



Public Services Committee

Oral evidence: The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability

Wednesday 21 July 2021

3 pm

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Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Hunt of Kings Heath; Baroness Pinnock; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 27

Virtual proceeding

Questions 213 - 222

Witnesses

I: Junior Smart OBE, Director, SOS Project, St Giles Trust; Chief Constable Alan Pughsley QPM, Chair, NPCC Crime Co-ordination Committee and Chief Constable, Kent Police.

Examination of witnesses

Junior Smart and Chief Constable Alan Pughsley.

Q213 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this public evidence session of the Public Services Committee in the House of Lords. We have two different panels this afternoon, all seeking to help us think about the vulnerability of children and the role of public services in addressing those vulnerabilities.

For the first half of the session, I particularly welcome two witnesses who both have experience, largely within the criminal justice system, of children and young people. Junior Smart OBE is director of the SOS Project at St Giles Trust. Chief Constable Alan Pughsley QPM is child vulnerability lead with Kent Police. Welcome to both of you.

As ever, I will ask the first question. I would be grateful, when you answer the first question, if you would give your name and say a little bit about your organisation. I always like people watching to be able to fit the name to the person, as it were. I will bring in other members later. You have an idea with most of the questions where members are coming from, but colleagues may want to ask you supplementary questions.

For my first question, I want to ask about the number of children who are getting involved with serious violent crime. We have heard from witnesses that it was increasing even before the pandemic. In your assessment, what do you think is happening between the sort of support that is out there and the number of children who now need it? Do you think the number who need support and intervention is growing?

Junior Smart: Good afternoon, Baroness Armstrong. It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to contribute. I am the founder of the SOS project at St Giles Trust. St Giles Trust is a national charity. It works, and always has worked, with society's most vulnerable. The project that I have been fortunate enough to develop over the last 15 years has been the SOS project. Prior to that I was a serving prisoner. I had been sent down for a long time for drugs-related offences. It was after trying to take my life a few times in custody that I decided I would try to save it and save as many young people's lives as I could.

That journey first started with the Samaritans. I am credited with setting up the Toe By Toe reading and writing scheme over at HMP Swaleside. That was teaching guys how to read and write in their cells. I then went on a bit of a journey of self-discovery and found that I had a real flavour for mentoring people from disadvantaged backgrounds. That led me to St Giles Trust.

I was fortunate enough to get a release on temporary licence. I sat an interview with St Giles. It has to be said that St Giles is a wonderful employer. There are not enough organisations that give people with convictions a chance at employment. It gave me that chance and the rest is history. SOS is now the largest ex-offender-led project of its type in the country. We also have SOS-plus, which goes into schools, colleges,

communities and pupil referral units. The whole aim is to demystify and de-glamourise the reality of gangs, criminal lifestyle choices, county lines and CCE.

The numbers have been really worrying for us. They were on a rapid increase, way before the pandemic. I will stage it out for you. The people we are working with are already facing multiple levels of disadvantage. They have huge levels of unmet needs. We support them to redress that balance. We believe that, once that balance is redressed, the need for committing crime and carrying out offences ceases to have a level of appeal, so desistance follows.

The pandemic brought down people who were already facing disadvantage. They were then even further behind. How did it do that? First, many of the families that we work with did not have recourse to public funds. People say, "Well, no, they go on to the furlough scheme", but that is not necessarily the case if you are in front-line work.

I can give you an example. The mother of one of my clients is a bus driver. When the pandemic hit, the employer said, "Look, we understand that you don't need to come into work, but here is the reality. If you don't come in, there won't necessarily be a job for you once this pandemic is over". She continued to go in. That is a front-line position, and she will come across loads of people who may have been affected with the virus on a day-to-day basis. It is a family where the father is absent. The mother has to work. With the schools closed, where are the kids going? How do they get access to healthy meals? How do they get online access to catch up with their schooling?

It should be no big surprise to the panel members that many young people just did not get an education. I am aware that you were all notified a few weeks ago of recent evidence that 100,000 children have not gone back to school since the restrictions were lifted. We only have another week left of school before they break up in entirety.

