



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Joint Committee on Human Rights

Uncorrected oral evidence: Human rights of children in social care, HC 1218

Wednesday 11 March 2026

2.20 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Alton of Liverpool (Chair); Baroness Hamwee; Afzal Khan; Lord Murray of Blidworth; Lord Rook; Lord Sewell of Sanderstead; Alex Sobel; Peter Swallow; Sir Desmond Swayne.

Questions 59 - 69

Witness

I: Yvette Stanley, National Director for Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted.

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Examination of witness

Q59 Chair: Welcome to the 46th meeting of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We have a new member of the committee, Baroness Hamwee, to whom we offer a great welcome.

To anyone who is unfamiliar with our work, let me briefly say who we are and what the scope of our mandate is. As the name of the committee implies, we are made up of six Members of the House of Lords and six Members of the House of Commons, both Houses of Parliament. We come from diverse political backgrounds and traditions. We are required by Parliament in our mandate to examine policies and legislation and to test their impact on the human rights of British citizens. Our recent reports on issues, such as supply chain transparency in modern-day slavery and transnational repression, are available to read on our website, as is much of the written and oral evidence that we received relating to our current inquiries on the human rights of children in social care, on artificial intelligence and human rights, and the new legislation on Northern Ireland.

Today we hold our fourth public oral session on the human rights of children in the social care system in England. The inquiry has a particular focus on children in care—looked-after children, as they are often called—but wider aspects of the children’s social care system are also relevant, for example, in regard to the availability of additional support to families with disabled children or the efficacy of early intervention measures and kinship care.

As part of our examination of what works and what does not, members of the committee recently travelled to the cities of York and Leeds, where we saw very interesting first-hand examples of best practice and met with young people who shared important personal insights with us. In today’s session, the committee will hear from Ofsted on issues connected to inspections and regulation, and then from the British Association of Social Workers on challenges faced on the ground by social workers. I will introduce our second panel when we get there, at about 3.15 pm, but we begin with Yvette Stanley, who is the national director for regulation and social care at Ofsted. She was previously director for children, schools and families at Merton Council and has 30 years of experience in children’s services. Before turning to my colleagues, let me begin by asking, what is the role of Ofsted in the children’s social care system?

Yvette Stanley: Everybody is familiar with our role in schools; we have a slightly broader and deeper role in relation to children’s social care. We are the inspector of local authority children’s services that help protect and care for children, including care leavers. The DfE is the regulator, so responsible for intervention and improvement. On a three-year, plus or minus six months, cycle, we inspect under a framework called the inspection of local authority children’s services. We are both the regulator and inspector for a broader range of providers, including adoption and fostering agencies, children’s homes, secure children’s homes and residential provision for disabled children. Where we are the regulator, we

assess fitness to practise as a manager or quality assurer of the responsible individual.

Chair: Do you look at kinship care as part of that?

Yvette Stanley: Yes, absolutely. As part of our inspection of local authorities, we look at kinship care. Do you want me to talk about that now?

Chair: There will be an opportunity later on; I just wanted to be sure that was part of the remit.

Yvette Stanley: It is, absolutely. In local authority children's services, we cover all forms of permanency for children and other issues such as private fostering, including kinship care. Where we are the regulator, we receive notifications and assess responses. I know the committee is concerned about complaints. When information comes in, we both inspect and carry out a range of regulatory functions. We might visit or look into a particular issue. We can put in sanctions so providers cannot take any more children. I was just trying to get the depth and breadth of the role, which is quite different in local authority children's services to the broader range of providers.

Chair: That was a very helpful introduction, thank you. It helps us paint on a broad canvas. Our mandate is particularly around issues to do with the human rights of children in social care.

Q60 **Lord Sewell of Sanderstead:** Hi, Yvette. How are human rights considered by Ofsted as it fulfils its responsibility to inspect and regulate services that provide care to children and young people?

