7. I've been feeling calm 8. I've been in a good mood 9. I enjoy what each new day brings 10. I've been getting on well with people 11. I've been cheerful about things 12. I've been feeling relaxed

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Emotional and mental health support (18 questions)	Do you have a person you trust? (CiC & CL) [closed] Do you ever feel worried or anxious (CiC & CL) [closed] If you worry, are you getting help from an adult (CiC) [closed]	Do you have a person who you trust, who helps you and sticks with you no matter what? (CL) [closed] Who gives you emotional support? (CL) [open] Do you ever worry about your feelings or behaviour? (CiC) [closed] When you feel sad or worried, who do you talk to or what do you do? If you do ever worry, are you getting help from an adult? (CiC) [open]	Do you feel like you have people in your life who you can trust? (CiC & CL) [open] What are your worries or fears? (CiC & CL) [open] What helps you when you are feeling down? (CiC & CL) [open]	Do you have adult/someone you trust? (CiC & CL) [closed & open] Do you have an adult/someone who sticks by you ? (CiC and CL) [closed & open] How confident do you feel in yourself as a person? (CiC and CL) [closed] What helps you to feel more confident in yourself? (CiC and CL) [open]

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
		What support do you need? (to talk to someone about how you feel?) (CiC) [open] In the last few weeks how often have you felt lonely? (CL) [closed] If your mental health is not great, how would I know/ what does this look like? Who would you go to/where would you go/what support would you want? (CL) [open]	What makes you feel lonely? (CiC & CL) [open]	
Family and friends (7 questions)	Do you have a really good friend? (CiC & CL) [closed]	Do you have a really good friend? (CiC) [closed] Who is your best friend? (CiC) [open] Who do you see/not see – would like to see more often? (CiC and CL) [open]	Are you spending time with people/animals who are important to you? (CiC & CL) [open]	Is there anyone you don't see, who you would like to? (CiC and CL) [open] What might help you to feel more connected to people? (CiC and CL) [open]
Trusted and supportive carers (0 questions)				

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Known and trusted workers (7 questions)		What is the best way for us to communicate together? (text, call, what's app, email) (CiC & CL) [open] Is there a preferred day or time for me to contact? (or a time not to contact, i.e. 9am)? (CiC & CL) [open] Do you have a preferred location to talk with your social worker, or somewhere you don't want to talk to social worker? (i.e. visit at school or not) (CiC) [open] Do you know who your social worker is (CiC) [closed] Is it easy to get in touch with your social worker? (CiC) [closed]	How can I build trust with you? (CiC and CL) [open] Are the adults in your life sticking to promises and timescales that have been set? (CiC and CL) [open]	

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Feel safe and at home (9 questions)	Do you feel safe in the home that you live in? (CiC & CL) [closed] Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? (CL) [closed]	Do you like your bedroom? (CiC) [closed] What would make your bedroom better? (CiC) [open]	Do you feel safe and settled where you live? (CiC and CL) [open]	Do you feel safe in the home you live in now? (CiC and CL) [closed & open] Do you feel safe in the area you live in now? (CL) [closed & open] Do you feel settled in the home you live in now? (CL) [closed & open] Do you feel settled in the area you live in now (CiC and CL) [closed & open]

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Involved and informed (11 questions)		Has an adult explained why you are in care? (CiC and CL) [closed] Do you know how you can access your records? How can I best support you to answer any questions you may have? (CL) [open] Do you know your background, culture, identity (How could this be supported better)? (CiC) [open] Do you have any important dates coming up in your life? If so, is there a better way to celebrate this with you to mark the occasion? (CL) [open] What is in your pathway plan and is there anything missing that you would like to have in there? (CL) [open] Do you know the care leaver local offer? (CL) [closed] Do you know your rights and entitlements? Have these been explained to you? (CL) [open]	Do you understand your story of why you are care experienced? (CiC and CL) [open] How do you feel about being care experienced? (CiC and CL) [open] Is there anything you want to change in your life right now? (CiC and CL) [open]	Has an adult/someone explained to you what led to you being in care? (CiC and CL) [closed & open]

