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Inquiry on

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

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10.40 am

Witnesses: Councillor Liz Green, Alison O'Sullivan

Members present

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood (Chairman)
Lord Brabazon of Tara
Baroness Gould of Potternewton
Baroness Kennedy of Cradley
Baroness Massey of Darwen
Baroness Morris of Bolton
Baroness Noakes
Lord Patel
Lord Sawyer
Baroness Shephard of Northwold
Baroness Tyler of Enfield
Baroness Walmsley

Examination of Witnesses

Councillor Liz Green, Deputy Chair, Children and Young People's Board, Local Government Association, and **Alison O'Sullivan**, Vice President, Association of Directors of Children's Services

Q122 The Chairman: Welcome and thank you very much for being willing to give us your time. We regard this as quite a critical and crucial session because you represent groups right at the heart of the provision that is being made and we hope will be made in the future. Thank you also for the written evidence. That was very helpful and I am sure that will be referred to as we go through. I will just remind you that we are now broadcasting and, secondly, that there is a recording being taken and there will be a written record of everything that is said during the session. You will see this and have the opportunity to make any corrections in good time, but it will be all written down and it will be sent out to you. I wonder if I could just start by inviting you simply to say who you are, introduce yourself for the purposes of the microphone, and then we can begin the discussion.

Councillor Liz Green: My name is Councillor Liz Green and I am the Liberal Democrat group leader on the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the deputy chair of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board.

Alison O'Sullivan: Good morning. I am Alison O'Sullivan. I am director for Children and Adult Services in Kirklees, which is in West Yorkshire, and I am also the vice president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

The Chairman: Thank you. My name is Sutherland. I am a Cross-Bencher who has an increasing interest in this topic due to the quality of the witnesses and the discussions we have had. I wonder if I can start with a fairly general question. What are your thoughts on the role of local government in the provision of childcare and early education? Is there a confusion of roles? Are there too many roles? Are there too many objectives? Would you like to reflect on that?

Councillor Liz Green: Yes. We have agreed I will start off on this one and then we will take it between us. We have a very established role particularly as the champions of disadvantaged and vulnerable children. I am sure the Committee is very aware of our statutory duties to improve the well-being of children in our area and reduce the inequalities and that we have to secure the part-time early education places for every three and four year-old and the 40% of two year-olds who meet the eligibility criteria.

We also have the role to secure sufficient childcare but, very importantly, so far as is reasonably practicable. That is a very important part of what it is that we need to talk about. Then obviously we provide advice: we are often a first point of call for parents who need advice and help and we will all run, individually in our councils, various advice lines and advice services.

The Chairman: I should imagine that “as far as reasonably practicable” could either be a get-out line or cover a lot of uncertainties that we want to probe this morning. Did you want add anything to that?

Alison O’Sullivan: Just to add the other things that are particularly in focus when we are thinking about vulnerable children: around children centres, providing support through children centre services; not necessarily children centre buildings but a range of supports to reach out to families. Increasingly, in local authorities it is not just the very young children but also older children and their families. Also, we recognise that, as the local authority assumes responsibility through public health in commissioning services for nought to five year-olds, that presents us with an opportunity to join up locally some of the initiatives that Councillor Green has described with our drive to try to close the gaps between the most disadvantaged and other children in our local areas.

The Chairman: I am not surprised that both of you have emphasised the role in relation to the child, but one of the Government’s stated objectives, and I think this does not vary a lot between the parties, is to increase the possibility of employment for parents who wish to have this opportunity. Is that something that features highly or it is secondary? How do you pull them together?

Councillor Liz Green: I would say that for the local authorities, particularly in the areas that we work in—children’s services—it is about the child. It is about giving that child an opportunity and a fair start in life where that possibly does not exist due to their family circumstances. Clearly, allowing parents to be able to work and, therefore, have the childcare in place that enables them to go to work is also of concern to the wider council and the economic benefits that it brings to the area.

If you start around the child aspect then, particularly for the vulnerable children, you are promoting that as opposed to just starting from the point of view of allowing working parents, and particularly working mothers, to return to work or start work for the first time.

Alison O'Sullivan: I think many areas are looking to that connection to try to promote economic resilience within local communities, too; so recognising that employment is a route out of poverty but also recognising that, for a vibrant local economy, you need to encourage and support people into work. I am mindful of the work of the Troubled Families programme that draws that direct connection between trying to support people off benefits and into work, but also the wider benefits for families and their children when parents are able to work. It is all interconnected, but it is joining it up at local level that is the trick.

Q123 The Chairman: A last quick one from me. You have used the word “vulnerable” there in relation to children. Is this particularly because it is early childcare or would you use the same word and the same emphasis in general education, with the focus driven by the needs of vulnerable children?

Councillor Liz Green: I think that if the child is not vulnerable—I like to use the term “the nice middle-class upbringing” that I had, for example, and that many people have—those parents are able to fight for themselves for what they need. They are able to access information. They are able to have that discussion and reach an outcome that is right for their children and for them as parents. I think by “vulnerable” I am talking about the disadvantaged groups and that might be through special educational needs. It might be through economic circumstances. It might be through a lack of parenting skills because nobody showed them what to do. I think that does continue.

It is particularly important in the early years because that is when you are setting them on the path for life and, if they go to school at four and they are already behind, the school has

a job to try to catch them up. If you can resolve some of those issues very early on, obviously that makes the school's role easier to educate them because they are not doing the first bits that should have already happened, but I think the term "vulnerable" is used throughout their education if they have not been able to get to them in the very early years.

The Chairman: Do you take the further step of then moving on to say, "Well, if that is the focus and many children will have an adequate provision because of their family background, that should affect policy and relation to resources; our focus is affordable childcare"?

Councillor Liz Green: I see where you are coming from in that childcare should be affordable for all and not necessarily just for those groups, but as local authorities we often find ourselves being the voice of those groups that are unable to speak up for themselves. Therefore, we find ourselves in the position of often talking about the disadvantaged or vulnerable children and young people because they are the ones who need that extra help. It is not to dismiss the rest of the population and their need for affordable childcare, but merely, as local authorities, we tend to concentrate on those areas of targeted work.

The Chairman: I am not taking sides on this issue yet. I probably will have a formed view in due course, but this is raised as an issue of whether one should target funds or channel funds, which is why I wanted to ask your reaction.

Councillor Liz Green: From a personal perspective, childcare for pre-schoolers is very expensive, even if you are on a middle wage. It is a massive amount of your take-home pay, which is a problem for a lot of families and particularly for mothers to get back into work. From the local government perspective, we need to make sure that we raise the idea of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged children and their access to it and their outcomes in life.