Yvette Stanley: They sit at the spine of our inspection frameworks and regulatory handbooks. When we inspect a local authority, we do so against their statutory duties and legal functions, which include the Equality Act 2010, the public sector equality duty and the Human Rights Act. We do not look at compliance but rather to see, both in services and providers, that children's voices are heard, their rights are respected and promoted, they are treated with dignity and respect, that they have access to educational provision, social opportunities and, where it is safe to do so, they have connection with their family.

In terms of secure provision, but also disabled children and more generally, we look at issues around restriction, restraint and deprivation of liberty. With social care providers, we look at their direct provision with children, whereas with local authorities, they have the direct contact with children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is part of that. Our training and support for inspectors has to equip them to look at all those duties as well as the progress and experience of children.

Q61 **Alex Sobel:** You touched on my question. We went to York, which the council has made a human rights city; Leeds is a child-friendly city. Both adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and trained their staff on this convention. But from an Ofsted side, do inspectors receive

human rights training to know what to look for when inspecting services in terms of the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Yvette Stanley: Yes, they absolutely do. I have 40 social care senior HMI and—I will have to check this, as we recruit all the time—about 350 regulatory inspectors. All are social care qualified, and there is a mix of social workers and other professions in our regulatory inspectors. We expect them to come to us having worked at a senior practice level and understanding the importance of rights-respecting work in relation to children. We reinforce that during their induction.

Those principles are embedded in our frameworks, so they are consistently trained on them in their induction to our methodology. They will then have specialist training, which might be differentiated depending on what they are to inspect. If it is provision for disabled children, inspectors have to understand deprivation of liberty orders and other restrictions. In the secure estate, we look at safe handling and the separation of children. Locking them in cells when they do not want to go to education is a deprivation of their liberty, and we take action when we find that. In our work, it is important that my colleagues are as equipped as any professional out there.

Chair: You might be encouraged to know that, when the committee went to Leeds, we were told how helpful it was to have been brought from a very low rating to the highest possible rating by Ofsted. We were very impressed by that and saw what an encouragement it was to staff on the ground. Ofsted inspection in schools is often dreaded, but in this particular case there was nothing but praise for the work you did there.

Q62 **Afzal Khan:** What are the main concerns Ofsted has identified about the availability or the conditions of accommodation provided to children and young people in the care system?

Yvette Stanley: When I joined Ofsted—I am in my seventh year, so we may have to update my biography to say nearly 40 years—we had just over 2,000 children's homes; we now have somewhere north of 4,000. In the five years between 2019 and 2024, the percentage of home increase was 64%, but the number of places in children's homes only grew by 10%. We have a challenge. The care population has grown, but we expect most children to be looked after in kinship care within their extended family or in fostering. Very few, but a significant number, will need residential care. The need has expanded, but the number of places has not grown in the same way.

Homes have become smaller, but we see a very worrying situation at two levels. First, the geography is not as we would like it. So about 30% of applications are for homes in the north-west, which is saturated with children's homes, as accommodation is cheap to buy. That is a worry for me.

Secondly—this is good policy—we try to wrap services around children to keep them in their families, but the needs of those requiring residential

care have become more complex. We see—again, good policy in health—the number of inpatient mental health beds has reduced, but that has resulted in more children with deprivation of liberty orders in the community. So we see growth, but the right homes are not in the right places. That is quite a challenge to tackle.

You may have questions about the types of people who offer provision. We see the growth of homes owned by private equity. More recently, local authorities such as York are opening children's homes to keep children close to their family home, which is what we would ideally like in most cases. But there is no single entity that does the knitting—the needs analysis or the provision map—and much better work is needed across Government.

Good policy in health keeps children out of hospital. In the justice system it keeps children out of the secure estate, which leaves more children with greater levels of complexity. An average DCS might make 200 calls before they find a place for a child. When I checked last week, 65 children were waiting for a bed in the welfare secure estate. That leads me to another worry, which you may want to ask about later, that people are setting up unlawful, unregistered homes and trying to meet the needs of children outside the sight of my beady eye as the regulator.

Afzal Khan: Can I ask you something else that probably covers your area? Ofsted also regulates and inspects accommodation for unaccompanied asylum seekers. What concerns has Ofsted identified for this particular group?

Yvette Stanley: As I said, in our inspections we look at different demographic groups of children and provisions and report on how the local authority responds to needs. We tend to say separated children, but both terms are equally used out there. Lately, we have inspected quite a few authorities, including Richmond and Haringey. In their reports, there will be a paragraph about how children are welcomed and supported and how their cultural and wider needs are responded to and met. Some children will have been travelling for years and seen very traumatic and difficult situations. It is partially a matter for local authorities, but this issue is more about their entry into the system, where the age assessment can be quite re-traumatising, and we worry about that. When larger volumes of children were coming in—there are fewer now—some were evidently placed with adults in hotels, where they could also be victims of abuse. So we absolutely look at and report on this issue.

Going back to my days as a DCS, my separated children—Albanian or Afghan boys or Vietnamese girls—would say they wanted to be together in supported accommodation. They were quite young for that, but they had travelled the world, and often that was their wish. When they were a bit older, they would say to me, "Maybe I could have benefited from some family time in foster care". Local authorities try to get the match right, and broadly, social work teams are welcoming and care passionately about making a difference for children. We see those children doing very well educationally. In some cases, they are desperate

to succeed and create a better opportunity if they go back home or make a life here.

Chair: We will return to the point about illegal homes, and my colleague, Dr Peter Swallow, will ask about that a little later on.

Q63 **Baroness Hamwee:** I will resist the temptation to have a conversation about what you just talked about, but you also mentioned private providers outsourcing to private homes. Does the outsourcing of services affect Ofsted's role? Do private providers do as well as others in the sector?

Yvette Stanley: As the regulator—my teams are inspecting private, voluntary sector-led and local authority homes as we speak—I have to be neutral. Next week, I cannot say, "I'm really not keen on this type or that type of provision". Somewhere north of 80% of homes are now in the private sector. Colleagues who have been around a long time will know that the abuse scandals of the 1970s encouraged local authorities to close big municipal homes. The voluntary sector stepped up, and then in the 1990s, the private sector was allowed to enter, where it acquired homes and made investments.

In terms of your very specific question about the profile, it is very similar. At a global level, there is about 1% between them, but 80 something percent of all homes, whoever the owner is, are good or outstanding. For the most part, that is because of the registered manager and the competence of the person running the entity. So there is no difference in quality and profile.

However, I come on to profit. Here, I speak as someone who has run my own children's home under a local authority and been a trustee of a national charity that had children's homes. When I was a lovely charity social person, we made a profit—we called it a margin—of 8% to 10% to invest in the future. People badger me about shareholder profit. Members of this committee will know that probably 85% of local authority budgets go to children and adult services, with children's work funded through the council tax. Questions are asked about the appropriateness of the level of profit. That is not a matter for Ofsted, but we are mindful of it and work with the DfE as it enters the space of financial regulation.

Our regulations probably go back to the Poor Law. They have been revised various times; the latest are 20 years old. I can only evaluate the person who runs the home on a daily basis and the responsible person who quality-assures that. I do not have any means of checking whether the ultimate finances and ownership sit with people who are interested in children—here we might have different views—and have experience of running services for them. That issue needs addressing in policy terms because of the huge cost: £60,000 a week. I had a child who cost £2 million a year. That was exceptional, but these are not small sums of money. Local authorities do not place children in unregistered homes to save money; they spend that sort of money in that space. I wandered a bit, but I hope I answered your question.

Chair: You did answer it.

Baroness Hamwee: Do you suggest that your regulations and framework should be changed?

Yvette Stanley: The DfE owns my regulations, and we have argued for a number of years that on many levels they are not fit for our time—for the ambitions, rights and expectations we have for children, or for the market that has developed. My regulations are framed with good people in mind with lots of experience in children's services running a small entity; I have no regulatory capacity at a group level. Some people own 700 homes. If there are problems across them, I can cancel all the managers, but where is the accountability system? At a micro level, people have to send hard copies of their bank statements and so on by post because that is enshrined in the regulations. So on the micro and macro level, the regulations are not fit for 2026.

Chair: That is a very helpful reply, and something I am sure the committee will want to look at. If you could write to us subsequently with practical suggestions about what we might recommend, we would like to hear from you.

Q64 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** How long should it take to register a home or supported living accommodation, and how long does it take?

Yvette Stanley: I go back to the number of homes, which, as I said, has grown. Two or three years ago, we would get 50 applications a month for children's homes. Last year, there were 100% more applications than the year before, and some months in the last 12, we had 170 applications. People sometimes allude to the time it takes in that context. I recruited 149 extra staff. We have administrators supporting that work, and we do it as fast as we can. Of 700 applications, 30% were in the north-west, where we do not need any homes at all, and only 10% were for children who need them now. There is a strong partnership between the provider, whether private or voluntary sector, and the local authority to make provision for children who we know are coming through.

In the context of that huge number, we had discussions with the Department for Education, and although not strictly allowed in our regulations, we set out our intent to prioritise applications. If they meet those criteria—they are for real children who have deprivation of liberty or other needs, and the provider works with a local authority—currently these take between two and six months. If they come with planning permission, the registered manager has nothing on their DBS that has to be explored further, and the paperwork is all great, it takes two months; it takes six if there are hiccups along the way. At the minute, for those not in that priority batch, the process takes up to 18 months.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill tries to sort out planning issues, and enable localities to say, "We've got enough or we need more", but the regulations probably need to be strengthened still further. That takes

me back to Afzal's point about who does the knitting in terms of how many providers we need, where, and for what particular sorts of children.

Chair: Thank you very much. When you write to us, if there are further mitigating factors that we could introduce, let us know what they might be. Dr Swallow wants to ask you about illegal homes. I said we would come back to that, so we will hear from him now.

Q65 **Peter Swallow:** You already touched on this, and thank you for doing so. I am sure you are aware that the Children's Commissioner raised serious concerns, both outside this committee and when she appeared in front of us, when she identified approximately 700 children living in illegal children's homes, for whom support last year cost the state £350 million. In oral evidence, she said, "If I have one message for Government and for Ofsted, it is: 700 children—sort it out". Will you sort it out?

Yvette Stanley: Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it will take collective action to sort this out. We were pleased to work with the Children's Commissioner on her report, and indeed we asked her to gather the evidence for us because local authorities are not obliged to tell us when they place a child in an unregistered school.

Peter Swallow: Do you mean an unregistered home?

Yvette Stanley: Yes, I do. Sorry, it is because I am Ofsted; I have schools on the brain.

Peter Swallow: Of course.

Yvette Stanley: Local authorities do not have to tell us when they place a child in an unregistered provision; indeed, because they are unlawful, they may be advised not to. But the Children's Commissioner can capture that information, and she did. Several years ago, we were very worried about this problem as we came across about 300 children in this situation. This tended to happen when the police said, "We're really worried about this place". At the time, supported accommodation was not regulated. We would visit and say, "That's for older children and it doesn't need to be, but this looks to be for younger children".

We raised this matter under the previous as well as the current Children's Commissioner and are grateful for the piece of work she has done as we need to eradicate this from the system. When we raised our concerns, the DfE gave us a small amount of money to employ one investigator and about six inspectors. When we had 300 children in unregistered homes, sending out warning notices was enough; but very quickly, the numbers escalated hugely. So I am pleased that, from this April, we will have a much bigger team and will be able to send out warning notices even more proactively.

In the new Bill, there is the provision for us to fine, which we currently do not have. Colleagues around the table may be closer to the ways of investigation, prosecution and the judiciary than I am, but we are both the police and the CPS in these investigations. I interview people under

the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. We have to compile evidence packs for the tests, which is hugely time consuming and very costly, and then we have to wait quite a long time for a court date. We have a number of investigations ongoing. There is a court case that I cannot talk about because it is happening at this point in time. We hope that the more cases we get through the court, with the visibility of that, and particularly as things develop in April, the more these cases and the fines will act as a deterrent. With the work we do with the local authorities in terms of their inspection, judging how they avoid this difficulty—albeit we know is not of their individual making—together with the work of the Children’s Commissioner and the strengthening of DfE regulation, we can reduce this problem.

Peter Swallow: I have very quick and specific follow-up questions. Are those fines brought against local authorities using these homes, providers or both?

Yvette Stanley: They are brought against provider because the criminal activity is the provision of the home.

Peter Swallow: I would put it to you that, if it is illegal to use these homes, surely it is illegal to put the children into them.

Yvette Stanley: In technical terms it might be called aiding and abetting.

Peter Swallow: We have heard that. My second quick follow-up is, you mentioned there is no legal requirement for local authorities to alert Ofsted. Do they have to alert any organisation when they put children into illegal children’s homes? Are there any changes in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill that mean they have to?

Yvette Stanley: I do not believe so. I can check that and give you a note. But on the positive side, when I inspect local authorities, I find they try very proactively to secure registered children’s homes. In some places, they open their own. They work collectively and regionally to commission. We test their oversight of children placed with them because we are not there, and ask, “How frequently do you visit?” We ask them whether they move children as quickly as possible when a proper and lawful children’s home is found. We look at that forensically, which affects judgments in local authority inspections, but continued purposeful action by all the players in the environment is needed to sort it.

Peter Swallow: That is really helpful, thank you.

Chair: Lord Murray wants to ask you about the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Then I will ask a question about the position of children with disabilities.

Q66 **Lord Murray of Blidworth:** My question builds on those of Dr Swallow about the new power to issue civil penalties, the fines that you referred to. Before we get to that, we throw around the phrases unregistered, unlawful and illegal children’s homes, but councils can still put children in

them. Could you tell the committee what makes them illegal and, if they are illegal, why councils put children into them?

Yvette Stanley: If a provider does not offer care, it has to register as supported accommodation; if it provides care for looked-after children, it is by definition a children's home. Technically, it is a matter for the regulator—in this case the DfE—which can take regulatory action against local authorities, whereas I merely inspect the provision. But the terms are effectively the same thing: if it is yellow and fluffy, it is a duck; it is an unregistered children's home, in my view.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The powers to issue civil penalties that are in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will allow you to fine people where there has been non-compliance with the registration requirement. Could you go to a home and say, "You have children in care and you're working for X council. You have not registered, and as a result here is a fine"?

Yvette Stanley: Others will understand better than me, but that test is more easily carried out than putting together a PACE-compliant case, where people have the opportunity to give a statement under caution and we compile evidence over time. I am trying to find a phrase that is not fly-by-nights. Sometimes, when we hear of and visit unregistered homes, they move the accommodation, change their name or tell the local authority that they are registered or, "The registration is in the post, your honour", that sort of thing. Some of these organisations make huge sums of money, so we need to think about how much of a deterrent a fine is. But on having a simpler and more immediate tool in your toolkit, prosecution powers and all the work to make sure local authorities look elsewhere, we have to do all the above.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: That leads me very neatly to my final two questions. First, how do you expect the use of this new power to issue civil penalties to improve compliance with human rights for children in care? Secondly, how long is it until you can switch on these powers?

Yvette Stanley: We have to wait for the Act, but we are starting to recruit staff. We have changed our finance systems and so on, so we stand ready as soon as the legislation gets enacted. When we visit such places, we find that the registered managers are generally people of good heart and good intent. Sometimes they think their provision would be registrable. It is the bigger organisations that galvanise properties. If we can deter the staff—if we have more visibility with them and they know about the fines—we hope they talk with their feet and go and work for a registered children's home. So it is about disruption at a number of levels.

Chair: Trying to draw the threads together a little here, and going back to the question asked by Sir Desmond earlier on about delays, is there a linkage between the delays in processing these applications and the actual registration? Is it part of the same problem, or are they separate?

Yvette Stanley: Prolific offenders have no intention of registering. They set up provisions for short periods of time, often for one child, or for a child who needs three-to-one support, which is quite expensive, so their margin is inflated. I am privileged that in my job I see wonderful providers of great heart and great intent who want to make a huge difference for children; I also see people who come to the market to make a fast buck.

On Facebook the other week, there was a man who had about 30 properties, houses in multiple occupation, that he had obviously evicted his tenants from. He was asking, "Would anybody like to run a children's home? You could just pay me £30,000, £40,000 a year in rent, and then you could take all the profit from the children's home". A good policy that makes things a bit sharper for landlords probably takes some people to an opportunity. I am often called to meetings where I am asked, "How can you thin regulation?" My regulations safeguard the rights, opportunities and individual life chances and choices of children. We need to get them right. Safeguards are important.

Q67 **Chair:** They are, and thank you for spelling that out; it helps us understand the whole picture very well. There will be a question about complaints mechanisms from my colleague Alex Sobel, but first I want to ask you about children with disabilities. In the long and distant past, I worked with children with special needs, but I often come in contact with families who have children with disabilities. We held a session about the human rights of people with disabilities, protected characteristics and so on. There seems to be a very patchwork provision when it comes to meeting their needs. The Law Commission has recommended the introduction of national eligibility criteria to access services for disabled children, hoping that might end the postcode lottery around this patchwork provision. Does Ofsted agree with that recommendation?

Yvette Stanley: We were having a conversation about things you might like to ask, and I was a bit surprised when I looked again at Ofsted's submission because it came across that we were against eligibility criteria. Rolling that back slightly—we can write and explain—we are passionate about a social model of disability, not a medicalised one that forces people through diagnosis and assessment.

You may be aware of the issues in special educational needs. That is another of our inspection frameworks, where health, education and social care come together. Children have been waiting years for CAMHS, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. I speak with passion about this, not just professionally but as the mother of an autistic adult. I want the same offer to meet similar needs across the space; I do not want to add to the queue for a diagnosis that will take nine years. I want needs to be looked at and services to be offered. There are ways of doing that, and it may be about how we had framed our worry about the eligibility criteria. We were worried more about the mechanism than about eligibility criteria.

Chair: So it is about equal provision throughout the country and working

towards that objective.

Yvette Stanley: In the SEND space, there is lots of consultation now and more to come, but we have to think about how children and families get the right help early enough to prevent crisis because, sadly, crisis is what brings them to my notice.

Q68 **Alex Sobel:** The next question is about complaint mechanisms. Ofsted does not have the power to investigate individual complaints or grievances, but it can use information received to help it inspect and regulate services. How does Ofsted receive information about inadequate provision of services, and how does it use this information to inform inspections?

Yvette Stanley: We get a lot of information. In the local authority space, the ombudsman looks at individual complaints, as do the local authorities themselves, and providers are tasked with looking at their own complaints. In my provider space, they have to notify us of serious incidents and issues. We get 40,000 notifications just about children's homes. Some link into these complaints, and my regulatory inspectors constantly receive information and re-evaluate their response.

If a complaint comes via us, we make sure it gets to the right person. It might be the local authority safeguarding team or the independent reviewing officers who oversee looked-after children. We also look at them to see whether children are at risk now; do we have to pick up the phone to the provider or local authority to ask what they are doing about it? We then look at all the information to determine whether we will visit or bring forward an inspection.

On inspections, while we cannot go in and say, "You've had a complaint that children are overly restricted here", where we can see that it has gone through the process, we look at restraint as an issue in our key lines of inquiry. If it was several months before, we look to see whether the provider has acquired any learning from the complaints. It is a challenge, and it is about having a professional dialogue: "So you've had these complaints; what difference has it made? How can you reassure me today when I'm visiting that you're meeting our standards and expectations and that, although bad things sometimes happen, you've learned and rectified the issues?"

Alex Sobel: If you spot a pattern within SEND notices in a local authority, would that trigger a response such as contacting the local authority or an early inspection?

Yvette Stanley: It absolutely would. We are commissioned to inspect once every three years, plus or minus six months. One complaint probably would not do that. The DCS says, "Their children's home has gone inadequate; there's been a pattern". All those things will be taken on board to determine the timing and the key lines of inquiry.

Alex Sobel: If the Government gave Ofsted the powers to investigate individual complaints, would it be well suited and resourced to perform

that role?

Yvette Stanley: We would not have the capacity within our resources. I said earlier that it is a village. If the issues relate to complaints about staff, the local authority designated officer has a role but does not investigate either; they have to ensure that the provider has investigated or appointed an independent person. If the matter comes to the notice of the police or child protection services because there is a safeguarding issue, they might do investigations. It may be expensive and not helpful for Ofsted to add to a crowded dance floor in that space, but we all have to work optimally to make sure we join the dots between us.

That was very much a lesson of Hesley, where, going back a bit, it also relies on provider integrity. If people are not making the right notifications and notify different people about slightly different things, we could all be falsely reassuring each other. I have to go out and inspect and regulate, assuming that people are mostly of good heart and experience and want to do great things for children. But, sadly, my experience over nearly 40 years is that there are providers who lack integrity—obviously, as they run unregistered children’s homes—and people who close cultures when they do not out bad things happening to children.

Chair: We are well aware that there is very good practice in the country that we are pleased to hear about, but where there are complaints, there is a danger of being part of a pass the parcel game from one authority to another. Children who are directly affected fall through the cracks as a result. If you have any further thoughts about how a complaints procedure can be made more effective, we would be all ears to hear them. Let us go to Lord Rook for the final question to you.

Q69 **Lord Rook:** Yvette, it was lovely to hear you share not only as a senior leader in your sector but as a parent. As a Merton resident and a parent of two children who grew up in schools under your leadership, I particularly thank you because they really flourished and thrived in those settings. You have been very honest in sharing where you currently have concerns. Are there other areas where children in our social care system might have challenges to their human rights in any way, shape or form?

Yvette Stanley: We have not had time—I am not asking for extra time—to discuss the secure estate, which I worry about in all sorts of ways, with its different profile of children. Secure children’s homes probably provide the very best. We inspect the STC only at the request of the MoJ. It is not a care home; it is what it is. You can look at the inspection report published this week. We have consistently had concerns about arrangements there. YOIs are not inspected at all. The children are the same but there is lots of disproportionality in terms of the demographics, and we do not inspect their care. They are inspected as a prison, and Ofsted supports the prison inspector in terms of education.

I have asked two of my three asks. First, I want my regulations to be much more up to date so that I can take the right action. Secondly, I

would like to be able to refuse children's homes from people who should not be running them in the wrong places. Thirdly, going back to the secure estate, I worry that there is no regulation for the transport of children between secure environments. When providers are commissioned, they do not have to have particular training, and sometimes children are transported in handcuffs, et cetera.

Talking about complaints, when I visit a secure children's home, their complaint will not be about the home; it will be how they get to and from court. There are issues with transport, handcuffs and providers still using pain-inducing techniques on children. We should not hurt children when we try to rehabilitate them. That is just not where we should be.

Lord Rook: That is very helpful. Are there any other recommendations you would like us to forward in our report?

Yvette Stanley: We have talked about a few things that we could put in writing to help you craft them. I have probably touched on those enough, unless there are other areas you want to explore. If we put some of those thoughts in writing, practical things that would help us be the best regulator we can be, that would be really helpful.

Lord Rook: It would be particularly helpful to have comments around the secure estate because that sounds quite alarming, and we should be proactive in pushing that.

Chair: We are getting pretty close to the end of the inquiry, so this is exactly the right time to be feeding in further thoughts to us. We will hold a round table two weeks from now with many of those involved in the care of children in social care and users: people who have been in care in the past. So there is an opportunity for us to hear at first hand some of the things that people might want to reflect on and ways in which the system might be improved.

But for today, thank you on behalf of the whole committee for coming and sharing your nearly 40 years of experience, as you say, but also your personal insights, wisdom and clear sense of conviction about the importance of what you do to safeguard children in whose care you are required on behalf of the state to ensure that the highest standards are observed. Thank you for all you do.