I would like to bring attention to the fact that these issues had always been there when the pandemic hit. The groups we were working with already had multiple levels of disadvantage. Those that had access to online resources—those who had internet and broadband connection at home—just went online. We are seeing that because there has been an increase in online gambling and online neurosis. There is male toxicity and objectification of women. That has all come about through young people accessing more and more porn online.

Then of course there is the drug taking. It is a generalisation, but it is largely escapism and as a way of making money. What we have seen is that county lines operations did not stop. They just changed their modus operandi. That was how they continued to deliver their illegal, and sometimes legal, commodities. Legal highs are just as damaging as illegal highs.

We have had an increase in teen-on-teen violence within the home. Abuse and domestic violence have also happened in teen-on-teen relationships. None of it has changed. All that has happened now is that the barriers have gone up and the kids are out there. We know that because, if you look at the peak time for violence, it is usually when the kids leave school.

What will happen when the pandemic lifts? We should be expecting a massive rise in violence. It is just going to happen because the beefs, the aggression and stuff contained largely behind closed doors will now enter the mainstream.

The Chair: Thank you, Junior. Chief Constable Pughsley, can you give your perspective?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: Thank you very much, Chair. I am Alan Pughsley. My national responsibility is as chair of the crime co-ordinating committee that covers many of the areas Junior talked about. Of course, it covers vulnerability and violence across the piece, including children. You have heard previous evidence from a colleague of mine, Simon Bailey, in that respect. The committee also covers wider violence, homicide, county lines criminality and gangs. It has a wider remit nationally. Of course, as you said, I am Chief Constable of Kent Police.

What we would say is very similar to Junior's account. We have absolutely seen an increase in violence across the piece during the pandemic. There was exploitation and grooming of children before, and indeed now during the pandemic, which, of course, has been going on for some time. One of the major reasons for that is the ease of accessibility to devices that people can exploit if they are a criminal and therefore exploit the most vulnerable. They are mobile phones, which, by the best description in current terminology, are a computer in your hand.

The group of young people and children that Junior talked about may be known to social services and/or education, and/or the police, and/or health. I will come to exact numbers of some of the offences in a moment or two; they have increased. We also have a new group of people—children that many parents believe are safe and secure in their bedroom at any given time.

I am probably of an age that when I was in my bedroom at home I was probably safe because I was not on the internet, whereas now children are routinely on the internet with very little parental control on some occasions. I am sure there is a big debate we can get into with regard to control of tech companies and suchlike. I think there is a huge piece of work there.

We know about these issues from our numbers, and from the voluntary sector; we work with St Giles Trust and it is nice to see Junior again. It is really good that we work with the voluntary sector, and of course we work with our statutory partners, which, from a police point of view, are health, education and social care. First, the voluntary sector is telling us

that there is a huge increase in referrals and people asking for their help. Some of the data coming into us is only from February to May this year, so it is pretty current. We know that in the bedrooms that I referred to there has been about a 117% increase in images of an indecent nature that people have taken of themselves in the bedroom and then shared. That is by way of example. Our statutory partners have also commented on a huge increase coming to them, with some cases being more complex. In health, they tell us that they have had more presentations in hospital of young children in need.

Bringing it very much up to date on three crime types—all crime types against children—we have rape, sexual assault and sexual grooming. In the four-week period ending 11 July, in a year-on-year comparison, or in fact a 2019 comparison before the pandemic hit, rape has increased by 4%; sexual assault has increased by 18%; and sexual grooming by 11%.

Bringing that more locally, because I thought it might help to give a bit of context, you get the child theme as the victim across many of these areas. I mentioned the hidden harm in the bedroom; the other one is domestic abuse. In Kent, and this will be replicated pretty much across the UK, domestic abuse increased during the pandemic, but it was increasing before. Of course, with many of these offences children are witnessing the abuse. Again, they are vulnerable in that space.

I am afraid it is a picture of increase. As Simon Bailey mentioned to you, there is a gap between service provision and the increase, and they are still some way apart.

