



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Wednesday 7 February 2024

3 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Morris of Yardley (The Chair); Lord Bach; Lord Blencathra; Lord Carter of Coles; Lord Laming; Lord Mott; Lord Porter of Spalding; Lord Shipley; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

Evidence Session No. 11

Heard in Public

Questions 132 – 153

Witnesses

I: Martin Tett, Chair, People and Places Board, Local Government Association (LGA); Suzanne Davis, SEND Strategy Lead for Preparing for Adulthood, Essex County Council; Jane Taylor, Head of Employment, Skills and Learning, Bristol City Council.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Martin Tett, Suzanne Davis and Jane Taylor.

Q132 **The Chair:** Welcome to this public hearing of our inquiry into the transition from education to employment for young disabled people, and welcome to our three witnesses today.

Suzanne, can I ask you to introduce yourself first, and then we will move along the line?

Suzanne Davis: Good afternoon. I am the SEND strategy lead for preparing for adulthood at Essex County Council.

Martin Tett: I am the elected leader of Buckinghamshire Council, and I chair the Local Government Association's People and Places Board, which is the non-metropolitan board.

Jane Taylor: I am head of employment skills and lifelong learning, including post-16, at Bristol City Council.

Q133 **The Chair:** Thank you for joining us today. We want to explore the local authority role in this area to make sure that we understand good practice as well as the challenges that you have.

Could you outline local authorities' statutory obligations with regard to supporting young disabled people? We will go on to the problems you have in delivering those statutory obligations, but for this first question could we stick to what you are meant to be doing according to the law?

Jane Taylor: The work that I do at Bristol City Council is covered by the statutory duty in relation to post-16 participation. The last guidance for that area was written in 2016 and it includes a number of duties. We have to identify all 16 and 17 year-olds in the city, up to age 25 if they have an EHCP, and report their destination to the DfE every month. In Bristol, there are around 9,000 young people in that age group. It has grown substantially over the last few years.

We have to ensure that they have a guarantee of a place in September, and then to identify whether they have arrived. We also have a duty to identify those who are at risk of becoming disengaged, or NEET, and engage with them as quickly as possible to support them back into education, training, or employment.

Martin Tett: I will build on what Jane said, because she has covered it quite comprehensively. From the point of view of every council, ensuring transition is a big priority for elected members. We want to make sure that every child, no matter what their background or particular circumstances, achieves the utmost in life potential.

As far as we are concerned, there are two key underpinning pieces of statute. The first is the SEND code of practice, and in particular, Chapter 8, which lays out our specific responsibilities. Jane has covered many of those. The second is the Care Act 2014, which requires us to produce

education, health and care plans. I am sure we will come on to those as part of this discussion.

Suzanne Davis: I do not think I can add very much, if I am honest. I think my colleagues have covered it. Left to right works great.

Q134 **The Chair:** We might start with you next time then. It sounds as though a lot of this came out of the legislation to raise the school-leaving age to 18. That is where it looks as though it has its roots. What is not clear is that it could apply to anyone. If you are talking about disengaged young people, as Jane was, they do not have to have a disability to be disengaged. So apart from your responsibilities on SEND and statements, do you have any statutory obligation that pertains in particular to young people who have a disability and are moving from education to employment, or is it all included in the general obligation?

Suzanne Davis: From an Essex perspective, we have a big focus on inclusion. When we think of SEND, we do not think only of those with education, health and care plans. We consider all those with protected characteristics, including those known to social care, leaving care and after care, et cetera. So when we use the word SEND in Essex it covers quite a wide spectrum, not just SEND with EHCPs. What we develop and how we deliver it impacts on all our duties in that area of SEND work.

The Chair: But you have chosen to interpret it in that way.

Suzanne Davis: Yes.

The Chair: You are not required by government or given any levers to do anything particular for this group.

Suzanne Davis: No, although there is a subjectiveness to that code of practice. It is not just for those with EHCPs. Only one chapter is directly related to education, health and care plans and annual reviews. A lot of the code of practice is actually about the wider population of SEND, but the majority of duties sit within the SEND landscape, which often means those with education health and care plans.

Martin Tett: I absolutely support what Suzanne has said. The code of practice is quite comprehensive in what is required. It says: 'Identify and assess the specific education needs when one is aware'. There is an issue with how one becomes aware in relation to applications to the council, but that is a pretty comprehensive requirement. However, although councils want to do this, we often lack the resources or the specific powers to intervene in all cases.