Q124 Baroness Noakes: I would like to switch to funding. I am aware that local authorities will always think there is not enough funding for anything, but could we just focus specifically on the amount of funding from central government for free early education—whether, in your view, that is sufficient for high-quality places and, if not, how we get to that number?

Councillor Liz Green: The LGA has called for an analysis of funding costs. As with a lot of the education system, a lot of the funding is historically based on the school systems and that means that some authorities receive a higher per capita or per pupil amount of money than another authority with a similar catchment area. Obviously there are different issues at play always like rural, disadvantaged areas or English as a second language, but there are still great discrepancies. The LGA would support an analysis of the funding costs by both councils and providers and then, on that basis, look to see what would be classed as sufficient. Being a representative organisation, the LGA knows of councils where it clearly is not sufficient for their needs for them to be able to provide it but, on the other hand, other councils where they possibly do have sufficient funding.

Baroness Noakes: Is the LGA's position this is a question of distribution within a pot, but they do not have a view that there is not enough overall?

Councillor Liz Green: I think without an analysis of what the actual costs are, and that piece of work needs to be undertaken on a national level, which the LGA would take part in, you cannot say whether the overall pot is sufficient and should just be moved around the country to different authorities or whether that pot needs to increase.

Alison O'Sullivan: It is quite a complex picture and I am by no means an expert, but I do know that local authorities apply their own funding to support things like quality of provision and promoting that. Those sorts of areas that are discretionary and local are coming under

increasing pressure because of the reduction in funding for local government generally. Quite a number of places have to scale back or even remove that element of the provision.

Baroness Noakes: What examples do you have of councils funding quality in addition to the funding that is specifically earmarked for early school years provision?

Alison O'Sullivan: As part of the councils' overall school improvement activity, many councils including my own have funded activities specifically targeted towards early years providers to help to promote the quality of learning.

Baroness Noakes: Is that paying more to providers?

Alison O'Sullivan: No, in my own authority it is reaching out and providing training and other forms of support to promote the quality of that provision.

Baroness Noakes: You are supporting providers?

Alison O'Sullivan: Yes.

Baroness Noakes: I see.

Councillor Liz Green: We do have a specific example, which is Somerset County Council—excuse me reading it just to make sure I get the details correct; I think they have given written evidence about it. They pay providers an hourly rate of £4.07, but they receive £3.77 from the DfE. They have made the choice to pay an extra 30 pence an hour to enable them to have the quality provision that they feel is necessary. That is one example. There will be other examples that people from the LGA can provide for you.

Baroness Noakes: Do you know how prevalent that is? Are there isolated examples or is this a common pattern?

Councillor Liz Green: We would have to do the research through the LGA. My guess would be that it is not that common that the final sum is increased but, as Alison says, the work around that on helping providers, which comes from the general council funds, will be very

prevalent. Virtually all councils, I would suggest, are taking some of theirs to make sure that the providers are in the right place that they need them to be and that they are either good or outstanding or moving towards it.

Q125 Baroness Noakes: It has been suggested to us that the amounts paid by the local authorities to the providers are insufficient for those providers to provide the care that is necessary and that providers themselves then cross-subsidise by selling hours outside the free provision at a higher rate, either to the same parents or to different parents, but there is an element of cross-subsidy. Do local authorities have evidence of that? What do they think should happen? Should that be allowed? Is that a reasonable outcome or should it be changed?

Councillor Liz Green: You are probably right. Quite a lot of providers, particularly in the private voluntary and independent sector, will be doing that to subsidise. I do not think that that is necessarily acceptable because it may well be other parents who are then picking up the tab for the childcare, but the local authority would need to balance its books and may not be able to pay the provider any higher income than it receives from the DfE.

Baroness Noakes: Do the LGA do any work on this or do they just close their eyes to it on the basis that, if they can pass the burden on to the providers to then get a hidden cross-subsidy, that is fine?

Councillor Liz Green: No, I do not think the LGA closes its eyes to it. I am sure we have colleagues in the room from the policy part of the LGA who can provide further details. I do not have those details at the moment.

Baroness Noakes: If there is any analysis, it would be useful.

The Chairman: We might take that up through your office, in fact. I think we will come back to some of these topics.

Q126 Lord Brabazon of Tara: Could you say what guidance is given to local authorities on how the dedicated schools grant should be allocated? Are maintained settings always paid a higher rate for delivering early education than PVI settings? What is the reason for this?

Alison O'Sullivan: The guidance to local authorities is set out in the School and Early Years Finance Regulations. It is a highly complex area and I am not expert in it, but I do know that it informs local conversations that take place about how the allocations are made through the dedicated schools grant and that is overseen through the schools funding arrangements. I have forgotten the name of it now.

Councillor Liz Green: Schools forum.

Alison O'Sullivan: Schools forum, that is right. The schools forum will set that locally, but based upon that national guidance. They are able to take into account a range of factors and there is a reasonable range of factors that can be taken into account on a local basis. It is possible for a local schools forum to agree to pay supplements for quality but those would be paid across the sector, not just in the maintained part of the system. It is also possible for local factors to be taken into account, such as the premises costs and various things like that, as part of those broad discussions. It is a case of national regulation being the background but some local discretion and that is agreed. Private and voluntary sector organisations are part of the schools forum, so they participate and inform those local discussions.

Lord Brabazon of Tara: We have some figures that show a significant variation in the rates paid to providers by both provider type and local authority, quite a big variation.

Councillor Liz Green: Some authorities pay the same rates to all of their providers. I am told that Trafford and Kent both do that, but you are absolutely right. There is a variation in the local authorities on what is paid often to maintained settings and the PVI sector, but a lot of local authorities are concerned about addressing the inadequate provision within

disadvantaged areas. Often the private providers will not wish to move into those areas. I say “wish”. What I mean it is much harder to get the providers, particularly the private providers, to provide that service within those areas.

A lot more of them are then maintained settings where the local authority has set them up and they would receive additional funding because you will often have within those deprived areas more young people, more children with English as an additional language, or more children from low socioeconomic groups and the associated difficulties with those. It is not always as simple as they not paying the same rate. There may be some underlying factors behind why the maintained sector pays a higher rate, because those children need a greater level of input than within the PVI. That is a generalisation, obviously, rather than specific.