Q214 The Chair: Thank you both for that. Are schools and services identifying young people at risk, or is it all going on with much of the public sector just not seeing what is happening? What do you think we should be doing to prevent children and young people getting into the sorts of problems that you are talking about?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: I will take them in reverse order. What can we be doing? I think it has to start at the very top. I share some frustration after 37 years as a police officer. If we honestly believe, as I think we all do, here and online today—otherwise we would not be doing this—that children are the most vulnerable in society, then at the very top, and I mean government, there has to be a single message. That single message has to permeate all the way down to every agency, whether it be voluntary, the police or anybody statutory-wise, without any dilution of the message through varying departments in government. By that I mean different Ministers, who have a different priority in a different area. No. 1, I think we absolutely need it and maybe a strapline would help: we hear the voice of the child. Maybe that has to be loud and clear in everything we do. That is one part for me at the very highest level, and certainly policing would support that all day long.

The second bit is that we do a lot of work now with the voluntary sector. Junior is here today, and that is great. People like Junior have a lived experience that none of us necessarily shares, and they have a massive

impact on our local people. The more that we can work cohesively and collectively together, the more we can absolutely in my view make this a safer and better place as we go forward.

Junior will speak for himself, but I think funding has to go with the strategic position, as I said at the beginning. It has to be long term. It has to be sustainable. I am not sure that quick fixes such as, "We will fund you for a year to see if you manage to turn something around", is the best way to do it. We should be looking at long-term successes. I think, therefore, the funding should be for two or three years and look at longer-term sustainable successes. I will stop there, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Junior Smart: I agree. First, I am really proud of the working partnerships that we have been able to forge with the police. The police have been the first to say that they cannot arrest their way out of this problem. Over the years that we have been giving evidence, we are now in the fantastic position where we are working out of custody suites. There are ex-offenders meeting people shortly after the point of arrest at that vital moment when we can engage them and get them to really think about the harm that they are causing their families and their children. We can slow the situation down, make them think about the consequences of their present course of action and do some powerful work. We have been really fortunate, and I am really glad about the partnerships that we have had and that we continue to make.

However, there are a number of things that need to be said. The frameworks that we are working with are still very dated; for example, police are not promoted on building good community relationships. Their frameworks are all set up for arrest and deterrence, which has its place. Enforcement definitely has its angle; with the people involved in some of these exploitations, you cannot talk them out of it. You cannot give them a bouquet of flowers and say, "Please stop doing what you're doing". They are just going to laugh at you. There needs to be a strong-armed level of enforcement, but it needs to be coupled with support.

Here is the problem we have. Police numbers have been stripped back. Gone is the community policing model in favour of a knee-jerk reaction approach. That needs to change, because the gangs and criminal networks are evolving and they change what they are doing all the time. They are even moving past procuring properties. They are going into Airbnbs. In the future, the properties they use will be where people are struggling to pay their rent, and so on and so forth. We need to be adaptive.

I definitely agree with the chief constable. They are raising questions about the violence reduction units now, but they have barely been given a chance or a few years. If we were really embracing the Scotland model of a holistic public health approach, we would be talking about at least 10 years before we even start measuring whether it is going in the right direction. In the 10 years that they ran their public health approach in

Scotland, they never had to deal with a pandemic. That is something else that we have to take into account.

What we see across the board is not a lack of good will. We need MASH teams and better pastoral care. What I think we need to do more is think about how to facilitate that. When you are doing this work, it is time-resource heavy. Short-term funding is not going to do it. It needs to be long-term funding and it needs to be consistent. It also needs to be ring-fenced so that, no matter which Government are in power, they cannot steer the funds away. Let us have it properly evaluated. Let us do what the Youth Endowment Fund is setting out to do, which is to set up a body of evidence and practice across the country so that people can see what works and what does not work.

The Chair: Thank you. I will bring in one of my colleagues for the next question. Lord Young.