Q135 **The Chair:** If you look across the local authorities, a different proportion of people might have education, health and care plans. Does that fact influence the amount of support or the approach that a local authority might take in different parts of the country? What is your impression?

Martin Tett: I would argue that you can have young people with special educational needs across the whole country. I represent a predominantly

rural and semi-rural area, and we find that there are significant numbers of children with those needs. They tend to be in villages, and when you have rural areas that is one of the most difficult things. A city is much more concentrated, and you can focus support and attention. When you have maybe just one child in a particular village it is much more difficult to provide support.

Q136 **The Chair:** Jane, you talked about collecting statistics. Could you say a little more about the statistics for this particular group? You are returning them on a monthly basis, which must be quite onerous. Is there a category so that the department will know the whereabouts of children with SEND, with or without a plan, or is that not differentiated as such?

Jane Taylor: We can see from our own records those who have SEND support needs, but the ones we have to report on on a monthly basis are young people aged 18-25 with an EHCP, and young people academic age 16-17 requiring Special Educational Needs Support (without an EHCP).

The Chair: Okay, that is what I wanted to know. Thank you.

Jane Taylor: I just wanted to come back to the question about which part of the statutory duty is most relevant to disabled people. My service covers careers from youth right the way through to retirement and beyond, so I am very interested in what happens to those young people when they become adults. In order to justify the work, we focused on the ASCOF measure on disabled people with learning difficulties who are in employment and supported by adult social care. I understand that that has now gone, which seems very disappointing.

The Chair: Why do you think it has gone?

Jane Taylor: I do not know.

The Chair: It is a mystery, because it is a success figure.

Jane Taylor: There could have been issues, or inconsistencies, in the way people were reporting it, but perhaps that could have been improved in terms of what is being measured so that we could keep it.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Q137 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** This is not the question that I have been asked to raise, but I will ask it. This Committee does not spend a great deal of time simply saying, 'Give us more money and we'll solve the problem'. However, we have had real difficulty finding out about the resource levels awarded for this activity, particularly over the last five to 10 years. Could you give us clarity on whether in fact you do assess how much you are allowed or expected to spend on an annual basis, and whether, as the University of Derby informed us in its research, that spending has gone down significantly?

Martin Tett: We obviously have quite a lot of challenges balancing the books in local government at the moment. As I am sure all Members here know, we are required to produce a balanced budget each year. We

cannot borrow like central government does. When we look at our children's services, we look at the totality of their needs. They tend to be priorities for all councils, partly because, quite frankly, they are statutory services, like adult social care, and we are inspected on them by Ofsted. That is why they tend to get the resources that they need, by and large. The money comes from a variety of sources. It can come from government initiatives, from top-slicing various funds, and from the high-needs block of the dedicated schools grant, the DSG.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: It would be useful if we could have a note from you at some point saying where that money comes from. You are basically saying that it has not reduced because you have to make the service a priority, and other things have been reduced instead. That contradicts what we have already been told, which is that there has been a substantial decrease in the amount of resource available.

Martin Tett: I suggest that the LGA follows this up with a supplementary note to give more details, but it depends on what you mean by reduced resources. For most councils, the amount they spend in this area has increased. Whether it has increased sufficiently is another question.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I agree.

The Chair: It would be helpful if your team could do that, Martin.

Q138 **Lord Shipley:** As we have LGA witnesses in the room, I should say first that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

My question relates to reporting to the DfE, so I would like to address the question to Bristol City Council. There is a great deal of reporting, and, as you said, some have plans that are reported monthly. There is a lot of work in that. What does the DfE do with the data? What feedback do you get? What is the consequence of all that work?

Martin Tett: This is definitely one for you, Jane.

Jane Taylor: If your performance is falling below the national average, you receive a letter of concern from the DfE, from a civil servant, telling you that your performance is slipping, and you are encouraged to communicate your plan and reach out if you need support. That is the pattern.

Martin Tett: I am not here to defend the Government, but there are also a number of targeted initiatives from all government departments—the DfE, DCMS, DWP and so on—which use the statistics that are accumulated in order to define and refine those programmes.

Q139 **Lord Mott:** I have no interest to declare at this point. I am just intrigued by what you said, Jane, and I am always slightly concerned when letters come after there is some concern and state, 'We're here to offer support'. What does that support look like?

Jane Taylor: I do not know, because as an authority we have never taken it up.

The Chair: I see, because we have you are here as a good example.

Lord Mott: Could we try to find out what that looks like?

The Chair: That would be great. Thanks.