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Opportunities to learn and grow (17 questions)		How much do you like school or college? (CiC) [closed] Have you thought about your ideal job or things that may interest you? (CiC) [open] Outside of school or college, to you get the chance to spend time on your own hobbies or activities? (CiC) [closed] Are you doing any activities outside of the home? If yes, what are you doing? (CiC) [open] Are there any activities that you would like to try? (CiC) [open] How often do you get to practise life skills like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or using money? (CiC) [open]	How are you finding education, training or work? (CiC and CL) [open] What are you enjoying in your life right now? (CiC and CL) [open] What things would you like to try? (CiC and CL) [open] What life skills do you think you have and what do you need? (CiC and CL) [open]	

Question theme	Surrey	Coventry	St Helens	Dorset
Opportunities to learn and grow		What skills are you learning? What would you like to learn? Who would you like to help you with this? (CiC) [open] Are you able to cook / clean / decorate – self independence skills – do you know how to use a washing machine/iron etc? (CL) [open] Do you understand energy bills? (CL) [closed] What is your favourite thing to cook or something you haven't cooked, that you would like to? (CL) [open] How are you coping financially? (CL) [closed] [Is there any support that you need] [open] Do you know how to access driving lessons, council tax discount, lower water rates, bus passes? (CL) [closed]	Do you have all the basic things you need? (CiC and CL) [open]	
Other (1 question)	Do you feel safe online? (CiC & CL) [closed]			

What questions were most commonly asked?

Number of local authorities	Type of question
4 out of 4	• Adult/someone you trust – All LAs ask whether children and young people have someone they can trust (1 LA does not ask children in care only care leavers). 1 area separates out having someone you trust and someone who sticks by you. 1 LA integrates someone who helps you and sticks by you in question about trust
3 out of 4	• See people important to you – 3 of 4 LAs ask their children in care and care leavers whether they see/spend time with people who are important to them or if there is anyone that they would like to see more. One of those LAs asks about what would help them feel connected. • Feel safe in home – 3 of 4 LA ask if feel safe in their home (to both children in care and care leavers). 1 of these LAs asks about feeling safe and settled in the same question. • Explanation/Understanding of why in care – 3 of 4 LA ask about whether children in care feel they understand why they were in care or whether an adult has explained (to both children in care and care leavers). 1 LA asks follow up questions about whether CL know how to access their records and how they can be best supported to answer questions. • Worries – 3 of 4 LAs ask about if child worries (1 LA asks about this alongside anxiety, another with behaviour), 2 ask if child does ask whether they are getting help
2 out of 4	• Friends – 2 of 4 LA – but one LA for children in care only – only 1 LA asks about friends to both children in care & care leavers. 1 of the 2 LAs who ask about friends also asks who they are. • Feel safe in area – 2 LAs ask care leavers whether they feel safe in their neighbourhood/area they live in now. 1 of these also ask children in care the same question. • Feel settled in home – 2 of 4 LA ask if feel settled (to both children in care and care leavers). • Like school/college – 1 LA asks how much children in care like school/college. Another how children in care and care leavers are finding education or work. • Worker relationship/communications – 2 LAs ask about how children in care and care leavers would like to communicate with/see their workers or how workers can build trust. 1 of these asks about whether adults stick to promises/timescales. • Life skills – 2 of 4 LA ask about life skills practice (both ask children in care and care leavers). 1 of these also ask specific questions about understanding energy bills, cooking, cleaning, ironing. • Interests/things you enjoy – 2 of 4 LA ask about hobbies or activities and things that children and young people would like to try (one asks children in care & care leaver but one children in care only)

	• Happiness yesterday – 2 of 4 ask this to both children in care and care leavers • Making plans – 2 LAs ask care leavers about what they would like to change – 1 focuses on the pathway plan specifically and another asks both children in care and care leavers if there is anything in their lives they would like to change. • Coping financially – 1 LA asks both children in care and care leavers whether they have all the basic things they need. 1 LA asks care leavers how they are coping financially and a follow up questions about access to specific financial support (driving lessons, council tax discount, lower water rates, bus passes) • Identity – 1 LA asks if care leavers know their background culture identify & how to support. Another LA asks about how care leavers and children in care feel about being care experienced. • Positivity about the future – 2 ask their children about positive about the future – 1 asks care leaver only • Anxiety – 1 asks care leavers about how anxious felt yesterday; another asks both children in care & care leaver if they ever worry or are anxious • Loneliness – 1 asks both children in care and care leavers about feeling lonely, the other directs this just to care leavers • Feeling down / mental health – 2 LAs asks their children in care and care leavers about what helps if they feel down / their mental health is poor
1 in 4	• Bedrooms – 1 LA asks children in care whether they like their bedrooms and what would make them better • Emotional support – 1 LA asks care leavers only whether they have someone who provides emotional support • Feel settled in area – 1 LA asks about whether children in care and care leavers feel settled in their area • Know social worker – 1 LA asks children in care if they know who their social worker is • Ease of contacting social worker - 1 LA asks children in care how easy it is to contact workers • Important dates – 1 LA asks care leavers about important dates and how to support around them • Rights – 1 LA asks care leavers whether they know their rights and entitlements and whether they have been explained to them. They also ask care leavers whether they know about the local offer for care leavers • Confidence in self – 1 LA asks about how confident feel in self, and what helps to feel more confident to both children in care and care leavers • Safe online – 1 LA asked children in care & care leavers whether they felt online

Patterns across the questions chosen

- The questions that local authorities and their children and young people opted to introduce covered all of the 7 drivers of well-being, except for trusted and supportive carers.
- However, one question asks about whether the *adults in your life keep their promises and deliver within timescales*, which is a question that could potentially apply to both workers and carers.
- All local authorities included a question about whether children and young people had *an adult/person they could trust* (though one of the LA did not ask their children in care only care leavers)
- Three out of four local authorities talked to children and young people about whether they:
 - See people who are important to them,
 - Feel safe in the home where they live,
 - Understand or someone has explained why they are in care.
 - Worry
- The questions selected included a mix of open and closed formats. The closed questions can be easily collated and visualised in dashboards, while the open questions are also analysable but require qualitative coding to identify patterns, themes, and collective messages.
- Two local authorities opted for more closed questions and one of these has already integrated responses into a dashboard that gives an overview of how children in care and care leavers responded to the questions. These questions were more closely aligned to existing Bright Spots survey questions, and this has allowed some comparison with Bright Spots national data (e.g. averages for children in care and care leavers, and, in some instances, the general population).
- The other two local authorities focused more on open questions (e.g. *'What are you enjoying in your life right now?'*) or identify additional support that they may wish to receive (e.g. *'What is in your pathway plan and is there anything missing that you would like to have in there?'*)
- One local authority integrated questions that specifically sought to check whether care leavers were aware of specific support available, e.g.
 - *'Do you know how to access driving lessons, council tax, lower water rates, bus passes?'*
 - *'Do you know the care leaver local offer?'*
 - *'Do you know how you can access your records? How can I best support you to answer any questions you may have?'*
- Some questions have integrated follow up open questions to initial closed questions (e.g. *'Do you like your bedroom'* (closed) & *'What would make your bedroom better?'* (open))
- In the well-being domain, one local authority chose two inventories that incorporated a range of questions to understand wellbeing, rather than standalone questions. The inventories are a set of validated questions that together give an indication of overall well-being.
- The most questions were in the two drivers 'emotional support and mental health' and 'opportunities for learning and growth'

Appendix: number of questions and how responses are collected

LA	Number of questions	How
Surrey	11 questions in total - 6 for children in care and care leavers - 2 for children in care only - 3 for care leavers only =8 questions for children in care = 9 questions for care leavers	Questions are asked through six-monthly care and pathway plan review meetings
Coventry	38 questions in total - 4 for children in care & care leavers - 19 for children in care only - 15 for care leavers only = 23 questions for children in care = 19 questions for care leavers	Proposed to be captured as part of mid-point reviews for children in care (social worker and or IRO) and as part of pathway planning for care leavers (PAs)
Dorset	12 questions in total -10 for children in care & care leavers -1 children in care only (scale question with 12 sub questions_ -2 care leaver only (1 scale question with 8 sub questions) = 11 questions for children in care (plus scale with sub questions) = 12 questions for care leaver (plus scale with sub questions)	Plans to integrate to care planning and pathway planning
St Helens	16 questions in total (all for both children in care and care leavers)	Captured routinely as part of social workers or Personal adviser visits and recorded on a visit template

Find out more

For more information about Ask Me What Matters and the Bright Spots programme see the Coram Voice website or email brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk

Bright Spots Programme

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/bright-spots-programme/>

Ask Me What Matters

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/resource-library/ask-me-what-matters-ensuring-services-are-shaped-by-care-experienced-voices/>



© Coram Voice, 2026

Coram Voice, Coram Campus,
41 Brunswick Square, London
WC1N 1AZ

www.coramvoice.org.uk