Q215 **Lord Young of Cookham:** Thank you, Hilary, and a warm welcome to our two witnesses. Junior, I want to ask about early intervention and prevention. By way of background, last week we heard about Surrey Square primary school where 280 pupils were identified as vulnerable but only eight had a social worker. We were told that they do not all need social workers because there is a wider network of support in the community. Who is responsible for identifying those children before they get into serious difficulty? Who is going to mobilise and co-ordinate early intervention? Who would like first stab at that?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: I can certainly have a go. I am sure that Junior will contribute.

I agree wholeheartedly. I do not think anybody does not think that early intervention is the best long-term solution to this problem. Primacy with regard to early intervention sits with local authorities. The children's social care and early help teams, by way of example, have primacy in that work, and are the statutory partners first and foremost. Any voluntary partners work alongside them.

With regard to how they get information, the referral units and varying police forces are the mechanism. I know that you previously talked about Operation Encompass, where children subject to domestic abuse self-refer through the police to education. In some forces—Kent Police being one—we have Encompass Plus. It is pretty new, working with partners. Rather than just being when children are exploited in domestic abuse, it can be in any other offence or in any other way that children come to the notice of the police. We make sure that information is shared with education. That then should bring together the collective approach, led, as I say, by the local authority with regard to bespoke action plans. Some areas are better at this than others. That is often the best way of doing it.

The public health approach is when you have strategic partners and voluntary partners sitting together, defining and monitoring the problem,

identifying a cause and—key for me—defining a specific outcome and intervention for the issue, not a generalised idea, and implementing and evaluating it. It is easier said than done, Lord Young, but I hope that is helpful with regard to who has primacy and how people can work together.

Junior Smart: I agree with the chief constable on those points. The only thing I would highlight is that, if we are waiting for the point when someone is arrested, arguably, we are leaving it too late. If you look at the serious case reviews that have happened again and again when a young person has been murdered, you see a recurring theme. That theme is that parents have been approaching agencies again and again, saying, "Something is wrong with my son. I don't know what is going on. My son is out of control. My son is disappearing. My son is missing".

I am going to say this. Services are overwhelmed. It is not that I am dealing with a lack of good will. Often, I am working with social workers who say, "I hear what you are saying about building relationships, but I have 20 clients to see in a day. How can I possibly find out more than just the basics?" They are dealing with things at risk level rather than at an interpersonal level.

Parents are approaching services and the police. A few weeks ago, we had a situation where a kid had some really graphic stuff on his phone. The police did not know what to do with it. They referred it to the safeguarding lead at the school. It was like playing hot potato; they were passing it backwards and forwards. If you carry on reading the serious case reviews, what happens is that the kid then ends up getting relocated, passed around, excluded and all sorts of stuff because people are not really sure what to do with their activity, the drug debts or the debt bondage they are involved in. That kid ends up murdered and everything points back to the parents. That is largely what the parents tell us. They feel passed around by the services, and then they feel blamed.

Here is my point. If we really want to do early intervention, we have to go into the communities where these families are. We have to go back to the community policing model. We also have to go back to the community intervention model. That means dealing with the tougher cases that most people like to let slide. That might be families where English is not their first language. It might mean going into meetings of tenants and residents associations. It might mean sitting there and hearing the community blast you with what they feel you are not doing. That is what my caseworkers do. When they are doing family work, they go in and talk to the families.

The families are often presented with a reality that they just do not know. I delivered a training session yesterday on social media. These were practitioners in the field. There were loads of websites they did not know and loads of slang terms they did not know. They did not understand. They had the misconception that if somebody gets arrested, or if someone loses the drugs or gets sent down, the drugs get written off. I

had to explain to them, "Look, that drug debt is never written off. That drug debt gathers costs and, when that kid is released, that kid is going to be wrapped up even further". There are loads of misconceptions about it. There are misconceptions about what gangs are and what happens on a day-to-day basis around gangs and all of that stuff.

It is really about training the professionals and going into communities. We have to think about the earliest point when we can intervene in a young person's life. Many times, it can be that you need to set up an intervention before the person is even born. That is where we need to be.