Q140 **Lord Laming:** I want to go back to Lord Willis's point about resources. There are two sides to resources, are there not: the amount of resource, which may not be sufficient in your terms, but also how the resources are used?

Something that surprised us in earlier evidence was parents' experience of having had great support during the school years of a disabled child, but when the child got to 18 it was not that education had done its job, as it were, but that when they made contact with local authority adult services they had to start completely afresh, as if all that had gone before had not been passed on. It would be very helpful if you could say from your experience what the machinery is for ensuring that there is a continuum with regard to the knowledge gained in services for children and young people when transitioning to adult services, rather than the need to start completely afresh.

Suzanne Davis: I can only talk about what we practice in Essex, particularly with regard to the resources we have from children to adults. We have grown a children and young people disability team that enables transition up to and from the point of transfer in the Act, which is 18. Children and young people will continue with their social workers to that age. We make a change between the age of 16 and 18 where it is most suitable for that family and that young person.

The SEND careers service, which is part of the children and young people disability team, has connections with schools through which it supports families to understand the upcoming change in the legislation and how the duties will change. It is very much a partnership approach and collaboration between parts of the authority to ensure the smoothest transition so that families do not feel that, when their child reaches 18, everything that happened before is lost.

Through that process, we ensure that those young people stay in the children and young people disability team until they have left education. So even if they move into college, independent placements or training provider sectors, they remain with their social worker until they transfer into adults, which is after they have finished education. That model works well in Essex.

Lord Laming: Would you say that is typical, or are you exceptional in Essex, which I am happy to believe?

Suzanne Davis: I would not know. I do not know about the other local authorities.

Martin Tett: You have raised a really important issue. I am not trying to say that every council has been, or is even now, perfect in this area. The

transition between children's services departments and those that look after vulnerable adults is a well-recognised issue that is not helped by the fact that you move from the Department for Education to the DWP, in terms of central government responsibility.

An increasing number of councils are putting joint working in place during that period. My own council in Buckinghamshire now has quite a sophisticated programme of joint working for a period of time, because we recognise that it is a historical problem that absolutely needs to be fixed. I cannot speak for every council, but you are right to focus on it as a historical, and potentially still current, issue for some councils.

Q141 Lord Bach: Broadening it out, to what extent are local authorities able effectively to support transitions from education to work for young disabled people? Perhaps you can give some examples. Also, what difficulties—apart from funding, of course; we have had some discussion about that—can local authorities face in the real world when supporting young disabled people during this transition?

Jane Taylor: Before Covid, we could see from the data that disabled young people with learning difficulties and autism had a low reported rate of employment in a city with really buoyant employment figures, so we set ourselves a vision and a target to address that. Now there is a line in the statutory duty that says, 'If you find areas of disengagement, you are encouraged to find other funding'.

We have made that into an art form in Bristol. We seek out all the funding we can. We managed to obtain one of the last ESF grants, a major grant, and we had to persuade our combined authority and neighbouring authorities to come on a journey with us. We took the lead and brought in additional resources. We were not worrying about the core system, in a sense. We were bringing in an additional resource that would focus on the vision of putting the young person at the centre, giving them experience of work through supported internships and supported employment, talking to their parents and carers, and training their employers. That has all been possible with the extra resource that we have brought in.

We have had support from the DWP and local schools and really good support from our employers on that journey. Now that the ESF fund has gone, our combined authority is providing us with extension funding, so this is becoming part of the Bristol landscape, if you like.

Lord Bach: Thank you. I noticed you nodding, Suzanne, for part of that answer. What is your experience?

Suzanne Davis: We have not been quite as quick on the issue of extra funding and resources, so I might speak about that afterwards. We have, however, gone down the route of securing effective partnerships, navigating and embedding the partnership models collaboratively in order to share available resources.

We work with our local employers and the further education and school sectors. This is a vision of how together we can all add to the value chain, because what we do right at the start will have a big impact on how these young people enter adulthood and carry on. Our approach is about partnership and how to ensure that collaboration is central to the vision of taking this group of young people more inclusively into the journey of employment.

Martin Tett: You cannot escape the issue that resources are scarce in this area. Just take that as written. However, you can do an awful lot through your convening power—and councils have a very strong convening power—to bring them together. You have heard about college groups and employers. I would also mention the voluntary and community sector. There are some strong V&C sectors out there that care passionately about these issues and have real expertise. If you can husband that group together, you can do an awful lot with relatively limited resources, used wisely and with your convening power.