Q127 Baroness Walmsley: What proportion of the dedicated schools grant is usually required in order to administer the scheme? Other than administration, are there any other reasons for holding back some of the grant at local authority level? I wonder if you could focus on one specific thing. There has been a change recently in monitoring the quality of early years provision. It has gone mainly to Ofsted. Has that meant that the local authorities are now holding less money back because they do not have that duty anymore? Does it depend on the proportion of maintained and PVI settings in the authority? Does that have an effect on the amount that is held back and does not get through to the providers?

Councillor Liz Green: Basically the question of how much they hold back is: how long is a piece of string? I am informed that it ranges from 0% to 35%, which implies administration but what is held back is not always for administration. I think there is a confusion because, of the Section 251 returns that the local authorities make to Government, there has been a lot of discussion about that within the general schools’ budgets, with the academisation. Those Section 251 returns are interpreted differently across different authorities and they include

elements that are not about administering, because administering would not come out of the DSG. It would come out of our general fund.

We will all have individual pots within our general fund that look at our early years and our early years provision. Within local government I think it is accepted. Whether it is accepted by national Government I am not sure, but the 251 is not fit for purpose. It does not give the kind of figures that I think you are after, which is basically how much we are spending on administration of the tasks, because it includes things like directors' salaries and how you proportion that down to individual providers. They come out of our general fund.

The schools forums are working these days with the head teachers, the schools' representatives, and the PVI representatives to agree the dedicated schools grant and how that should be spent and how it should be split. That is following on from the lead from Government and I think that is working better. Obviously we have had schools forums for a number of years, but not in all areas have they worked particularly well. I think the system is working better now so that schools are making those decisions based on the facts of the individual circumstances of the local authority.

Kirklees and Kingston are very different authorities. Not dramatically different in size but, in terms of the population, they are very different and I would not expect Kingston to use the same kind of analysis of the needs of the schools as I would for Kirklees. I think that is replicated across the country.

Baroness Walmsley: Now that Ofsted has that duty, are you holding back less?

Councillor Liz Green: I am not aware that we are holding back less, but that would be down to each individual area and, like I say, their schools forum. While Ofsted has been given the duty to look at the quality of that and it has been removed from us, I think most local authorities still take school improvement—by “school improvement” I include early years

settings—very seriously because Ofsted comes in once every four years or so and has a look at it and in the mean time you do not respond unless there are complaints. I think that is wrong.

We all know that schools and providers can go from outstanding down to inadequate within a four-year period and we see our duty to be that monitor throughout that four-year period, to keep an eye on things. Often you can find that there is a small issue which, if you nip it in the bud between Ofsted inspections, will never reflect in an Ofsted inspection. That is the aim because if you miss it you have missed a whole cohort of children and young people coming through the system.

While the duty has been removed from us, I think most local authorities still wish to partake in that and providers like that support. Even good and outstanding providers—particularly good and outstanding providers—recognise the need for that support. We have no power to go in there but, if working with them is acceptable to them, they want us to help with any issues that they have, but it will vary across the country.

Alison O'Sullivan: Just to emphasise what Councillor Green said, the local sense of responsibility is not diminished by that change of responsibility. for Lead members and for directors and chief executives in councils still We feel responsible for the quality of what children are experiencing locally. It also connects to our duty to ensure sufficient good-quality places as well because, unless you have that ongoing relationship with the sector, you are not in a position to fulfil those responsibilities as well. It is not just having sufficient provision; it is also making sure that the quality is good.

Baroness Walmsley: Does the amount you need to keep back vary depending on whether you are predominantly maintained or predominantly PVI?

Alison O'Sullivan: I would say not because there is this balance between the maintained and the PVI sector to ensure that, overall, you have the right provision for your local population and so that overall responsibility is felt by everybody.

Q128 Baroness Massey of Darwen: Thank you for this submission from the LGA, which I found interesting. You say that the LGA is calling for a single local schools capital pot to allow councils and schools to work together and you go on to say you are concerned about the confusing structures of school accountability, which leaves parents unsure about who is responsible and so on. My question is about examples of local authorities which are taking action to ensure that provision is accessible and affordable. Clearly you have those examples and you have examples of all sorts of things. What is beginning to concern me, and it goes back to Baroness Noakes's points, I think, is that I do not see any overall analysis, local authority by local authority, of who is doing what, where there is good practice and how that good practice can be shared. Ofsted does not seem to have this kind of analysis. Does the Local Government Association have this? Who does have it? I think we need it.

Councillor Liz Green: I am not sure about the formal analysis. The LGA does a lot of work on sharing good practice. We have events. We have internet-based support. We have peer work where good practice is shared among the sector. I would say the LGA is very good at sharing that good practice among its colleagues. It is probably not necessarily in the format that you would be able to see, but it is good at sharing that good practice. Different authorities are doing different things but, as I say, they are very different because they respond to their local needs. What is best practice in one area is not necessarily appropriate in another area.

In Kingston we have a generally affluent society with some sub-ward-level massive deprivation areas, which is very different to an area with large swathes of deprivation or

English as a second language. You can share good practice, but you cannot take one and replicate it somewhere else.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: This is why I would like an analysis of who is doing what, where and to whom. In other words, I would like a map of local authorities and who is doing what. What kind of catchment area is it? How are they dealing with that catchment area? How do people deal with another entirely different catchment area? What happens to the money? Where is the money going? What is being topped up? What is not being topped up? Does anybody have that kind of document?

Councillor Liz Green: That is a huge piece of work because each local authority will have different aspects. There are a couple of specific examples that we have been particularly informed about. Brent is doing some work on irregular hours—obviously you can have people working irregular hours anywhere in the country—and will also be doing some work maybe with their PVI settings. I do not know. It may be topping up or maybe not topping up and that is one London authority.

The breadth of information that you are asking for across the whole of local government is extremely detailed. I would, in my authority, be able to give examples of where I think we have best practice but there might be six or seven and then there is the additional information on the funding and how that changes among the different settings.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: I realise that entirely, but each local authority must have a breakdown of how it is operating in relation to children's services.

Councillor Liz Green: It will have lots of documents, yes.

Alison O'Sullivan: Your fundamental point is right in that I am pretty certain that there is not that analysis on a national level. As Councillor Green said, there are places that people can look to for best practice. The LGA site is one. On a regional basis, people share best practice.

Ofsted also posts up best practice on its website following the various contacts it has with authorities, but I think you are right. I am not aware that there is a national analysis in the way that you describe.