Lord Young of Cookham: I understand what you are saying, Junior, but who is in charge of that? You say, "We must do this", but who is "we"?

Junior Smart: This is the problem. Nobody wants to take responsibility. For years, we were talking about who was going to take responsibility for county lines. Is it the place where the kids come from? Is it the place where the kids are offending?

What we struggle with are two things. First, if it is in a school, are the staff trained enough in safeguarding needs to spot the earliest signs? If it goes down to the council, is it resourced enough and does it have the resources in place to pick up those cases?

Here is another thing. I will tell you something that is very common. They want the children who are involved in this stuff to make disclosures, but the frameworks do not exist to keep the children safe once they have made the disclosure. Once a kid makes the disclosure about something very serious that is going on for them, nobody knows what to do with it. That is a very real problem.

I honestly think that something needs to be set up, individually, that will lead on this and take accountability for it, and hold the partnerships around the table to account. I put it to you like this. At the moment, there are lots of partnership meetings with lots of different agencies. I have sat down in a few of those partnership meetings and walked out of them five hours later still not knowing who is leading on the case. That is insane.

Q216 **Lord Young of Cookham:** What you have said, Junior, is enormously helpful. We are going to take seriously the issues you have raised.

I have a quick question for Mr Pughsley about prevention. Police work is about the detection of crime but also about prevention. To what extent have you been able to focus on the prevention side? Do you have a ring-fenced budget for prevention? How do you measure how cost-effective prevention is when you put your resources behind it?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: All forces, with chief constables and their police and crime commissioners, have their funding allocation, which includes a set amount for prevention. Certainly in this space the best example I can use currently—I will come back to something Junior said a moment or two ago—is that additional investment and prevention is, in

many policing areas, going into increases in things like new schools unit police officers.

In Kent, over the last two or three years, because of an increase in funding, I have created 70 police officer posts. They are now in every school in Kent. They are working regularly in Kent with education and with the voluntary sector, building the relationships that Junior is talking about with children outside, dare I call it, the confrontational-style space. That has great long-term benefits.

Lord Young of Cookham: Are these secondary schools or primary schools?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: They are all secondary schools. At the moment, we are just exploring year 5 and year 6 in junior schools. We are in that joint space.

Again, I hear and share some of Junior's frustrations. I mentioned where the responsibility sits. It could be better and it could be tighter, but there is a lot of work that goes on through safeguarding meetings, chaired by county councils, where you have all the partners around the room. There are some good benefits and good outcomes with regard to some children who are known.

My big concern—Junior touched on it with county lines—is that there are a lot of children we do not know about at the moment. We have to do the work on the children who are known to us, for whatever reason, but we please must not miss the hidden-harm children that we both talked about as well, Lord Young.

Lord Young of Cookham: Thank you both very much.

Q217 **Lord Bichard:** Thank you both for coming. You make an incredibly powerful pair, to the point where I have more questions than we are going to have time to get through. Maybe you should do this more regularly together because what you are saying is very important.

You are both saying, and we have concluded, that co-operation between agencies and across bureaucratic boundaries is really important. Why is it so difficult to achieve? What could we do to make it more likely and to build the really strong partnerships that would make a difference?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: Probably two things jump to mind. The first is to have a less risk-averse policy with regard to data sharing. That is fundamentally important. I take responsibility for my officers and my staff. They have rules and regulations. They know that data can be shared if it is going to be used and it is appropriate, in the right regard. It is not a blanket sharing of data. It is a focused sharing. But it is not, "Don't share it", which is what is happening on some occasions. We need to get more clarity for all agencies, because it should not just be reliant on the leader of whichever organisation. There should be absolute clarity on, "This is why and when", on top of what we understand so far from

government. It does not matter which agency; it might be health worried about sharing it with policing, or vice versa. That would be No. 1 for me.

Repetitively, No. 2 is what I said right at the beginning, Lord Bichard. We need a single mandate from government at the very highest level that does not dilute itself when it comes down to local agencies. It just cannot. I think those two things would be helpful for me and, I am sure, for my partners. Junior will speak for himself as he always does, but those would be the two for me.