One of the strengths of local councils is the ability to look holistically at the requirements of young people with special needs. The DfE tends to look solely at the education issues, but quite often if you are trying to transition into employment, it is about things like transport. How do you get from where you live, particularly if it is in a rural area, to a potential job opportunity? Does the bus service run in that area? If not, is there a demand-responsive service that can be provided? The local council is well placed to look at transport and all the other important aspects that wrap around somebody gaining useful employment, and it will understand the local job situation.

Cookie-cutter solutions from the centre are fine, but in my area, for example, the media sector has an enormous demand for people because of Pinewood Studios and the National Film and Television School. They are more than happy to be a disability-friendly employer, but it is about matching up that local need with the availability of young people, and that is something, again, that local councils can do very well.

You mentioned barriers. One of the things we struggle with—this will be another topic, I am sure—is a shortage of key skills. We have real trouble recruiting and retaining educational psychologists, for example. If you want to come back to that, I would be more than happy.

Q142 **Lord Bach:** Thank you. Going back to the difficulty side of things, apart from funding, which I know is a big part of it, what do each of you find to be the greatest difficulty in supporting young disabled people? Just choose one example—or two, if you have to.

Jane Taylor: Perhaps it comes down to the fact that we call it an EHCP. The focus in early years through to 16 is very much on education and completing qualifications, and that focus goes through to post-16 as well. Then you have health and social care to consider.

What if we called it an EHCC—education, health, social care and career—plan? That would place a focus on work from the start and right the way through. It cannot begin early enough. It should begin in the early years. It should be the expectation. Rather than, 'We rule this in', it should be, 'We rule this out'. Unfortunately, core resources follow a particular path that is not suitable for all.

For people with learning disabilities, the supported internship model is evidence based. It works. The pattern is place, train, maintain. It is not about lots of classroom learning. Train then work. Mainstream funding keeps churning the same way. Supported internships require a different model.

Suzanne Davis: I echo all that my colleague Jane has said, but we must also focus on skills and talents for this group of individuals, nurturing those from the earliest years, providing good-quality career education, information, advice and guidance and keeping their aspirations, motivations and confidence high.

Alongside that, part of the challenge is a common language. We use different words for the same things, which confuses the landscape, especially when you move from education into post-16 areas, into social care or into the employment arena. Getting a common language all the way through the system would be very beneficial to families as well.

Q143 Lord Shipley: Jane, I think you said that you need to start at a much younger age than people realise. We have had some evidence to suggest that some people who might qualify for an education, health and care plan do not get one until quite late in the process. Can you identify a way in which that process might be sped up and whether it is a question of resourcing or a question of organisation?

Jane Taylor: This is going slightly outside my zone, but there has been a significant increase in the number of 16 to 17 year-olds. In Bristol, in the last five years the numbers have gone from approximately 6,000 to 9,200. That is a massive expansion, yet there has been no added funding to do this specialist work and to cover the increase in EHCPs, so that creates a tension in decision-making.

Ensuring that those who need a plan get it earlier is about raising the knowledge from early years onwards, with parents and carers in particular. That it is their entitlement. It has to be about communication.

Martin Tett: The last statistics I saw were from about two years ago, when there were 517,049 EHCPs. There has been an enormous increase in parental awareness of EHCPs. Councils are, frankly, struggling to cope with demand. I go back to my point about educational psychologists, who are on the critical path when it comes to having an assessment done. There are some big roadblocks. If we could find a way to increase the supply of educational psychologists, we could make a major change in the way the EHCPs are processed.

The Chair: You think it is more about skills than cash, then.

Martin Tett: Ultimately, it comes down to the same thing, because you need educational psychologists. There is an issue with skills training for them in the first place, but you also need to pay them enough to encourage them to come into local government. It is a combination of the two.

Q144 **Lord Porter of Spalding:** Probably for transparency, I should declare that I have known Martin ever since he started playing at national politics/local politics. For the benefit of the record, I think he is one of the most able and capable politicians of his cohort.

When I was chairman of the LGA, the numbers scared me, because you could see the direction of travel. Clearly, that has just kept on accelerating, but do we think that is because there are more children who need the services, or more parents who now know they exist? If we have better educated parents, that is one thing. If we have a growing problem, that is a different thing. For the Government to be able to plan for that, we should be able to see a peak at some point in the number of clever parents increasing, because they will all be clever. If it is growth in the numbers of children, that is a different problem to face.

Suzanne Davis: That is a really good question. It will be different in each local authority. We have very robust conversations with our Essex Family Forum, and it will come from a position of resources and what it is able to offer. We need to go back a page and ask what the intent and the purpose of the education, health and care plan is. If it is always looking at the negative, should we be looking at how we are going to progress that individual along the journey of education and into employment, or into independence *et cetera*?