Councillor Liz Green: Basically, we can ask some of the people at the LGA to look into trying to produce something. I am just not sure that it is possible on the scale that you are requesting, I have to say. I think it is too large a piece of work. We will all have lots of documents within our council that talk about our early years provision and we will all have early years strategies and so on, but I am not sure it is viable to go through all of those for each top tier authority.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: I am sorry to go on about this, but I do think we need analysis on this. Could each local authority not give a two-sides-of-A4 analysis on what these issues are and simply give them to somebody who will put it all together? Is that too simplistic?

Councillor Liz Green: I think that the request would go out from the LGA or from ADAS. We have no mandate to make them do it within the LGA, but the request could go out. I am sure that lots of authorities would respond with: "I could not fit this on to two sides of A4. Here is a document on it".

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Three sides of A4.

Councillor Liz Green: Yes, but they would respond with a plethora of information to the LGA if the request went out. Other authorities would not respond at all and we have no mandate to enforce them to respond to it. We would then probably end up with skewed information, which is why a lot of it is taken from the Section 251 because it is mandatory that the authority fills those in on the funding. Therefore, you know that that information is coming back from every local authority. The LGA cannot ensure that that would be the case.

Q129 The Chairman: Before we move on I would like to just probe a little on this, not least because your evidence suggests, among other things, that you would like a bit more clarity from the Government. When we take evidence, we keep getting the answer generally: “Oh, it is all a bit complicated and the local factors just confuse the issue”. Pushing the Government for clarity is something that I am quite sure we will do because the funding systems are complicated and people find it hard to work them. “Transparency” is a lovely word. We are all using it these days. How transparent is it to a parent or a school? That is the money that comes down. This is how it is broken up. This is how it is spent: X% goes on administrative costs and Y% goes on capital costs. You referred to that as well. You need a director of education or a director of services whose budget has to be scattered around, and any smart accountant would do that for you. They do that for a living. They will chop it up and if they do not get it right you will soon tell them. What drive is there for the local authorities to be more transparent to the providers and to the parents, the voters?

Councillor Liz Green: I think that the schools forum will produce its budgets each year, which are public documents and it is open for the public to attend schools forums meetings. I have to say I have never known a member of the public to turn up to a schools forum meeting because it is extremely complicated.

The Chairman: That is a reason for pushing this point.

Councillor Liz Green: Yes. I do not think parents look at the funding of schools particularly. I think the head teachers and the PVI managers see that information and certainly it is shared among our head teacher groups when they get together so that they know how it is all done. They then vote in their reps on the school forum, so it is for that head teacher rep from the primary sector or the nursery sector or whatever to distribute that information to those within their sector. I do feel that that information is available.

When it comes to members of the public and parents seeing that information, it would need to be explained because, if you are putting a different amount of money into one school to another, it will be on the basis of number of students with English as a second language, deprivation, special educational needs, additional needs and so on. That almost needs a full explanation alongside it because I, as a parent, would look at a school and say: “Well, that school is very similar to that school in the same sort of area. I do not think there is a lot of difference”.

I am not seeing those underlying figures. I do not know how many children at my children’s school have autistic spectrum disorder, which would initiate more funding, for example. I would not know that as a parent and neither should I particularly know that. I do not need to know how many children have additional needs at the school or English as a second language because I leave that up to the school.

The Chairman: As a voter?

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: Absolutely. These people are paying. Of course they have a right to know.

Councillor Liz Green: No, I did not say that they do not have the right to know. I said I do not need to know it and the reason that I do not need to know that information—

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I heard what you said. It may be that the LGA cannot provide us with the figures, which we must accept, of course, but for you to be advancing the view that there is no need for people to know how their money is spent, particularly in an area that is complex is, shall I say, surprising to me. We shall certainly be pressing Ministers on clarity in the way that they are allocating funds to all of this. We accept the complexity, of course. I do not know whether you want to rephrase what you have said, but you are giving, me anyway, as one member of the Committee, the impression that local

government is not prepared to account for the way it is disbursing funds in the areas for which it is responsible. That is the impression you are giving. You may wish to correct it.

Councillor Liz Green: That is not the impression that I mean to give. What I mean to say is that, as a parent, I do not need to know how many pupils at the school have additional needs. What I do need to know, and what is publicly available either through the schools forum and often on the council websites and on the DfE website, is the amount it receives per pupil to that school. I can see that total amount received per pupil for the school that my children attend or any other neighbouring schools or any school in the country; I can see how much it receives per pupil. The detail behind that figure is the detail of how that is broken down. As you say, that is extremely complex but I think that can influence parents' choice in a negative way, and this is my view, because if they see that a school has a particularly high autistic spectrum intake parents will worry unnecessarily, incorrectly, about that aspect.

The figure and the amount of money that that school receives is public knowledge and is publicly available, as is how much they spend and how they spend it. The breakdown on the DfE website shows how much they spend on their teaching staff, how much on their non-teaching staff; how much they spend on the other aspects of the school, IT and all the rest of it—how much they need to be able to run a school. That information is publicly available and I would support it being publicly available.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: People other than parents also need to know this. There are governors of schools. I have been a parent governor for years. I would have wanted that detail.

Councillor Liz Green: It is there, publicly available, on the DfE website.

Alison O'Sullivan: Perhaps I can comment, too. The challenge here is that it is presented differently in different places, but in every local authority there will be two main elements. As Councillor Green says, there will be the deliberations of the schools forum and the way that that works. That is public and it then feeds through to published information on the various spend as has been described. Also, importantly from a parent's point of view, there will be lots of information about the characteristics of schools and settings in their local area and the sorts of offers that there are and the funding arrangements around that. I think the fundamental point in discussion here is: how easy is it for people to join those two things together and to see a continuous link with the deliberation about how funding is allocated and what it means for them as a parent or an interested member of the public? I think it is probably difficult in many places.

Q130 The Chairman: Just to bring the perspective in, that is precisely one of the things this Committee wants to do. One way of putting the point is: suppose we selected half a dozen school Forum and sent them a letter and said, "We would like an analysis. That is the money that comes in. This is what you are spending. What happens to the bit in between and are you benefiting from it?" Would we be able to get that information?

Alison O'Sullivan: Yes, you would get a very clear answer.

The Chairman: If we cannot get it, clearly then we find it very difficult to say to the Government, "This is affordable or not affordable." That is why we are interested.

Alison O'Sullivan: Absolutely. You would get a clear answer from every individual schools forum and that would be in the public domain in that local area. It is not as easy to say what that analysis would give you overall. Also, from a parent's point of view, how that joins with the picture that they have is important.

The Chairman: Certainly what I hear from lots of the head teachers in primary schools is, “We get less than them. Isn’t it unfair?” Unless you can begin to plot this out, you do not know if it is unfair.

Alison O’Sullivan: Those are lively debates that take place locally and do influence the way things work. Most authorities have been working to equalise that so that there is a level playing field across the sector. There are challenges there because clearly, if you inherit historical funding at different levels, you can then undermine the ability of the part of the system that has had more advantaged funding. We have seen the same with the allocation of funds for sixth forms, for example, and equalising that. The same challenge applies but, to my knowledge, most areas have been looking to try to equalise and make that a fairer approach.

Councillor Liz Green: Although, interestingly, in my area the schools forum was trying to do some equalisation following some further government guidance. Our schools forum and all the schools’ representatives on those wanted to go against that because they saw that a particular school had a more deprived area and, therefore, needed a far greater funding level per pupil than a school in the nice suburbs in that area with very few people on free school meals, very few people with English as an additional language, and it did not have the need. Our schools forum and our head teachers argued ferociously for a differentiation in their funding levels between their school and another school that they saw had a greater need.

The figures that you ask for are all publicly available and any council website will publish the schools forum’s budget, which will list what comes in and what goes out to which school and what level of funding that school receives. It will have that detail within it. That has to be

public domain information because they changed the rules on the schools forums a couple of years ago to make sure that that was public domain information.

The Chairman: The last one on this, Baroness Walmsley, and then we must move on. We have other issues to pick up.

Q131 Baroness Walmsley: You describe quite a complicated situation, but how well do you think parents are equipped to make a judgment about a school and a local authority and the Schools Forum about how well they are doing that distribution, given that looking at the amount that comes to a school has to be balanced against the needs of that school, as you have rightly said? Unless a parent knows not just how much per head they get per pupil but what they need to do with that, how well equipped do you think, generally, parents are to make that judgment?

Councillor Liz Green: I think, generally, at the moment they are very poorly equipped to do it. It is there if you go and look for the information, but obviously a lot of parents, when they view a school or a nursery setting, are looking at the more “touchy-feely” side of it. What do they think of the head teacher? What do they think of the teaching ethos? What do they think of the staff members? How is the building and the location? All that kind of thing is probably foremost in their mind when they are choosing a school. I do think that helping to provide the information and educate the public to look into those details would be extremely useful so that they can see where that money is coming from and where it is going and what it is spent on.

I think the pupil premium, for example, is a start to providing that additional information with the requirement on schools, as it stands at the moment, to say what they are spending their pupil premium on. It is starting to give parents a view on it, but it is only a start to giving that view. At the moment parents are not informed about it. Yes, it needs to be

worked on to try to find a way of letting them know what is going on within a school; the more complicated areas of a school rather than just the bits that they see and the people they meet.

Q132 Baroness Gould of Potternewton: I want to go back to the question of quality but, before I do, can I just say that I think that we do need as much evidence as it is possible to have. I think this is the responsibility both of the Government but also the Local Government Association, because it is impossible to arrive at a policy, and we all want things to get less complicated, unless we have that evidence behind us. I know you argued the case and I know all about local government independence and so on but, nevertheless, I think this is something that we really need to, and hope we will, pursue somewhat further. Particularly so as, in your blurb about the LGA, you talk about influence. You talk about trying to do that. Well, how do you do that and know that you doing the right thing if, in fact, you do not have the evidence before you to make sure? That brings me on to the question of quality, because you talked also about looking at specific areas of good practice and how you promote specific areas. Perhaps you can elaborate a little bit more on that. One of the things that occurred to me when you were talking about it was: how do you make sure that an area knows what the best practice is for them? You can have an exhibition. You can have all sorts of things. They think, "Oh great. Is that not good?" and then suddenly identify that that is just absolutely wrong for them. How do you go about making sure that they get the right information for the right type of area to make sure that they are providing good quality within the schools? Also, when you talked about Brent, when Brent finishes whatever it is doing as an example, do you then pick that up and use it and the same with other examples that come in from other areas? I suppose I am talking specifically around the LGA rather than individual councils, but how do you then promote that out? I will come on to workforce in a

minute. It does seem to me that what you are trying to do in promoting this is fine, but somehow it just seems a little fluid.

Alison O'Sullivan: Shall I begin on this? I think at two levels—and perhaps Councillor Green will come on to some specific examples. Starting from the strategic point of view, each local authority will look at the needs for children and families across the whole of its area based on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment driven by Public Health; starting very much at a population level, looking at the characteristics of a local area and analysing what the needs are of that population. That would then link to our duty to ensure sufficient good-quality childcare provision. The early years strategy would then be driven from that same source and would link to the children and young people's plan that is in place for each local authority. That is the way in which you get the local flavour imposed on what the priorities are.

That then translates down into the activity on the ground which would take whatever the priorities are. Some might be linked, for example, to the new special educational needs and disability reforms and then translate into us saying, "For this particular population, either across the whole local authority area or in particular geographic locations, there are particular needs". That would then influence the commissioning activity that we have across the sector, PVI and the maintained sector, to try to make sure that the provision is tailored to those particular needs. That is perhaps a statement of the obvious, but that is how we go about commissioning things at a local level. The particular initiatives about quality linked to sufficiency would then flow.

Councillor Liz Green: I think the LGA is one of the organisations that can help disseminate it. A lot of the work that the LGA does is member-led and so the children's lead members will take an interest in it, but obviously the councillors are not the experts in childcare. They

would expect the directors of children's services, along with their staff, to be able to partly share that information between local authorities. I know that the association does a lot of work between directors and then those connections are made one level down or two levels down to the workforce who are on the ground looking at the early years strategy and how that is implemented in the area.

It is not all through the LGA, but I would expect that information to be shared. There are professional networks out there that do a very good job in sharing and disseminating that information. A lot of it can be quite regional-based, so you will have people within London looking at other areas within London and talking to each other within those and then you will have the east of England and the north. Sorry, I have just lumped the whole north together. I did not mean to do that, but within those areas.

Alison O'Sullivan: Perhaps a couple of specific examples to bring it to life. We are aware that in Bristol they have a self-evaluation framework for early years settings. They have drawn together and set some standards, so they are promoting quality through that route. An example of meeting a particular need that has been identified locally would be East Sussex, where the early years improvement team has set up a village school project that helps with linking together lots of small settings and enabling the link through into being school-ready and linking into schools. It has targeted particular attention there. Those are just a couple of examples to give you what the local flavour turns into.

Baroness Gould of Potternewton: Could I just then pick up another point? Against all the background, all the work that is being done, can you give us any examples of where local authorities have been able to achieve a better-qualified early years workforce?

Councillor Liz Green: I do not have any specific examples. I think the issues are around the funding. We all know that better childcare and early years comes from a higher-qualified

workforce in that area and a higher-qualified workforce commands higher pay, which commands a higher cost. I think that is the whole issue around affordable childcare because getting the best quality comes with a higher cost associated with it and, whether that cost is picked up by government through the two year-old offer or whether it comes from the parent, there is a substantial cost that is associated with it. Certainly we can ask the authorities within the LGA to give us examples, if they have any, of where they have managed to achieve that and what methodology they have used. We can put out a request for that information. I am not aware of any specific examples at the moment on that.

Baroness Gould of Potternewton: It would be very useful to get the information. Thank you very much.

Q133 Baroness Shephard of Northwold: A lot of our witnesses have said that one of the most useful things that providers could give to children who are particularly vulnerable is whole-family support and support in the home learning environment. It is a big ask. We have heard a lot about stretched resources. What role do you think local authorities think they can play in this, if at all?

Councillor Liz Green: I totally agree. I think the idea behind just taking a vulnerable or disadvantaged child, at whatever age, out of that and giving them some quality education—they are still spending most of their time with their family. If their family are not supporting it through home learning then it is all to nothing, effectively. Not quite nothing, but it is not going to improve the outcomes for that child or young person. I think we do need to move away from the buildings-based model of getting the child into a building to sit there for however many hours a week of education and early years learning without the support outside of that for the family.

I think where local authorities link into this is that they have their early help services, which are obviously across the board. When it says “early help”, it is early prevention work as opposed to early years, necessarily. I think through children’s centres, and the commissioning of the nought to five public health, we will have access to a lot of those families. A lot of children’s centres run by local authorities and a lot of other services are looking at getting that whole family approach. For example, we have the Team Around the Family for our early work. That is about the whole family. It is not about the one individual child. It is about a family approach to the work. I know when the two year-old offer was piloted, I believe it was Greenwich found that, rather than 15 hours of free settings-based service, they did 10 hours of the settings-based service and five hours of family support per week.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: That is interesting. It is Greenwich.

Councillor Liz Green: They found that very helpful. I think to have designated it as 15 hours in a setting is not always the best way to go forward. Therefore, the idea of having that flexibility to allow them to use some of that funding for a family-based support element for some of the time would get greater results for those children. I know some of the Greenwich details but we can get more details on what Greenwich said within that because I think that is one way of approaching the family to improve the outcomes.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I think it would help the Committee a great deal if you could give examples of good practice, not just from Greenwich but elsewhere.

Councillor Liz Green: Yes.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: That is very interesting. If the system is flexible enough to allow for that sort of provision then that would be rather cheering, I think.

Alison O'Sullivan: I think that is absolute the nub of the way forward. I know local authorities up and down the country are looking at how they can join together the offer of free early learning with other family support through children's centre type offers, not necessarily children's centre buildings, as Councillor Green has said, and trying to wrap other things such as parenting support and access to adult learning into that equation.

We have an example, which is on the Ofsted good practice website from my own area, Kirklees. In the Ravensthorpe area of Kirklees, which has a particularly challenged population, the community centre there linked with three early years settings to equip parents with English as a second language to support their children's readiness for school through helping them to develop language and communication and giving them confidence. As a result of that, not only did the children benefit from being better equipped to get off to a good start learning in schools, but also many of the parents took up opportunities for adult learning and that improved their prospects for the future, too. There are those sorts of creative approaches up and down the country.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: Also, perhaps co-operation with other organisations, for example the WEA which does quite a lot of work in this area, strangely enough by combining some of its educational outreach work with co-operation with those who provide support for families.

Councillor Liz Green: Very much so.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I think the more examples we can have of good practice in terms of co-operation and collaboration and success, the more that would help the Committee.

The Chairman: Very much so.

Q134 Lord Patel: I would like to refer first of all to your submission, the LGA response. In key messages, bullet point four, you say, “The shift to a more school-led system for the early years must involve the council as they ensure that early years provision is seen as an integral part of local education in the schools planning placement”. Do I get from that that the local authorities support the development of a school-led system for early years education?

Alison O'Sullivan: I certainly do, but I think that we need to support and encourage schools to take up that role. Schools have taken on a lot of additional responsibilities in recent times and clearly they have the autonomy and the flexibility in many cases to make the best use of that, but I do feel that local authorities are well placed to support schools to collaborate as part of the wider system. collaboration and in systems.

Lord Patel: What would be the role of the local authority in doing this?

Alison O'Sullivan: I think the local authority is there to help to develop the capacity and the collaboration between schools to join their efforts, as was commented earlier, with other parts of the system. Schools locally are, in most cases, now spending more public money, collectively, than the local authority is. Schools, obviously through the increase in funding for particular purposes such as pupil premium, have a much wider responsibility to secure support for their children and the families that they serve to wrap around the learning experience.

Helping schools to link to the early years elements of that is an important part of the future, but it is quite a tall order. Some small schools do not have the capacity to engage with that strategic planning and thinking. Many areas are encouraging schools to group together and collaborate. Some of the school groupings, through either trusts or academy groupings, are taking on that responsibility to secure additional support for speech and language, for school nursing and for other things and making that part of a local response to particular needs. It is

that role that I would like to see schools taking up, but I do think they need to be equipped and supported to be able to do that well.

Lord Patel: Is there a funding stream available to schools who want to develop this from local authorities?

Alison O'Sullivan: It is part of the schools' role in a sense, but it is something that some schools are equipped to do and some are not. I think it is the local authority's role to help that develop.

Lord Patel: Local authorities do favour this development, but local authorities feel it is the schools that should develop it and local authorities do not feel that they have any role as far as funding is concerned—do I have it right?

Alison O'Sullivan: The funding for schools goes directly to schools by one route or another. I believe the local authority has a responsibility to collaborate with, support and encourage schools and clearly has some resource to do that, but increasingly limited resources. It is about collaboration.

Councillor Liz Green: Putting it in very practical terms, if you have a school that currently does not have a nursery and wants to move into having a nursery, the funding for the nursery places, once it is open, will obviously come through the dedicated schools grant as they put people in, but in my view that school would not want to just suddenly do it. It would want help and support to be able to provide it. The funding to do it would probably come through central government to open it, in terms of new buildings and the capital requirement, but there would be a lot of support from the local authority in terms of hours and work and information rather than necessarily the cash to be able to do it.

What local authorities are very good at, as a whole, is the school-to-school brokering that Alison mentioned, which is extremely useful to the school. Again, a school may be looking to

get into an early years setting—it only started at reception and it wanted to introduce nursery into its mix—and may be a school with a private provider on site as well, so they can take them from two. They have the private provider. They go from the nursery class, from their morning session, into the private provider to enable people to work but still be within a school setting. To do that, they would want to take advice from other schools. Within our local authority areas, we would provide that best practice; go and speak to whichever school, because we have that information. The school by itself could probably find it out, but it would be a lot more work for the school.

Our role is to encourage them to move into the early years, to understand early years. As Alison also said, schools have taken on a lot of responsibility. Many of them are understandably concerned about their SATs scores because that is what parents see. The Ofsted rating and the SATs results is what parents often look at when choosing the school, so the school needs to ensure that it keeps up its Ofsted and its SATs for its reputation within the area. Additional pressures on the head to move into these areas where possibly they have not had any expertise before is a lot of pressure for that school and for the governing body of that school to make that decision. The local authority must support them in doing that.

Q135 Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I just want to turn to the issue of sufficiency that you have both touched on already earlier on in the session. First of all, obviously the law changed around sufficiency with the Children and Families Act 2014 so that local authorities are no longer obliged to publish their sufficiency assessment every three years, but there is a new requirement now that the local authority should report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting that duty and make that available to parents. I know it is very early days, but I would be interested first in your view about whether that will have as much

impact; perhaps it will have more impact, more leverage, than when you were required to publish a report.

Alison O'Sullivan: I think that is vitally important information. Certainly in my own authority it has been in the public domain and will continue to be in the public domain and I guess most places are going to take that approach. Quite detailed analysis, ward by ward, of the population, of the availability of childcare under the provision in the local area, is certainly important for elected members and for other partners in commissioning the right services. It is also important for providers, for parents, and for other people. I imagine that most areas are going to continue making that information freely available in the public domain one way or another.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: There certainly was some concern at the time the legislation was going through that an important part of the tool kit that local authorities had would no longer be available to them in their broader market-shaping role.

Councillor Liz Green: Whenever responsibilities are taken away from local government, local government says, "We want to be able to do this". I think there is always that element to it, but we want to provide the best outcome for the parents and the children in the area, as everybody else does. To do that we need the information and we need to be able to analyse that information. There is a great beauty behind it being available to elected members because we are not the experts in everything. Therefore, we do come at it as the parent would come at it, with slightly more information and knowledge often but not always, and we are able to assess it in the same way as a parent or a member of the public who is interested would be able to look at it.

I did just want to raise the idea of the age groups because I think there should be more of a focus on the under-fives in terms of this. When we talk about sufficiency of childcare, yes,

certainly there is an older age group of schoolchildren who need that additional childcare, but a lot of it should be around the under-fives, the pre-schoolers, because I think those are where the focus should be. Again, I can come back to the disadvantaged children and their families because that is where you can make the greatest difference in their lives, if you can get to the under-fives.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I noticed, obviously, that your written submission talked about a review of the duty on local authorities. I sensed it was more from the perspective of how realistic it is to expect local authorities to take on that sort of market-shaping role as opposed to particular age groups. Could you say something about the thinking that lies behind your request for a review?

Councillor Liz Green: Again, in the area, it depends on the PVI settings that are available compared to the maintained settings. There is some evidence to suggest that maintained settings get better results in disadvantaged areas. As I already mentioned, it is a lot easier to get a maintained setting within a disadvantaged area where maybe the PVI market does not want to move. I think what we need to ensure is that it does not go quite the same way as schools with the presumption of free schools that it must be a PVI setting. If you need a new setting because of growing need in an area, often we will need to make that a maintained setting because it is hard sometimes to drive the market in the direction you want it to go. It is a commercial market predominantly and, therefore, it will go to the areas that it feels are the most commercially available for its own ends: the business's ends.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Finally, again I know it is early days, but what would you hope the outcome of the review might be?

Councillor Liz Green: I think it is always hard to say what the outcome of a review might be because you have not gone through the process. It is like: what is the review of the analysis

of the funding? We do not know, because we have not done an analysis of the funding yet. I would not want to say what I think is needed in terms of the outcome of the review. I think we need to go through that process.

Alison O'Sullivan: I think one of the things that is bound to be considered though is the early years pupil premium and there is always a dilemma there as to how much leverage you want to apply through that because it does have an impact on the shaping on the market there. The early years pupil premium is at a pretty modest level at the moment and there would need to be consideration as to, if you increased that, if you doubled it or whatever, whether that would have more of an impact and, therefore, act as an incentive in the market for providers to maybe move into areas where that would attract greater levels of subsidy to their operation. That would could be a key lever that would be considered.

Baroness Walmsley: I have a question but can I clarify, first of all, something you just said? Am I right in understanding that you are saying that, where there is a need to provide more places, currently you are in a position to set up maintained settings and it is easier to do that because it is hard to get the PVI sometimes to go into those areas and you want to make sure you can continue to do that and not have to go along the same route as schools have where, before they could set up a local authority school, they have to see who else would want to open one. Is that what you are saying?

Councillor Liz Green: Essentially, yes. You have to look at the PVI sector as it currently stands, but the presumption is not the same as with the schools and the free schools currently. Obviously free schools are not the private sector. A lot of our childcare is through the private sector businesses run for profit on the basis of providing childcare. Yes, they also have to provide the early years foundation learning but, predominantly, there is a day nursery to provide childcare and they do so at a profit. I am not comparing that with a free

school, necessarily, which is not for profit and is still operating as a school on educational purposes. We need to make sure that maintained can be opened easily if that is most appropriate for the area.

Q136 Baroness Walmsley: Thank you for that clarification. I want to go back to this duty that has been removed. I remember, when the Bill went through, we were being told that the duty that was being removed—and let us bear in mind there are two different duties and we should not confuse the two—was removed because local authorities wanted it removed and yet I get the impression you are telling me that local authorities are still doing it. Can we just be clear about which duty they are still carrying out and whether they are carrying out both duties even though they do not have to?

Councillor Liz Green: I think it would depend on the local authority. The answer is I do not know which authorities are doing both duties. I think that it is sometimes useful to do both.

Baroness Walmsley: I think it was from Alison that I had the impression that some of them are still doing it. Not just reporting to the elective representatives but doing the annual report, which I understood was going to be a great big document like this and local authorities could well do without having to do it. That is what we were told when the Bill went through, was it not?

The Chairman: That is my memory, too. Yes.

Baroness Walmsley: Are they still doing that even though they did not want it?

Alison O'Sullivan: Probably not as extensively, but I think to operate on a local level and to try to make sure that we are in partnership with others, meeting local need, you do need to have that information. Much of that population-based information is in the joint strategic needs assessment, as I mentioned, but you do also need to have a picture about how many providers you have and how they are operating. Maybe it has removed some of the burden

of the detail of reporting, but I would say you still need to have that information to responsibly commission services for a local area.

Councillor Liz Green: Also, we will provide information services. Unless you have the detail on who is operating in your area, you cannot provide that information service to the parents who call, to make it available to them on what is there. We would always keep some of that information, but having the duty to report it removed is often an advantage because then you do not have to do it in the exact same way as the Government have legislated sometimes, which produces this much paperwork. Maybe you have produced this much paperwork on what people in your area want as opposed to what Government have insisted on.

The Chairman: I am happy to say the written record will not be able to record the size of the bundles of paperwork since we probably all have a different view.

Q137 Baroness Kennedy of Cradley: First, I need to declare that I am a councillor in the London Borough of Lewisham, which is obviously a member of the LGA. Can you say what role local authorities play in encouraging employers to take a more active interest in enabling their staff to access affordable childcare? I think a lot of what you have talked about today comes from the element of the child and early years education and readiness for school and then the wraparound and early intervention is about supporting the parents, but looking at it from an economic activity point of view in helping parents get in to work.

Councillor Liz Green: Again, it will vary massively by area. I was talking with some people at the LGA yesterday about this. It will depend upon the type of area you have. If you have one major employer within the area, it will be a very different situation in terms of them providing childcare to many small and medium-sized enterprises, and then you go into the wider sector for childcare, but all local authorities will work with the DWP to get people into

training that have been on or are on benefits, to encourage them and to help provide them with, if they need to do the training, the adult education courses and to help them get the childcare in place to enable them to do that training and then progress on to work. I think all areas will do that, in partnership with the DWP, to move things forward.

Alison O'Sullivan: It features as part of the economic strategies for many local authorities where you see the joining together of the benefits for children and families of parents working with improving access to often, but also that accessing through employment and trying to smooth the way for families who may not have somebody working in the household. At the sharp end of that, the Troubled Families programme clearly tackles entrenched unemployment as part of its strand and we see there linking with the DWP and with local employers to try to find routes through for people.

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley: Do you have any examples of best practice where local authorities have worked with employers?

Councillor Liz Green: Not to hand, I am afraid. We can get some more examples of where they have done that—and, again, I am thinking of areas where you have one or more main employers, but also there will probably be some good practice and some best practice examples we can get you where it is about the training and the education.

In my own area, we have a specialist women's college that is residential and has childcare facilities onsite and specialises in getting women, who have had children probably relatively young and have no qualifications whatever, into access courses. Because it is a women-only college and they specialise in people often with young children, they have all that on site. That is an example and we will work with them and the DWP to get mothers into work. It is not always mothers, but usually it is mothers anyway.

Also, I think Alison gave an example earlier about learning English. You will often find that it is the mother whose English is poorer and, therefore, wants to improve her English to then aim to go into a work situation later on, and with our adult education courses providing English qualifications and English learning and, again, with the voluntary sector, which is a major partner in that kind of work.

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley: In the local economic plans, do all local authorities include childcare within that or is that not a requirement for them to look at childcare opportunities in a local area when they look at the economic plans?

Alison O'Sullivan: I expect it will vary.

Councillor Liz Green: Yes, I do not think it is a requirement. Therefore, yes, it will vary drastically as to whether they consider that an element or not.

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley: Do you think it should be? Do you have any view? Have you seen anywhere where it works in that way?

Alison O'Sullivan: I think there is a clear link between promoting economic resilience in a local area and equipping families to survive the ups and downs of a turbulent economy. Also we do know that families where a parent is working are not only financially better off but are often more connected with the local community and other opportunities. It benefits the children in lots of ways. That element linking with local economic strategies is an opportunity that I think many local authorities take to get that synergy going. I do not think it is a requirement.

Q138 The Chairman: Two last little tidying up points, if I may. I think we just slipped past them on the way through. When we were talking about the whole-family approach I wanted to ask—and the answer is, “Yes”, “No”, or “I don't know”—is it more expensive to provide a

whole-family approach for the individual child than to have a normal 10 hours? If you do not know then fine, but I think it would be useful.

Alison O'Sullivan: Yes, in the short-term—but because of the long-term benefits? Probably no.

The Chairman: No, it was initially the cost on the day.

Alison O'Sullivan: In the short term, yes.

The Chairman: That is useful to know. We were talking earlier on about what local authorities are doing to make childcare provision more accessible and I think we meant to ask a little bit about whether they are doing anything to make it more affordable. Are there any initiatives of trying to make it more affordable for the parents in question?

Councillor Liz Green: The answer to that is I do not know. If they are, it will be on their prevention agenda that they will be working towards it. Whether they will be able to continually work towards that with the further cuts that are coming through—I would question whether they would just simply be able to afford it. That is right back to the beginning of, “Yes, can local government have more money, please?”

The Chairman: I was thinking of things that do not necessarily require an additional cash inflow, like adjusting their own employment policies to have nursery availability in the workplace or talking to local employers to encourage them to see the benefits of this.

Councillor Liz Green: Those will vary across the country and certainly they will speak to those. In my own area, there are rumours that a major employer is going to close its nursery and those conversations will start, which will probably start with, “Please don't because it is well used by your staff”, but, at the end of the day, it will be down to them if they close the door or not.

The Chairman: I understand that.

Councillor Liz Green: Those conversations will definitely happen across local authorities. I would be surprised if any local authority is not having those conversations, but how successful they are will vary.

Q139 Lord Sawyer: How hard are you pressing your desire to get a review of early years funding? Are you pressing it vigorously or is it just one of these things that you have—

Councillor Liz Green: I have not been. I would have to ask the policy officers at the LGA in terms of how hard they are pressing it. I know they are extremely interested in what comes out of this Committee because the information you are collecting is going to be so useful to everybody that works in early years, because you are seeing and getting information from so many different groups. That is the kind of work that the LGA cannot undertake and, therefore, that information will be taken seriously because it is a Lords Committee and it can then be used to help press for it further.

The Chairman: Finishing up by paying us a compliment, of course, is always a smart thing to do. It may be that our conclusion is that the information is not available and that we need to find it, which is why we were pressing the point earlier on. That being said, thank you very much for your efforts today and for the written submission. We have not made things easy for you, but that is because I think we agree with you. These are very important questions. Thank you very much indeed.

Councillor Liz Green: Thank you.