Lord Bichard: You will not be surprised that I agree with you, particularly on data sharing. Junior, what would you do to make a difference on collaborations?

Junior Smart: I agree completely with the chief constable. The only thing I would add is that we should look at things outside the borough perspective and start thinking about things inter-regionally. County lines do not stick within boundaries. They frequently cross over into other territories. There is loads of stuff that goes on, but agencies seem really scared of communicating.

I have seen some fantastic bodies of good practice from the police and the voluntary sector. When I talk about it, people are hearing it for the first time. They just do not know. As I believe Lord Ramsbotham said, someone has to be responsible for making good practice somewhere best practice everywhere. That is what we need to think about. We need to communicate outside boundaries, get together and consolidate good practice.

Q218 **Lord Bichard:** Junior, the committee would find it very helpful if you were to point us—not now but maybe in a quick note afterwards—to some of that good practice. Where is it happening and why do you think it is happening?

Junior, can I ask you specifically a question that crossed my mind as you both spoke earlier? You had a difficult start and you have recovered amazingly. Looking back on it, what kind of early intervention might have made a difference to you, and stopped you getting into the situation you found yourself in?

Junior Smart: The reality was that, in my mind anyway, things did not really go off the rails until after my mum died. At that point, I looked at my friends and associates as my family. Loads of people tried talking to me, but none of them was going to get through to me. I had to find out and discover the reality for myself.

What I realise is that, if somebody who I could have related to at that point had managed to reach out and talk to me, then, yes, I would have listened. The problem was that there was nobody in successful positions who I could relate to. Do you see what I mean? There was nobody in the community who was a walking body of success who looked like I did, sounded like I did or had a similar sounding name to me. No one in government looked like that. So who did I look at? I looked at the

success models that were around me, and they were not always positive or productive.

When you go into schools and talk to children, and they realise that they can trust you and share stuff, they start asking you questions. One of the most powerful conversations I have is saying to young people, "Look, if you can think it and you can dream it, it is absolutely possible". I want them to use their voice. I lost my voice. I got criminalised long before I even realised what the virtues of life were. Do you see what I mean? Now, I am in a position where I can look at it and say, "Actually, I need to make changes". I am hoping that young people not only use their voice but use their vote and use their feet. The kids are 100% our future. Everything rides on them being a success for the next generation.

Q219 Lord Bichard: I think the point you have just made is incredibly important. You can be sure that we are going to reflect on that. What you are saying is that lived experience and the ability to make a connection was not there.

I know that time is limited, but I want to ask two more questions of both of you. Mr Pughsley, I was very interested that you talked particularly about your 70 police officers in schools. Before either of you was born, I ran a local authority in London, and it was incredibly controversial to suggest that there should be a police officer in a school. You have moved on from that. I would be interested to know how you have managed to do that and developed confidence and trust. I would be interested to know whether Junior is with you on that.

Since I have limited time, a second question, which you can answer at the same time, is this. We are told, and I think, that excluded children are at greater risk. Do you agree with that? How do you think we could address that through, say, pupil referral units or some other mechanism? Police officers in schools, excluded kids: can I go back to you, Mr Pughsley?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: I will be brief on both. The schools bit was easy. My goodness me, it was open door. We went and spoke to every headmaster and headmistress in the county with regard to every senior school and, as we say, junior schools at years 5 and 6. We told them that it was twofold: first, wanting to build really strong relationships with our future generation so that they were not groomed or cocooned into a life of violent criminality that Junior will be able to tell us more about than I guess anybody else; and, secondly, building a relationship with our young people and children so that they saw police as people they could talk to, dare I say it, in an old-fashioned way. "If you're not sure, go and ask a police officer". I did not have to work too hard. The door was there and education willingly accepted us.

We have not missed the excluded bit. Again, we are working with some of the voluntary sector and the schools, so that, outside schooling, there will be other events that maybe the excluded children can be part and parcel

of. That links into our wider safeguarding groups, mainly with statutory partners here in Kent.