It is a good question, but is it one or the other, or is it a combination of both? One may feed the other, *et cetera*, but before we understand that we need to understand the purpose of the plan. Sometimes the plan is seen as a key to other doors, and because other services are not available it is written in a plan, so that plan has the statutory duty and that is what the local authority delivers. Do you need a plan to access speech and language therapists? We could have a conversation about that on its own. So there is a page before that question.

Martin Tett: EHCP performance is one of the key performance indicators that I review each month with my senior management team. It is a really important statistic. Frankly, we do not do well enough, and I come back to the educational psychologists.

To answer Lord Porter's question specifically, there are two sides to it. There is an increased awareness among parents of the benefits of having an EHCP, particularly when they wish to ask for a specific facility, maybe out of county or whatever. On the other side, we have seen a significant increase in applications since Covid, and it does appear as though Covid has had a systemic impact on a cohort of young people that has led to a requirement for them to come forward for a potential EHCP. I ask my own senior officers whether this is long-lasting, something we will see

carry on as a long-term trend, or whether it is basically a single cohort that goes through. I hope it is the single cohort, but there has been a significant increase, certainly in my own council area, as a result of Covid.

The Chair: When you meet with your management team, what are your criteria? Is it about speed, or, in light of what you just said, are you looking at whether you could reduce the need for EHCPs? We always talk about the number of people who win on appeal, and I have often thought that that is just a tension between the local authority just not having the resource for a demand-led service. In law, it is written down as a demand-led service. Try to talk a little about that. Perhaps saying what your management objectives are might help us to understand it in your local authority.

Martin Tett: Yes, certainly. Just to be clear, this is part of a general management meeting I have every month as I go through the KPIs for every service. I have a limited number of KPIs that I can challenge on, so I look at our achievement in terms of the KPIs to meet their target date. Frankly, we are not achieving that, as most councils are not. I also have a cabinet member who looks after children's services specifically. She does a deeper dive on an ongoing basis, but that is not a meeting I sit in on specifically.

Q145 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** I find this fascinating. Before we leave this issue, it would be incredibly useful for the Committee if we could have an answer from the LGA on the question of increased numbers. Was it from Covid or otherwise? If the rise from 6,000 to 9,000 in Bristol is repeated across the country, that is a phenomenal increase and, in fact, something that should be prioritised moving forward. If we could have some facts on that, that would be very useful.

I want to move on to the issue of partnerships. Jane, you talked about added resources. Martin, you talked about joint working. Suzanne, you talked about partnership. Clearly, partnership is crucial to resolving some key issues. Local authorities clearly have an important role to play in this because they have a legal role to play, but what does good practice in transition, planning and support look like? What do we want government to recognise and therefore be able to support?

Suzanne Davis: Good practice will come back to that relationship and that partnership, and it needs to be fostered by more than individuals. Good practice needs to be embedded, and partnerships need to be embedded across the authority's various services and duties, from education to care to bringing in our colleagues from health and DWP. It needs collaboration in the area that centralises it, but flexibility needs to be allowed within it.

We hear from our families and young people when talking about their experience of transition that they cannot see it. So as well as good practice we need to show more when it does happen and what it looks and feels like. We are not very good at showing good practice when it

happens. The schemes that Jane referred to, like supported internship and accessible apprenticeships, are a bit of an untapped secret and are really good practices for getting people through the journey of education and transitioning into employment. Overall, however, we need to look at how we have a common vision through that journey in our partnerships. There is a duty to be part of that relationship and not just because it is an individual driving it.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Is that something that the Government could create a requirement for, or is it purely dependent on local people delivering these sorts of partnerships, which depend on them as individuals rather than on a system?

Suzanne Davis: From where I am working, it is happening because of—we are doing it and it is working well. If other local authorities have more struggles and do not have that, it would bring more benefits and make it easier to create and foster those relationships and join them up through the system. The silo of the systems we work in, driven by different initiatives, programmes and funding streams, makes it very easy for people to say, 'I can't do that, because it doesn't fit my stream of work'. If we could allow some flexibility but have areas that people must join up on, and should be joining up on, it would make the area of work easier and our families and young people may find it easier as they go through.

Q146 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** We hear a lot that there is good practice, and we have heard about good practice today from each of you. Martin, from your local point of view and from an LGA point of view, how do we get that transferred across the piece so that we get other authorities, which perhaps do not have the resources or the people, to start moving into the same sorts of spaces?

Martin Tett: I will put a plug in for the Local Government Association, because I am representing it here today, but one of the things the LGA does very well is gather up best practice from around the country. Again, I offer to submit evidence to you of some of the best practice we have from a range of councils in different parts of the country.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: That would be helpful.

Martin Tett: They often run workshops, seminars and lectures whereby people can come along and learn from each other. Then, of course, you have the directors of children's services, who have conferences where best practice can be shared. I am not going to pretend, and I do not want to mislead anybody, that this is perfect, but there is always more that you can do and more best practice that you can share. Some systems exist.

Slightly tangentially, local government must put the child at the centre of everything we do. You asked how we bring different groups together. From our point of view, and I can speak for my council, it is about putting the child, particularly the child with special needs, at the centre of the conversation and looking at what it is about them that is special and what

they can do rather than what they cannot do. Then it is about looking at assembling the right cohort around them from different colleges, voluntary and community groups, employers and so on, that can help them on that particular journey. That is something local government is particularly well placed to do.

- Q147 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** You say that, but often the information initially gathered at school level—I think your colleagues have said that it should start earlier—is often in a silo and is therefore not transferred perhaps to further education. It is certainly not transferred to employers, and you have a new set of information being gathered post-16 or post-18. What do you suggest we could do about that lack of continuity?

Martin Tett: I can talk about my own council, but I cannot say that this is done everywhere. Let me be frank about that. We do not involve employers very much in that journey, and we cannot have every employer there, but we tend to have particular sectors—creative and media in the south of the county, healthcare in the centre of the county, high-tech engineering in the north, and rocket and space technology—that have specific needs, and we tend to involve those key sectors in discussions about key skills.

We have a skills board that involves all the various skills contributors, and we have a discussion about the labour requirements and special educational needs and how those young people can help to meet what is a chronic skills shortage at the moment. The fact that someone has a disability does not mean that they cannot contribute to the workplace, and making employers aware that there is an enormous talent pool that they can access is a key strength that local government can have.

- Q148 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** Thank you. Jane, in order for that to happen there has to be an end to the silos that different government departments work in when dealing with young people, not just those with recognised disabilities but those who are discovered during their journey through education and into employment. Is there anything we should be recommending that would bring government departments and those silos together into a single cohort? Could there be a specific area with specific Ministers who bring all this together, or do you have enough in local government to be able to say, 'Give us those powers and we'll make sure it happens'?

Jane Taylor: That is a really good question.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: It always is.

Jane Taylor: Yes. Each area is so different, so I will plump for giving us the powers and setting a general commitment and a vision. However, it is the players on the ground and the trusted working relationships that are strategic and very operational that will make it work locally. In Bristol, we can see where we want to go next. We need a post-16 transition handbook. We need to set out clearly what needs to happen from education into employment. We have some nuggets that are already working, like transition panels where you look at the individual cases: you

bring in the FE college and the employer, and you have a really detailed plan. So yes, it needs to be local but against a national framework.

- Q149 **Baroness Stedman-Scott:** I will email you with other questions, but I have two observations to make now. The first is on Lord Willis's comment about partnerships. We heard last week that partnerships and effectiveness do not just happen. Somebody has to hold the ring. For our report, that is really important. Also, and I declare an interest in that I have a great nephew who has just had an autism assessment, if you want to do an EHCP—or an EHCCP, which is an excellent idea—do you have to have the assessment before the plan? If so, there must be a huge waiting list. How do you cope with that?

The Chair: Do you mean what happens to the child while they are on the waiting list?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Yes. How can you cope with that? You cannot do the plan until you have that, and there is a big waiting list.

Suzanne Davis: In Essex, we also have One Planning before the plan. We look at One Planning to assess, plan, do and review. The assessment is done by the people who know that individual, that child, best. You will need that professional, of course you will, but people will know the strengths of that child. We do One Planning with young people, children and their families to look at what is likely to inform a plan while these activities are going forward. I am pretty sure that the code of practice states that you should not wait until you have a plan to put in a level of intervention. That is our response to that.

The Chair: Can you spend the money without the plan?

Suzanne Davis: In Essex? We can, yes, again because if the need is that significant—

The Chair: You just get on with it?

Suzanne Davis: Yes.