Lord Bichard: Do you think that we have moved on from the political opposition that existed to having police officers in schools?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: I think we have. There are still times when people have the impression, "Don't talk and don't trust the police", but I do not think that should be a barrier to trying. We will try and try, and eventually I am sure that that barrier will be broken down. We have great connections with people like Junior and others. When we need to get into a community that is a bit worried about working with the police, lived experience and a really strong connection with non-police officers is a really good segue.

Lord Bichard: Junior, are you happy with that?

Junior Smart: Yes, I am. The only thing I would add is about excluded children. How about we make the headteachers responsible for the outcome of any children that they exclude, so it is not just that they can exclude a child and say, "Out of sight, out of mind"? Let us have it that, wherever the child is, the school is still responsible.

I would also argue that we should have a similar thing with prisons. Prisons should be responsible for the people they release, at least for the two years when statistics say they are most likely to reoffend. I think if we had that kind of level of accountability and responsibility, people would soon start thinking about the long term, and how we can break the cycle rather than just have short-term fixes.

Lord Bichard: I think we should send you to the NUT conference next Easter and let you put that proposal to the profession. We will give you some protection and help you out of the hall. That was brilliant. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I can imagine the teacher conferences at Easter. It is actually a very good thought. We need to find ways of making sure we hold accountability in the right place.

Q220 **Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** Big thanks to our panel of Junior and Alan Pughsley. It is really fascinating stuff. I would love to be there in a front-row seat when that policy is announced at the NUT. If you can organise that, I would be very grateful.

The Department for Education has told us that there is no integrated government strategy on vulnerable children. Many of us think that there should be. If such a strategy were to be put in place, what would be your priorities? It would be good if we could have something, when you are responding, about the family hub programme and how you think that plays a part in this area.

Junior Smart: It speaks volumes that there is no integrated government strategy on vulnerable children. There is also no integrated response on

missing children on county lines. That needs to be national rather than even regional.

The way it should be connected would be to have full integration with the MASH—the hubs—and we should have the voluntary sector as part of that. I say that, because when we go in and do work with families, and for the reasons I have explained through the serious case reviews, we do not have to look far to see where bad practice leads us. The whole integration model is really important. We must have voluntary sector organisations, and ones that are known to work with families, and there are many, as an integrated part of it.

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: There are two or three things. In the strategy I would expect to see clear direction to make sure we get hold of the children's voice. Too many times, policies and strategies are written, and there is lots of telling and not too much listening. I would have a really clear focus. How we get that is another question, but the strategy should absolutely have the voice of the child all the way through it.

Something that all partners, all stakeholders and all voluntary sector organisations would sign up to, again as a high-level strategy, is that this must be about protecting the most vulnerable from the most violent. I absolutely think that has to be a focus. Again, it is something that everybody would sign up for without, dare I say it, a competing priority.

Certainly from a local perspective, I think the family hub bit works. When we are absolutely focused on the families that need the most help, for whatever reason, the wrap-around services through Kent County Council, and local divisional support and the voluntary sector, work. I think that is fine. Again, I am slightly more worried about the children who are hidden at this moment in time. They are the ones I mentioned right at the beginning, in the bedroom, with a parent or a mum and a dad who think that everything is fine, but it is not, because they are being exploited by somebody else, somewhere else in the world. I think there should be a huge amount of accountability, and our technology giants need to be held to account far more than they are currently. I have some strong views on that, which we may be able to get into another time.

Q221 **Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** I feel sure you are right on that. Thank you very much indeed.

Perhaps I could move to another important part of the Government's policy—the Supporting Families programme, which has taken over from the troubled families programme. Could you give your views on what are the good bits of that, how it can be improved in the next phase and how you see that developing?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: Supporting Families has to be improved. It is very good in part, but going forward there are two major areas. First, it absolutely has to focus on the families with multiple problems. We cannot do everything, but multiple problems, whether it be domestic abuse, education, health or anything else, give you a better

chance of a long-term solution. Secondly, which is the broken record bit, it has to have the ability for better joined-up data. If we are to have a multiple problem solution, multiple partners have to be able to share data without a blink or a glance.

Junior Smart: It is still very early days with regard to the programme. I would be interested to see how it looks in practice. There is great stuff that is all on the surface, but how it will dovetail and work on the ground with families will be the real testing part. I am eager to observe where it goes.

It goes without saying that the people we are working with have multiple complex needs. If I can even get to the young person to talk about what gang exit might look like, I have to help mum get access to benefits that the council has declined. Before I can even get to talk to her about that, I have to help her deal with the domestic violence that is happening. Before I can even get that far, I have to help redress the balance in the house because we are seeing a lot of adolescent-to-parent violence, where the kids are playing out the violence that they have seen being enacted in the home. Before I get there, I have to show her how to budget and manage the money that she has. This is all at a 2-metre distance, with Covid and all that stuff. There is so much stuff going on for families.

Yes, I definitely praise the Government for their new approach, but it is only going to be effective when we see it in action. It has to be said that so much money has been taken out of this arena for so long that we have to ask questions. Is it enough? Will it be enough to redress the balance, especially in this post-Covid world? We are not even out of Covid yet, but as Covid starts to move out, what will it look like?

Q222 **Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** Perhaps I could squeeze in one last question. It relates to policy elsewhere. As a committee, we are obviously focused on England but we seek to learn from lessons elsewhere.

Junior, are you able to tell us anything about efforts elsewhere, perhaps particularly the Scottish violence reduction unit, in reducing the number of teenagers involved in serious violent crime? Can we learn anything from that in England? Mr Pughsley may have views on it as well.

Junior Smart: I will offer a couple of comments, but the best person to speak to about this is Professor Simon Harding, who makes everything accessible. He has talked to me about it. I am not going to say I am as fluent or as knowledgeable, but the reality is that it was a 10-year thing. It always seems as though in Scotland they are one stage ahead, but we have to realise that they operate in a different way as well. There is one unitary authority compared to the 32 London boroughs that we have. They had money pledged for this thing consistently for 10 years, a lot like Boston's Operation Ceasefire model, which was also successful in reducing violence.

Loads of things fail and people do not throw in the towel. How many bad situations have we had in hospitals or schools? No one says, "Close that hospital down or close that school down", until things get really bad, and they have been given long enough to have a chance to iron out stuff.

The violence reduction unit in London has just started. I think it is too early to judge how it works. It is typical of us that we look at what works and then we mimic what does not work. We have to get better at seeing things through, seeing what it will look like and giving it a chance. There is some really good practice already. There is the way that we have been able to partner with the police and councils, using the violence reduction unit. It is great in principle, and I am eager to see how it plays out, definitely.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: Thank you, Junior. If you have any more information on Professor Harding, that would be useful. Mr Pughsley, do you have any views on this?

Chief Constable Alan Pughsley: This is purely a recent conversational piece with a couple of my chief colleagues rather than hard facts. We believe that, where it has been successful in Scotland and in Wales, they have had cross-department strategy agreed across government. As to whether that is 100% correct, I am afraid I would have to go and do some more work. That is certainly what we have heard.

I mentioned earlier that I chair a national crime co-ordinating committee. Police Scotland and Wales are part of that. From a policing point of view, we share best practice.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: Thank you very much indeed for that run of answers.

The Chair: Do any of my colleagues have anything that they want to come in with at this very late stage? No. We are going to be able to let you go. Some of my colleagues have other commitments in the Chamber coming up, so it is a busy afternoon for a lot of people.

Thank you very much. I hope you have heard from colleagues who asked questions how much we appreciate your words this afternoon, and the work that those words come from. It is always very sobering for us to hear just what people are doing in order to improve opportunities for young people.

Thank you both very much indeed. Your evidence has been really useful. If there is anything you think we have missed, or that we should have asked about, or if there is anything that you think about later, please let us know. We would love to hear from you even though we have officially finished the evidence session. It is now my duty to formally close this part of the meeting.