- Q150 **Lord Blencathra:** Can I say, without sounding patronising, that you are an incredibly switched-on panel and it has been highly informative this afternoon? I want to pick up something that Mr Tett said: 'We need to look at what children can do, not what they can't do'. That reminds me of visiting a young offender institution many years ago. The only correlation I am making is that, again, it is a bunch of kids put in a box and partly written off. As I talked to them, the police turned up and grabbed one of the kids. I said, 'What's he done?' 'Oh, no, we just need him. Someone has locked themselves out of a new BMW 5 Series and he's the only one who can get into the car without breaking a window'. I thought, 'Why doesn't BMW or Thatcham Research give him a job?' A little while later, they were playing darts and doing the mental arithmetic faster than I can count on my fingers. Why do we not train them to be accountants?

So I like the point you have made, but my question, which Ms Davis may

have touched on, is this. It can take a few months or many years for young people to transition between education and getting a job. How is information shared with the families of disabled people to reassure them that you are still working on it, and how can it be improved more generally in the country?

Suzanne Davis: There is a lot of information, a lot of different departments that have information, and a lot of appendices to the EHCPs *et cetera*. Does everybody read and understand every piece of that? Sometimes we have too much information. What we are taking forward in this space is our One Planning and one-page profiles, alongside vocational profiling that Essex is leading on, to ensure that we understand the individual's strengths, the place they come from and where they are more resilient and confident. The idea of vocational profiling, which is well documented in the world of supported employment, comes from that position of strength. Therefore, you do not place somebody in a place of work if they do not like being around people. You look for an activity that is more individualised. So there is that one-page profile.

Obviously the DWP is now looking at adjustment passports, so there is a similarity there, but they are confusing, because we are using two languages again. So it is about identifying a tool that has the journey through life, because people can come into this space at any time, and using that language and that tool to support people. When you do the global research on vocational profiling, it is fundamental in supporting people to build on their strengths and to give them the skillsets they need, and for employers to understand what works for them.

Martin Tett: I completely agree with what Suzanne said there. There is a lot of information around EHCPs. My concern is that it will tend to be the more educated and professional parents who will see that, read it and understand it. My concern is always about parents who come from more disadvantaged backgrounds and to what extent they have the ability to access it and make their way through the system. There is always that underlying concern that there may be a cohort of young people who are being missed because of that.

Lord Blencathra: Thank you. I was scared to ask that question in case I phrased it incorrectly. You have made the point that some parents would not be able to understand what was being said. Others may not care so much about what was being said.

Jane Taylor: How do we keep parents well informed? There has been mention of the vocational profile. When it comes to the transition to employment, those documents should be embedded into the EHCP. It should not be something else that is parallel. It has to be part of the core conversation. For parents who need it, there should be a trusted advocate. It could be a SENCO in the school or a careers adviser, but it has to be a bit more word-of-mouth than just a document. We are lucky in Bristol. Through this extra money, we have been able to put in career navigators who have been able to do that work with parents and have

conversations if they have worries. It is very much about making sure that you have the right people and the right plan.

The Chair: What is the background of your career navigators? Are they careers officers or just people who help with careers?

Jane Taylor: They come to us from all kinds of backgrounds. They might have a background in youth or housing, but they are very people-orientated, and we give them the training in specialist employment support and working with disabled young people.

Lord Blencathra: I do not have any more to add. That is helpful, thank you.

Q151 **Lord Mott:** What could central government do that would support your work in this area? I will ask Martin first.

Martin Tett: How did I know that fickle finger would point at me? I will take it as written, because we keep saying it, but more resource would be helpful, frankly. However, it is also about the development of key skills such as educational psychologists and so on. Making sure that we have the right national terms and conditions for them would be helpful.

The other big thing is the co-ordination of what is currently a multiplicity of different initiatives from different government departments. I think it was the LGA that estimated that £20 billion was being spent in England across something like 12 different government departments on about 48 different separate initiatives.¹ When I talk to my director of children's services they are almost bemused by the number of initiatives, which departments they are coming from, the timescales, and the age cohorts they impact. It is almost like a flavour of the month from a particular Minister, and Ministers occasionally change, as one might recall. If one could find a way of producing a more co-ordinated, cross-ministerial approach to this issue, local government would find that beneficial.

Q152 **Lord Laming:** That is a very helpful comment. In response to my earlier question, you mentioned the Department for Education is dealing with the children, and the Department of Health and Social Care is dealing with the adults. Across government, there is this group here dealing with this aspect, and a group there dealing with that aspect. How do you think central government could actually implement your beliefs about how to manage transition? Is there a model you could think of where the Government could be an example to what you are doing locally?

Suzanne Davis: That is really difficult. One of our councillors says, 'You can't be what you can't see'. If you are going to be a really good example, you need more of the people who have to come through into employment and more people being employed in central government who

¹ The Local Government Association clarified that: "around £20 billion is spent across England on 49 national employment and skills related schemes or services managed by 9 Whitehall departments and agencies, multiple providers and over different geographies."

come from supported internships and accessible apprenticeships *et cetera* being there.

As much as this is focused on different departments, the route through education is the pathway journey, whether it is GCSEs to A-levels to T-levels *et cetera*. There is an inclusive lens in that. If you are SEND or you have an EHCP, it is often felt that it happens somewhere else and there is no natural position from which you move through that journey. There is a need to map all this conversation on to the education landscape with the T-levels and whatever that future looks like.

Lord Laming: I was rather taken with your example in Essex where, if I understood you right, you have a multidisciplinary team bringing together all the key players and not just according to age. There is a process that goes from an early stage in a child's life through this transition. It struck me as being in marked contrast to my understanding of how central government works, but maybe I am wrong about that. Maybe you could share with us if you have seen a super-duper model in central government that puts this machinery of joint working in place.

Jane Taylor: Yes, very much so. We have just had a visit from the DWP Permanent Secretary, Peter Schofield. As Covid struck, the DWP quickly put some resource into youth hubs, and this was a central missive. In Bristol, we already had quite a lot of co-ordinated youth activity, and we quickly got together with our local DWP and came up with some co-ordinated approaches, which included opening a city centre base where the careers service, the DWP, the local college and the council were all present and bringing the resource together. That did not come down from central government. That was us making sense of resource and direction.

Again, on the ask of central government, we are always trying to run round these different pipes trying to make this make sense to our local population. The LGA has done some sterling work on Work Local. There are 42 different funding streams for employment support. Can we not have a single fund that can be used against our local priorities and local providers and what works?

My other ask relates to data. If you measured what matters to you, we would all understand more about the number of disabled young people who are progressing into employment, but it is very difficult to find the data. In preparing for today, I went back to the statutory duty, which says that, as a local authority, if I want to find the results from post-16 education, I just need to go to the publicly available dashboard. So I went on to the publicly available dashboard. For my local FE college, you can find what proportion of 16 to 18 year-olds went into employment—great—and then it goes down to the disadvantaged group. However, when you click on 'disadvantaged', it is if you are in care or having free school meals. Again, disabled young people disappear. Who is responsible? Where is the data? Who is holding that? We want that data, and we want it on a very granular basis. That is key to what we are dealing with here.

Martin Tett: I completely commend what Jane said. The LGA has produced an excellent document called Work Local, which is very much about a single pot coming down, with the co-ordination done locally, very much in the way we outlined earlier, which means that you can tailor it to local areas and local circumstances.

Going back to the other end of the question and what government can do, all I can say from my business experience—and most of my life has been spent in business rather than in this role—is that if I was looking at this and I had a series of vertical stovepipes and a particular theme that I needed to deliver, I would look at a cross-cutting programme that said, 'How do I cut across those vertical stovepipes with a horizontal?' It is not only about convening the right people around the table; you need an owner. You could have people in a room, but you need somebody who owns the issue and will make sure that it happens and drives it through.

For me, it is about identifying the real must-dos, such as education for people from a disability background, and identifying the right owner who has the ability to convene people from all the different government departments to drive a coherent strategy rather than leaving each department to do its own thing in isolation. That is my answer to that.

Q153 The Chair: This has been an excellent session. It is interesting: one of the things we have seen in our visits and talked to our witnesses about is the idea we have heard from you today about asking what people can do rather than what they cannot do. Today has been very heartening, because it has been about what local authorities can do rather than what they cannot do. We have an awful lot of evidence and hearsay about the problems local authorities have, which we know are very real, but having you three today who have spoken so positively about possible solutions has really been very good, and we are very grateful for your time.

Can I just add to your list of things you might ask the LGA to send us that have arisen through the inquiry? When Jane said that they are a very good local authority, I was not quite sure about the support central government will give if you get a warning letter. Could you tell us a little more about that? That would be interesting.

We are also conscious that the Government's disability paper was published and launched this week. We have been through it and, to be honest, do not immediately see anything that would help this group of young people. If, when your teams go through it, you find otherwise and you think there is something in that report that you would like to draw our attention to in the next stage of our inquiry, please let us know. We would be grateful. Other than that, I think you know that you will be sent copies of the text. Feel free to amend anything you want to before it is published.

Martin Tett: On behalf of my two colleagues, may I just thank you for your chairmanship of this and to all your colleagues for this very important topic you have raised? Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed.