



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Role of public services in addressing child vulnerability

Wednesday 3 November 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; Baroness Wyld; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 35

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Questions 269 - 282

Witnesses

I: Will Quince MP, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education; Fran Oram, Director for Children's Social Care, Practice and Workforce, Department for Education; Maggie Throup MP, Minister for Vaccines and Public Health, Department of Health and Social Care; Liz Ketch, Director, Early Years, Children and Families, Department of Health and Social Care.

Examination of witnesses

Will Quince, Fran Oram, Maggie Throup MP and Liz Ketch.

Q269 **The Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's meeting of the Public Services Committee in the House of the Lords. Some of us are present, others are remote. We continue to run hybrid meetings in this House, which means that we are not as crowded in here, so we are able to welcome officials as well as Ministers. I am Hilary Armstrong and I chair the meeting. I will try to make sure that we keep within what we are trying to do to reduce the transmission of the pesky virus. I may be a bit officious as the afternoon wears on, but I will probably forget. I will try, however, not to forget. I would be really grateful if you two could not forget and could wear your masks if you are not speaking,

We know that you are new Ministers, and I think you have one of the best jobs in government in looking after and working out how we can improve services for children. We are coming to the end of this inquiry into vulnerable children, and many people have said that over the period of Covid it is children who have been the real victims, whether that is because they have had the disease and been out of school or because others have been out of school. Very many of the most vulnerable children were not ready to face a pandemic; they did not have the resilience or the skills, or their families did not have the money to face what was needed, such as wi-fi and the internet, or the parents the skills to home tutor and so on.

In a very wide range, children have been the focus, and that is why we as a committee looked at this issue. You are our last public witnesses and we still have people contacting us with challenging issues. We will reflect those in our report, but we hope that with your assistance this afternoon we can have a report in three to four weeks' time.

Thank you for coming. As I say, I think you all have fantastic jobs now, but there are huge challenges within those roles. I hope that you will reflect back to your Secretaries of State some of the things that we are raising with you today, because we want them to take them seriously too. As ever, I as the Chair will ask the first question, but before that I want you to introduce yourselves.

Will Quince: Thank you for your kind words. I am the Department for Education Minister for Children and Families. Thank you very much for having us today.

Maggie Throup: I am the Minister for Vaccines and Public Health and it is delightful to be with you today.

Fran Oram: Hello, everybody. I am director for children's social care at the Department for Education.

Liz Ketch: I am director of early years, children and families at DHSC.

Q270 **The Chair:** Thank you. I have the first question, as I said. Colleagues will come in with other questions. We allocated the questions alphabetically,

which is why it is all women asking you the main questions this afternoon. It is not that we said that the men are not involved, and I know that the men will want to come in at some stage with some supplementaries.

During the inquiry, we have been troubled by the real challenges within services for children and by the move from early intervention and prevention work to crisis work. We have found and been told that there was an annual reduction of £1.8 billion in local authority early intervention spending between 2010 and 2020 and that this has led to worse outcomes for children, particularly for vulnerable children. It pushes too many of them into crisis intervention, which is the state becoming the parent, and my experience is that that is not often a very good experience for the child. It has not produced savings for the taxpayer either. The spending has had to go on costlier, later interventions such as support for looked-after children in social care, which rose dramatically during that period.

The Government committed last week to an additional £492 million over three years on Start4Life and other family help services. That is only a fraction of what was there. How are we going to get to the stage where we are intervening at the right time for the child and giving the right support to the child and the family rather than waiting until there is a crisis?

Will Quince: I broadly agree with the thrust of your question—that early intervention always leads to the best possible outcomes. We know that when an individual, a child, a young person or a family is in crisis, when you intervene at an early stage your options are big as opposed to when you intervene at a later stage, when your options are often far more limited and extreme in their nature and end up being far more costly to the taxpayer.

Of course, our fundamental aim here, which you referenced in your opening remarks, is protection and support of some of the most vulnerable children and young people. That is certainly my role in the department and across government, and to be the champion of children and young people.

I note that the committee called for a number of bids, as part of the spending review, that ended up being successful. It is almost as if the committee anticipated what the department, working with other departments, was likely to put in bids for. We were successful, and the result has been far more successful early intervention. I do not dismiss a lot of the work that has been done in early intervention over the past few years. In each of the past three years we have spent over £3.5 billion on education entitlements, for example, which includes the universal entitlement for three and four year-olds and the entitlement for disadvantaged two year-olds. I think that around 124,000 disadvantaged two year-olds have had the advantage of the additional support that we know leads to far better outcomes.

You rightly referenced the point at which we started and the point that we are fast getting to now. You referenced the Start4Life offer and the family hubs. I suspect there will be more questions on that and I am very keen to talk more about this, because I think it is a very exciting step forward. As has been announced in the Budget, as you say there is a £500 million package for families, including the £200 million package extending the Supporting Families programme, which I think will be significant and which will extend over the spending review period to 300,000 families, and £300 million to transform services for parents, carers and babies to around half of all the local authorities in the country.

I appreciate that you ask whether that is enough. The answer, of course, is that it is not, and I want to see that rolled out to every local authority in the country, but it is important that we get it right. That is why the first step is the transformation model, which is the first 12 top-tier local authorities, and then we will roll out to 75, which is half of all top-tier local authorities. The plan, subject to agreement from Her Majesty's Treasury, is to roll that out across the whole country.

Maggie Throup: Across government we recognise the importance of getting it right for some of our most vulnerable. I want to pay tribute at this stage to our colleague Dame Andrea Leadsom and the review she undertook to look at the early years and the outcomes of that. We can give her credit for getting some of the additional funding for this group of people through the work that she has done and her report. The vision in her report, *The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days*, is quite inspirational. That is what we are trying to build on through the additional funding from the spending review, which is so important. She has set us a challenge that I hope we will meet over the coming months and years.

Q271 **The Chair:** Will, you said that you were seen as the Minister across government. We have said that there ought to be a cross-government strategy. We find it quite difficult as a committee that is set up to look across the piece rather than to delve into each department. For any of us who work in and have worked in public services—as you can see, there are a lot of people around this table who have a few more grey hairs than there are on your table, because we have been doing this for a long time—working across the piece is so difficult.

I am not sure, for example, where the Start4Life will end up, because it has been in Health. You talked as if you thought it might come to Education. How are the Government going to make sure that this is a cross-government strategy? We have pushed other witnesses very hard on whether there should be a cross-government strategy. Most of them think there should be. Where do you stand on that and when can we see some changes?

Will Quince: That is an excellent question, Chair. Before this role I spent two and half years at the DWP, and I can assure you that the grey hairs are fast approaching. I very much see my role as being the champion of children and young people across-government. At the Department for

Education, I have a certain number of levers, and the best start possible in life and allowing everyone to achieve their potential through our education system and our care system, and how we support children and young people via local authorities, are to some extent within my control. You are absolutely right to point out that many of the levers that I would ideally need to pull to transform and improve the life chances of children and young people sit within other government departments.

I think that five or six weeks into a role is too early to say whether a strategy per se on vulnerable children is the right way to go. I have an open mind on it and I very much look forward to receiving the committee's recommendations and report in due course. I feel instinctively that it is potentially not the right approach at this stage, and I have some initial thoughts on why a strategy for vulnerable children would not necessarily be the right thing at this stage.

First, I do not think there is a clear definition, across government, of a vulnerable child, which in and of itself is a problem. We have had our own definition to some extent—it is, for example, a child or young person with a social worker—which helped us to identify who should stay in education even throughout the pandemic when schools were largely closed. We would first have to get a clear definition in place. To give one example, for some children you could say that if you have a social worker, that might be a good place to start, but then what about a child who perhaps has never come into contact with the state so far but is involved or vulnerable to county lines activity or is growing up in a very affluent middle class household where there is unknown domestic violence and they are witnessing that? They are equally vulnerable or certainly would fall into the vulnerable child category.

Secondly, when something is across government you have to make sure that it is manageable and that somebody ultimately is responsible.

Thirdly, you need to make sure that there is the time resource, and certainly at the moment, especially with the fantastic spending review that we have secured, for me it is all about delivery and making sure that we deliver on this.

I am conscious that we can spend a lot on strategising, whereas we need to be delivering on the money that we have secured in the spending review and ensuring that it is making a difference to the life chances of children and young people up and down the country. We have a lot of strategies across government, and we have quite a lot in the Department for Education too, but strategies by their very nature tend to be quite static. Once you have produced a strategy, it is something you will work towards, but in anything relating to children and young people it is a forever moving feast and you have to make sure that you evolve and adapt accordingly.

I would also be a bit worried about stifling innovation, particularly at a local level, because there is so much happening around local authorities

that we want to continue. Sometimes a strategy can hinder that, although not in all cases.

Another reason is making sure that all government departments are totally aligned. To some extent, the strategy can help that, but it can also hinder. Also it is about making sure that, where you have a strategy, all government departments are working together towards one aim. I note what the committee has said previously about joint bids across government. The former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, giving evidence to this committee, suggested that was the right way to go. We largely do that across government, and that helps. At the same time, once we have our spending review outcomes we will not all have everything that we bid for, but it is important that what we do still bricks up to a wider strategy.

I have an open mind on this. I am not convinced at this stage that a wide-ranging strategy document is necessarily the right way to go, but I look forward to the committee's recommendations, and I have an open mind.

Q272 Lord Hogan-Howe: On the point about how important a definition is for a strategy, I agree with you that it is very hard. In fact, I have chaired some reviews over the last few months that have been thinking about it. Is there not a case for making at least a minimum picture of what a vulnerable child is? They might be in care, they might not be in employment or education. Without that, I do not know how you ensure consistency across departments, the very thing that you are trying to achieve, and how you make an argument to the Treasury for resources.

Will Quince: I think that is a fair question. One of the most powerful ways of making a case to the Treasury is displaying outcomes, which is why we tend to pilot things first. I broadly agree with you about having a starting point for children and young people who in all cases you would class as being vulnerable, and to some extent we did that with children in school. The danger, of course, is that the group of children who the DfE might consider to be vulnerable may be a different cohort from those who DHSC or DLUHC might consider to be vulnerable. It is about making sure that children and young people who do not fit a definition that we have artificially created do not fall through the cracks when they are vulnerable.

I think there is great merit in what you say as a starting point, but I would not want us to base everything on that and then lose sight of the fact that there are vulnerable children and young people out there who may not fit into any box or category. I am absolutely determined that we do all we can to make sure that they get the support they need when they need it.

Q273 Lord Bichard: Let us put the strategy on one side for a moment, because you also mentioned the importance of delivery, and I could not agree with you more. When all those years ago we set up Sure Start, which I was involved in, one of the most important things we did was to bring the budget together, make it clear who was responsible for the

budget—then it was the DfEE—and which Minister was responsible for delivering it.

In other words, there was clarity about who was in charge and what they were going to do. What we have now as a result of the review a couple of weeks ago is a number of relatively small pots of money in governmental terms, some in the DfE, some in the DHSC, some in the Department for Levelling Up and whatever else it now has responsibility for. Would it not be helpful to make clear just who is responsible and who has the budget to deliver all that?

Will Quince: That is a fair question. Specifically on family hubs, you will find some in government who are not huge fans of Sure Start. I am not necessarily in that category. I see family hubs as being Sure Start+++ . We are building on what we learned from Sure Start, which had great merit, especially in the early days when it was being rolled out.

I have two criticisms of Sure Start. One is that it was only for children nought to five, and the family is much wider than that, so the family hub model will be for the whole family. The second is that when it rolled out initially it had some very good outcomes, but like a lot of things when they are rolled out at scale at speed, what is happening on the ground becomes far more inconsistent and patchy.

I am determined that we make sure that as we roll out the family hubs model we see what the best practice is across the country and that the outcomes are absolutely clear. Quite frankly, that is the only way I will get the additional money secured from the Treasury to deliver it to the rest of the country.

On ownership, you are right, because DfE is leading on the funding of the family hubs and the national centre, but family hubs will work in practice only if other government departments lean in and make sure that a family hub is a one-stop shop for your family needs. That is why I am working so closely with Maggie and counterparts in other government departments. We will iron out ownership over the coming days and weeks, because it is absolutely right that in the House of Lords and the House of Commons someone is able to hold a Minister to account and point them in the chest and say, "You are the ones responsible for family hubs and you will be accountable for their success or otherwise". I hope very much that they will be a success. I agree with you: we have to have a clear accountability framework, and we will develop that over the coming days.

Lord Bichard: Just to be clear, I did not want to have a debate about whether Sure Start was a great thing or not. I am much more interested in clarity of responsibility to deliver. You rather suggested to us that there may be some developments here, and it might be helpful for us to suggest that there should be some developments here and that you should be the responsible Minister to bring all this together.

Will Quince: It is very kind of you to make that suggestion. It is always a challenge when you have a departmental level where we set our intent,

what we hope will happen: "Here is the funding we have secured from the Treasury. Ultimately, this will be for local authorities to deliver. We want them to be creative, innovative and push the boundaries as to what a family hub model could be and could deliver for families".

I do not want to be overly prescriptive, but I will make it absolutely clear what a family hub must be and what it must deliver. If they want to go further, I would absolutely encourage that. I do not think I would be against it if the committee wanted to propose a clear model for ministerial accountability.

Fran Oram: I want to build on the response to the question about the separate pots of money. You are absolutely right, of course, that some of the programmes are owned by different government departments. The Department of Health and Social Care is leading on the lion's share of the Start4Life programmes, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, as I think it is called now, leads on Supporting Families.

I wanted to emphasise how jointly the increased budget for that programme will be delivered over the next three years. We are working in very close partnership with officials and Ministers at DLUHC. We will be working to make sure that that programme delivers continued success, as it has proved to have over the past six or so years since it was created, in the reduction in the number of looked-after children and in reoffending from the complex families it is involved in supporting, and so on.

I think the point that really makes a difference is whether we are working in genuine partnership together. The fact that the announcement at the spending review brought all these different components together into one overall whole demonstrates that we are working in a partnership model, which I think is responding to the substance of the call in your letter to us before the spending review.

Will Quince: I will add one more thing, if I may. In my two and half years in my previous department, Ministers would often come together in an inter-ministerial group and put together a joint bid, and then the Treasury would in effect pick that apart; it would pick and choose the bits that it liked and the bits it did not like. You ended up with individual departments getting their spending review outcomes and they then worked out what they could and could not deliver with the pieces of the jigsaw that they had left.

I think this a great example of a genuine joint bid across government where the Chancellor—very much helped by Dame Andrea making the case to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—has just gone, "A big tick. Now go and deliver it". I think that is why this will be game-changing and we have what we asked for to deliver this overall package together collaboratively across government.

The Chair: Yes. It is not what we would normally call a joint bid, though,

I have to say, having been involved in them in the past, but never mind.

Maggie Throup: As a new Minister I was very nicely surprised by the fact that we were working together in so many different ways. We have seen the outcome of this joint working already, and it is so important that we work together for our most vulnerable in society. At ministerial level and at director level, there is a lot of joint working going on all the time, so I would like to reassure the committee that joint working is going on at every level, which I think is important.

Will made a very good point earlier about how you define vulnerability. The Department of Health has certain definitions, and the Department for Education will have others. It is about making sure that nobody slips through the net by having too narrow a definition. We have to be very careful about that. It is important. I want to reinforce what Will said: that it is about actions and outcomes and not just about strategy. Obviously we need to know where we are going, but it is also important that we deliver for those who we are working on behalf of.

Q274 **Baroness Pinnock:** Thank you to Will and Maggie for the answers they have given already, which have been very helpful. You have largely covered the area of my question, which you have been provided with, about the relatively small pots of money and the lack, perhaps, of integration of those.

I want to explore one or two points that have been raised in your answers. At the beginning of Hilary's questioning she raised the fact that local authorities have had an effective cut of £1.8 billion in early intervention spending in the last 10 years. The response is that the pots of money you refer to—I know it is more than these small pots of money—are £492 million spread over three years, so effectively £160 million a year, which is a drop in the ocean in comparison. I ought to say at this point that I remain a West Yorkshire councillor, so I am very concerned about the cuts to early intervention for children. How can councils respond as you are suggesting—

The Chair: Hang on, Kath. We are going to need to let the two Ministers go if they want to vote.

Will Quince: I am afraid the Chief Whip would be somewhat disappointed if we did not.

The Chair: Some of us ex-Chief Whips are a bit concerned that this is a whipped vote, but there you go. We had better let you go.

Will Quince: We will return as quickly as we can, Chair.

The committee suspended for a Division in the House of Commons.

Q275 **Baroness Pinnock:** I will pick up where I left off. A lot of the topic of the question that I was intending to ask has been covered in earlier questioning, which is great. I want to ask about the funding levels. Hilary talked in her question about £1.8 billion having been cut from early

intervention for children services in the last 10 years. The level of funding being provided to replace that is apparently small beer in comparison.

The next part of the question is this. Will, you talked about half the local authorities—I think that is what you said—able to have the Start4Life funding. What criteria will be used to select those? Will it be targeted at the local authorities with the greatest need with regard to vulnerable children or deprivation? It will be interesting to hear a response from both you and Maggie to those questions.

Will Quince: It is certainly not small beer, let us put it that way. Apologies, you will know this already, but for the benefit of those who might be watching, local authorities and their services fund their services, including those for children, through their non-ring-fenced core grant. We, and successive Governments, have always taken the view that it is for local authorities to determine how they spend their non-ring-fenced income on the services they provide, and that includes services for children and families. They do that by taking account of local need, their priorities and of course the statutory obligations that we place on them.

This year councils have access to £51.3 billion for their services, including a £1.7 billion grant for social care. In the spending review announcement, local authorities have access to £4.8 billion of new grant funding over the spending review period. That will enable the sector to maintain vital front-line services, including children's social care. It represents the largest annual increase in local government core funding for over a decade.

Specifically, I suspect you are referring to children's services, and rightly so given what we are discussing today. In total, local authority spending on children's services in 2019-20 was £10.5 billion, so that is 18% or £1.6 billion higher than the spend in 2014-15, so we are already on a positive trajectory. Then, of course, there are the services funded through the public health grant and Supporting Families, which are also very relevant to this agenda.

Turning to your point about family hubs, it is not quite half. Half will be funded via the additional £82 million, but we already have the transformation fund, which is the £34 million funding that was announced ahead of spending review, where we have family hubs that will be opened in about 12 areas. It will be more than half, so that is 12 plus 75 out of 151.

On how we are going to select for the criteria, we are still very much working up that piece. That is because it will be for local authorities to express interest. All local authorities are in slightly different places with their children's services. Some already have a family hub model of some description, and others are operating their children's services in different ways. I hope to be able to report back to both Houses within the next few weeks on our criteria for determining where the bidding process for those is or how exactly we are going to allocate the funding for the local authorities and identify the 75. I hope that answers the question.

Maggie Throup: I believe that local authorities are best placed to decide how the money is spent in their particular communities. We have maintained the level of public health grant funding for the next three years and are giving councils more than £3 billion to commission public health services this financial year.

It is important that we continue to work with the Local Government Association and other professional bodies and to share the evidence and guidance, to make sure that the money is spent in the right way. As Will said, we have money for 75 local authorities and we will be talking with the Department for Education, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to work out where it will be best spent, which is important. Once again, it has shown cross-government working to ensure the most effective use of the money.

We received a significant amount of money through the spending review, but it is not starting from ground level. It is building on what is there already, and that is important. We can see what is there already, and we know what works and how we can expand it to make maximum use of the funding that is there.

Baroness Pincock: Thank you both. I do not think this is an appropriate time to challenge some of the financial figures you gave. From what you say, about a quarter of local authorities have children's services that will not access any of the funding. Have I understood that?

Will Quince: That is quite possibly right for the family hub model. Do not forget that most of these services are already being provided in one way, shape or form through local authorities. The additional funding through the £82 million and the £34 million prior to that through the family hub model is about transformation funding. It is about funding those local authorities to support the change process to a family hub model. It is not about us investing in new buildings, although in some local authorities that might be the direction of travel. In many cases, they have the right buildings. It is about helping them to support the change process of designing and developing a family hub model within their local authority areas.

As I said, my aspiration is to go much further, but one thing I am conscious of—I am not going to use the word "mistake"—is that the rollout of Sure Start was not consistent as it was expanded across the country. I want to make sure that we get this right, and that means not rushing to do the whole country in one go. That is why we have the transformation starting with the £34 million and are working with local authorities.

Do not forget that alongside this there is a digital offer, and we have a piece of ongoing work there, as part of the initial £34 million, to ensure, again, unlike Sure Start—I appreciate that times are very different, because it was a little while ago—that a blended approach where you can get support online as well as in person is key to the family hub model and its success.

The Chair: I am afraid there is another Division.

Will Quince: I am so sorry.

The committee suspended for a Division in the House of Commons.

Q276 **Baroness Pitkeathley:** You have been very emphatic today about how much you value cross-party working, cross-departmental working and so on, and you said that in your letter to us. In taking our evidence we found that there was a lack of national co-ordination, which inhibited local services' ability to integrate their own services. I want to ask you for very specific answers about what your departments will do to support agencies working with children in perhaps underperforming local authorities, so that they can improve their performance, integrate services and share best practice.

I will put a very specific question to you, Minister, about the lack of sharing information, particularly from the NHS. The result of the NHS not sharing the information was that in most local areas early intervention services were unable to match their unique pupil identifiers on the pupil database with children's NHS numbers. That meant that many of those children did not receive the early help that they need. How will your department address that particular shortcoming? If you know of any other shortcomings, I would be glad to hear specific answers.

Maggie Throup: I will start with that one. I think we recognise the need for more data sharing. You raise a very important issue and it is something that there is shared concern over, because we need to make sure that no vulnerable child slips through the net at all because the information is not spread widely. We recognise that NHS professionals are sometimes reluctant to share data with other professionals and it is important that the information is shared in a safe and appropriate manner. It is about making sure that the data shared ensures that there are good quality services for children and young people. It is across the board, and the whole family is important because of the impact that the child can have on the parents and the parents can have on the child. It is important that is acknowledged.

I believe it is wrong to have a group decision. It should be based on a case-by-case decision, as that is probably a safer option. There was guidance issued during the pandemic that helped to accelerate what data is there that is appropriate to share. Hopefully over the weeks and coming months and into the future, when this is looked at, we can learn the lessons from how things were changed throughout the pandemic to make the most of how we move forward. It is about sharing the right and appropriate data, and making sure that nobody slips through the net, but also that the data is not shared inappropriately. It is trying to get that balance and knowing that, case by case, it is done for the right reasons.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Where they are reluctant and you have acknowledged that some may be reluctant, how would you encourage that?

Maggie Throup: I think it is important that healthcare professionals realise that they have a responsibility around safeguarding. Safeguarding works both ways: by not sharing data you may be safeguarding, but by sharing data you are safeguarding as well. It is making sure that everyone is aware of their particular responsibilities and looks at the wider picture. As we have been talking about through the whole evidence session, it is about more departments working together to make sure that we have the right levers in place for the data sharing to be done in an appropriate and safe way.

Will Quince: I think there are probably two points to the question. One is on collaborative working and the second is on data sharing, and they are two distinct but interlinked issues.

First on collaborative working, at a ministerial and senior official level, I think that huge progress has been made, and there is always room for improvement. When I look at things like the holiday activities and food programme, the Start4Life offer, Supporting Families, the mental health support teams where I work very closely with Maggie, and the Household Support Fund where we work very closely with the Department for Work and Pensions, collaborative work is happening very well at ministerial and senior official level. Where it is arguably more inconsistent is the collaborative working between the police, social services, education and other aspects of local authorities. That is where we come back to Lord Hogan-Howe's point on how there is a danger that, if someone is not in a category of vulnerability, they will potentially fall through the net. We have to do more collaborative working.

The pandemic, by its nature, has led to far more collaborative working at a local level and part of my job, working with Ministers across government, is to see how we can harness that, if people all pull together and pick up the phone. On a lot of the things on data sharing, people have hid, and I use the word "hide"—in fact, I am going to take that back. They are not confident enough about things like GDPR. Actually, if there is a safeguarding concern, there is nothing in GDPR that says you should not share data. Safeguarding should always trump anything else, especially if it is around a child or young person. We have the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* guidance and a clear legal framework, so I think we are doing far more on data sharing. But do I think there is far more to do? Yes.

I will point to three areas where we are making great progress. The first is the child protection information-sharing system. That enables information to be shared between health and children's social services, where a vulnerable child visits accident and emergency in a hospital. The second is the Family Hubs—Growing Up Well digital project. That is where we have partnered with Bristol City and Lancashire County Councils to improve how information is shared between professionals and services. The third is a pilot that we are undertaking in 3,000 schools to provide live register data, so we can see patterns of attendance, which is often an indicator for other issues.

I will say again that it is early days for me in this role. I will look very carefully at the evidence that this committee has gathered and its recommendations. If there is more we can do to share data confidently and securely to provide better outcomes for children and young people, I would be willing and keen to explore it.

Maggie Throup: I will add one thing. The barrier that we need to overcome, but in the right way, is the fact that the first thing a healthcare professional learns is patient confidentiality. It is trying to work out how to make sure that patient confidentiality is in place, but also can break through, where we need to, to make sure that there is the right protection in place for the individual.

Baroness Pitkeathley: It is not to be used as a barrier but as a facilitator.

Maggie Throup: Yes.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Some of the most powerful evidence that we heard from witnesses was about the connection that they had with the local voluntary sector and civil society organisations, and how they had found that a much easier sector to build trust with in personal relationships. We found that, in many local areas, barriers exist between the local statutory agencies and small charities in particular, and they often felt excluded from partnership agreements. What steps are both your departments taking to improve partnership working between local statutory agencies and the voluntary sector? It is very striking that neither of you have mentioned the voluntary sector thus far in thinking about co-ordination.

Will Quince: That certainly was not deliberate on my part and I think the voluntary and community sector plays a vital role in working alongside national and local government to deliver services directly, in particular to children and young people, including those who are vulnerable.

To pick some examples of where we are working very closely with the voluntary sector, the first is the grant funding that we provide to, I think, 152 parent carer forums in local areas. They support young people's participation training and development in local special educational needs and disabilities information, advice and support services. I think they provide a national helpline and online services too. The second is the support line we set up alongside the NSPCC to raise concerns about children and young people at risk of harm. I think we extended that to a dedicated line in response to the Everyone's Invited website and the concerns around schools, in particular. Then we work as part of the family hub model with local authorities and organisations like Barnardo's in the delivery.

There is always more we can do if there are more areas in which we can collaborate and work alongside the community and voluntary services sector. You are absolutely right that they are often the most trusted in their communities, among some of the most vulnerable people. Whether it is us at DfE or the local authority or social services, we are all seen as

the Government, and sometimes the Government are the people that take your child away, whereas Barnardo's or the NSPCC is not. We must harness the trust that exists. I should say that is not the case—the Government are here to help and we provide all sorts of great services and support to the most vulnerable in the country—but there is a very important role for community and voluntary services and we need to harness that and do more.

Q277 The Chair: Will you be looking, for example, at the rules around safeguarding? One of the areas that has been brought to us is from a safeguarding meeting, where the only person who was working, for example, with a young 15 year-old girl who was being groomed, was from the voluntary sector; she is frightened of everybody else, but they are not from one of the statutory named organisations and they are then excluded from safeguarding meetings. I can give you several examples.

Will Quince: Chair, I will hand over to Fran, who will be able to go into some more detail. As far as I am concerned, if the data or information can help to protect a vulnerable child or young person, my instinct is that we want to do all we can to make sure that is shared and action and intervention is taken. If there is more we need to do, I will look forward to the committee's recommendations and look to do it.

Fran Oram: To add to that very briefly, and I am conscious of time, I emphasise that the safeguarding partnerships are still relatively new. The statutory duty on the three safeguarding partnership partners has only existed since September 2019 and we have already had one review, the Sir Alan Wood review, looking at how to improve the effectiveness of those partnerships. As the Minister said, we are not at all complacent and would not remotely claim that it is all working perfectly at all levels. It is something that we keep continually under review.

I want to mention three things that we have not managed to bring into this hearing yet. The first is the independently led care review; I know you heard from Josh MacAlister quite recently. We also have a review of the special educational needs and disability system that is being undertaken within DfE and we have a planned schools White Paper. My point is that, across those three significant pieces of work, there is lots of potential for reform, improvement and to tackle any obstacles and problems in the system. We are not currently aware of obstacles with the legislation but, if there are, that is something I am sure we will reflect on and look at remedying.

Q278 Lord Hogan-Howe: On the point of data sharing, your letter of today goes through three paragraphs on how you try to improve data sharing. The Data Protection Commissioner is very clear that people should be able to share this data, but all the evidence was that people on the operational front line or their managers were not yet confident to do that; in fact, they were worried about it. That is the evidence they were giving. There is a disparity between what the system thinks and the people who are operating it. Everybody wants to do the same thing: nobody wants to share private data that should not be shared, and everybody wants to

make sure that the data is shared for joint benefit.

My point is how that culture can be changed. Given that the Data Protection Act is about not sharing data, where is the legal protection for individuals who could claim what I would call a reasonable defence—they acted in law in their own duty and in good faith, but perhaps they made a mistake? There is no defence of that type and no one in the Data Protection Commission has ever said, “They can use this defence” so why not provide a lawful defence that would mitigate the concerns they have?

Will Quince: Fran will certainly be able to go into this in more detail, but my understanding is that there is never a reason under safeguarding grounds not to be able to share data, but you hit the nail on the head when you said the issue is practitioner confidence. “Confidence” is the key word there.

We have very clear guidance on this. I think local authorities in particular know and understand what they need to do in executing their legal duties. The question is whether another piece of legislation is going to address that. I do not think it would. It is a fair challenge and one I have not given much thought to yet, but we can certainly go away and see what more we can do. We have published guidance, but that probably is not enough and we need to look at what more we can do to give practitioners at the grass-roots level the confidence to know that they are acting within the law, because we absolutely do not want people sitting on their hands, especially when they are worried about implications around—

Lord Hogan-Howe: I think the concern is that there is so much guidance that practitioners do not have time to read or absorb it. What they do not have is ready access to a rubric that says, “Broadly, you are okay if you have done these things”. Confidence is my point.

Will Quince: I think the other thing you said is about culture, and culture just takes some time to change, and you need to work out how to change a culture and then embed it across organisations. We will certainly take that away and look at what further steps we can take to give people more confidence that they are acting well within the law and know what their rights and responsibilities are.

Fran Oram: To build on that, I think there is a statutory duty to share information if there is a safeguarding concern, so it is the opposite of the statute preventing you from sharing the information; it is the statute requiring you to do that. But I totally appreciate the point that, if that is not well understood and if practitioners at the front line do not feel confident about doing that data sharing, all the guidance and all the legislation in the world does not address that. It is a culture change point which, as the Minister says, takes a bit of time, but we can certainly look at how we can try to push that and speed that up, because it is critically important.

The Chair: You might want to look at what we did on data sharing arising from our first report, and the discussions and exchange that we

had with the outgoing Data Protection Commissioner about this. The legislation is written for companies rather than for the public sector and that is part of the problem.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Can we give Maggie an opportunity to answer about the voluntary sector, because she did not?

Maggie Throup: I think some of our heroes throughout the pandemic have been from the voluntary sector. I do not think we could have worked without them and that needs to be acknowledged. The better integration of local services is vital. The Health and Care Bill that is going through Parliament at the moment, with integrated care partnerships, gives us a good opportunity to make sure that not just the statutory but the voluntary groups can work together to deliver on what we are talking about today. I find it exciting that we are bringing it down to the local level and the integration of both sides of it, which to me is the way forward.

Q279 **Baroness Tyler of Enfield:** I want to return to family hubs because they are so central to this agenda and, Will, you said at the beginning that you were keen to talk about them.

My question is about scale of ambition. When the announcement was made, last week, of £82 million over three years, the Institute for Fiscal Studies described it as “not a transformative amount of money or a bold agenda”. When Dame Andrea came to give evidence to our committee, she clearly had a very ambitious vision for family hubs and was calling for a family hub in every community. In fact, earlier on you used an intriguing phrase when you talked about your ambition being for Sure Start+++ . I am not quite sure what all the pluses were and it would be great to hear about that. Sure Start’s budget in 2010 was something like £1.8 billion, so I am having a bit of difficulty stacking up the figures and ambition at the moment. Could you say specifically how many family hubs you estimate will be set up over the next three years with the £82 million per year?

Will Quince: First, I will quote the National Children’s Bureau that said it believes “the announcement of £500 million for children and families marks a clear intention to invest in the future”, which it very much welcomes. I will say two things on the family hubs model. You have rightly focused on the spending review announcement. If we just take a step back and look at how this all started with the initial funding of the £34 million into family hubs, which is all about championing the family hub model, there might be a slight detachment between our intent and perception. A family hub model is something that a local authority will roll out across its county and it is up to them to design that. The funding that we provide is about allowing them to go through the change process, incorporating their existing children’s services and other services currently provided within that local authority area into a one-stop shop.

On how the £34 million breaks down, there is £12 million as part of the family hubs transformation fund, which I launched on Tuesday and was part of an event with the Anna Freud Centre, which is acting as the new

National Centre for Family Hubs. Applications and bids are now open for local authorities to bid to be one of the first 12. They will support those local authorities with that £12 million fund to open family hubs. The second is the National Centre for Family Hubs. The third is an evaluation innovation fund to build on the evidence bases, as we look to roll out to 75 areas across the country. That is being done in Essex, my county, Suffolk, Bristol, Leeds, Sefton and Doncaster. Then there is the data and digital products element that I touched on, which is to support the practical implementation of the family hubs model and will help local professionals to share information and data, which is a point that we referenced earlier.

I think the focus of the package has somewhat been on the £82 million to help local authorities to go through the change process to transform their services into a family hub model. They are all on very different points on this journey: some are very well advanced and others have not moved on from Sure Start, so the funding will be used in different ways in different local authorities. If you look at the overall package and separate out the £200 million additional for the Supporting Families programme, and then talk about the £300 million package, it brings family hubs to life. Yes, it is the £82 million, but it is also about the £10 million for the Start4Life offer; DHSC, with the £100 million for perinatal mental health support; the £50 million, again through DHSC, for breastfeeding support; and the £50 million that we will be delivering through DfE on parenting programmes. I think that is what it is all about and Dame Andrea's concept of the first 1,001 days, that Start4Life offer, which is very much at the core of the family hub model. Unlike Sure Start, it will be for the whole family, not just nought to five.

There is a lot still to be worked up. That is the honest answer, but we have secured the funding and are very ambitious about where this can go. It is about transforming a lot of the services and provision that already exist, up and down the country within local authority areas, and morphing it into a family hub model. That is why I used the phrase, which I did just make up, of Sure Start+++ , because we have ambitions for this to go much further and I want it to be a proper one-stop shop.

Can I give you one example? I know I am being verbose but, for example, I know that we have an issue with serious incidents relating to babies. We know there is an issue with men and males in the households often being the perpetrators, so I want more interaction with men and children's services. For example, I would love to see birth registration, which is the one occasion where a man must go if they want to be on the birth certificate, to be at a family hub. I am not going to mandate that, and we are looking into what more we can do, but I want there to be more interaction. In the same way, I have spoken to Maggie about my own experiences with my two children: the health visitor often arranged a time when I was not there. I think it is important, wherever we can, to see all the family and that is how best to identify potential risk. I digress a little, but the point is I want local authorities to be innovative about what a family hub model could be.

In bidding for this additional funding, which will be approximately £1 million per local authority, I think we are going to see some exciting innovation around what family hubs can be and the services they can provide for children and young people in families.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Can I press you a little bit further? I take your point about the different funding streams that you have been talking about, which makes it a slightly more complicated package, but are you able to give any timeline for when you think there will be a family hub in every community? By which time will there be a national rollout?

Will Quince: I cannot give you that. I think the transformation programme will be critical, so these first 12. The learning from that will show us how fast and ambitious we can be over the next two or three years. Of course, I want to see the family hub model rolled out as quickly as possible but, more importantly and going back to Sure Start, I want them to be right. I want it to be meaningful. Having a building that has a limited amount of services is meaningless. It must be that one-stop shop for parents and families to get all the support that they need under one roof or online, digitally and so on.

I appreciate the question, but I cannot give you an answer. My ambition is to get these rolled out as quickly as possible, but most importantly to give local authorities the time and space to develop their offer and get it right.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Finally, can you clarify these initial pots of money? Is it all going to be done by bidding or will any priority be given to the most deprived communities, perhaps those that are part of the levelling-up agenda?

Will Quince: Family hubs, at their heart, are part of the levelling-up agenda. I am still to work up all these details and I have been speaking to organisations. I met early with the LGA, for example, when I discussed exactly what it would prefer this to be, whether it is a funding allocation or bidding. The key is that this is not just about giving money to a local authority; a local authority must want to go on this journey. They must see the benefit of family hubs, believe that this is absolutely the direction of travel that they want to take for their children's services and have a bold and ambitious plan to do so. With that money that they can secure through the department, this is their vision and they can make it happen. I am exploring that, but I think key to this is not just giving money to local authorities; it is about giving money to local authorities that share my, the department and the Government's ambition for rolling out family hubs across their local authority area.

Q280 **The Chair:** Can I supplement that? The problem that you face is that the areas where there have been the biggest cutbacks in early intervention funding and the biggest increases in social care for children are the most deprived areas as well. If you do not take account of need, you will reinforce that rather than enable that shift. An authority I know very well has lost 66% of its early intervention fund, so it no longer does nurse-

family partnership and no longer has Sure Start centres. All of that and the number of children in the care system has gone like that. If we are going to move the money to where the child and the family need it, there must be an acknowledgement of need as well as those who, because they have not had that level of need, are well prepared to be imaginative and creative.

Will Quince: That is a fair challenge but, on the flip side, the local authorities that face the greatest pressure on their children's services are, I hope, the ones that will be keenest to engage with us and secure this additional funding to roll out the family hub model across the country. Of course, we will take all of that into consideration as part of our process in working out exactly how we are going to allocate the funding.

The Chair: You hope that money from children's centres and Sure Start centres, if there are any left, will be funnelled into family hubs.

Will Quince: That is for the local authorities to decide, but of course my ambition is that they will have a family hub model rolled out across their local authority and that will be the model that they move to.

Q281 **Lord Young of Cookham:** Can I follow up what Baroness Armstrong has said about the allocation of resources? She made the point that some local authorities have greater need than others. You said you hoped that those were the ones that come forward. One thing we know is that not all children's services or authorities are of the same quality. To what extent is part of your agenda to look at those that are under the greatest pressure, but may not have the staff resources? Are you able to encourage them to improve their bid and give them some help so that they come up with the competitive bid that you want, rather than leaving them on their own, so they cannot put together the right bid and stay deprived?

Will Quince: I think that is a very good question. That is exactly why we have the projects of the transformation fund with the 12 initial trail-blazing sites. This is already working in some parts of the country. In my own county we have a family hub model. I think a lot of local authorities will look to those to see what can be achieved and what they can do within their own local authority.

Yes, of course we would look to provide that support and hence we are also funding the Anna Freud Centre as part of the national centre, which will be able to provide support to local authorities to see the ambition that they could have within their local authority area. I imagine they would also be there to help, although I have not confirmed that—I am getting a nod of approval from Fran. They will be able to support with bids and look at what difference a family hub model could make, based on the services they already have in health and integration with education and others within their local authority area.

Fran Oram: I think that is right. I have an additional thought. Family hubs are an exciting innovation that we are delighted to have additional

funding for, but they are in some respects a gateway and focal point, digitally and physically. In large part, the services exist already, so the health services, social care services and so on exist and are funded nationally. It is not as though the family hubs are a silver bullet; it is about more coherence, accessibility, outreach and better community responsiveness. I want to emphasise that we do not think they are the sole answer.

In response to your point about local authority quality, again coming back to the care review, I think some of these issues are fundamental to how effectively the children's social care system works and how that interacts with other elements of the system—the education system, the special educational needs and disability system and so on. We all recognise there is significant room for improvement in all those systems individually and in how they interact with one another to support vulnerable children. Local authority improvement, intervention and the overall effectiveness of those services, going back to the Chair's comment about the rates of looked-after children in different areas, is something that Josh MacAlister is absolutely focused on.

We have a really ambitious agenda to try to turn that around, so that the system as a whole focuses on earlier intervention and how to help children and families before they hit crisis point. We recognise that there has been an upward drift of spend towards the more acute end, which we know is very expensive and delivers poor outcomes, most significantly for the children and families involved.

Q282 Baroness Wylde: I want to ask about mental health services—I know we are moving on a bit—and about your very good point, Fran, about family hubs not being a silver bullet, although I am a big fan of family hubs. We have had a number of witnesses who have told us how worried they are about children and young people's mental health. Minister, you mentioned perinatal mental health as well, and I am very glad there has been some additional funding.

Can you say whether you think families can justifiably have confidence in youth mental health provision, at the moment? Which bits do you think are working well and which bits do you think are not? If family hubs are not a silver bullet, what is the solution to this very big problem?

Maggie Throup: You raise a really important issue. The Government have committed to provide mental health support teams in schools and, to me, this is really important and is moving on at pace. There are over 280 mental health support teams either set up or in training, which is a great achievement in quite a short time, and 183 of these teams are operational and ready to support children and young people in about 3,000 schools and colleges. I know there is more to do but I think it is good that we are getting moving with it and providing that support within the school and college environment.

It is important to recognise that the family hubs provide support and services. Having the perinatal mental health support services within the

family hub will make them very broad and ensure that there is a wide range of services there, so any mental health support that is required can be identified at a very early stage. To me, the formation of the family hubs is going to bring innovation in many different aspects. We can bring innovation in how we ensure the good mental health of those attending the family hubs, whether virtually or physically, and it is good to have early intervention to give young people a good start in life. If we are doing it from such an early age it is going to have a huge impact.

There are so many different things that can cause mental health issues and, if we can identify them very early and start to help young people through that, whether it is at a very young age or later in life, it is going to make a difference. We know that early intervention helps and, if you can minimise the interactions with issues that cause poor mental health, it will help in the longer term.

Baroness Wyld: Thank you for that. I promise I am not trying to catch you out; we are hearing pretty harrowing evidence about people not being able to access CAMHS and so on. Yes, early intervention services are extremely important and, yes, there is extra investment going in, but do you think that the families of the children who are most in need, who reach crisis, have confidence in the system currently?

Maggie Throup: There is more that needs to be done. The mental health support teams are in addition to services such as CAMHS. I think it is important that they work together and are not seen in isolation, because that will create a more effective service overall. If the mental health support teams in schools can identify issues very early on it is going to help CAMHS handle cases that are perhaps more severe. It is trying to stop things early before they get to a stage where they need further support. That is the role of the support teams in schools; it is to identify issues early to stop them having to go down further routes.

Baroness Wyld: I will just remind the committee that I am a non-executive on the board of Ofsted. On the point of schools, do you think that there is too much being piled on schools? Do you think it is realistic to tell schools that they are the gateway to solving mental health problems? Do they have the resources to do that?

Will Quince: It is a fair question, and I think we know that mental health has suffered for many throughout the pandemic, not just for children but for adults too. We also know that mental health services are under an awful lot of pressure, due to the threshold and the wait, and it can be difficult for families and children, and we are alive to that.

I have seen the most incredible practice in schools that takes this issue incredibly seriously, not just about mental health but about mental well-being, and the whole culture of the school is based on that. Look at the funding we have put in: I will focus on money but it is not all about money; it is about delivery on the ground. There are steps we have taken more recently: £17 million was announced in May; there is £7 million for well-being for education recovery; and funding of about £10 million to

support 7,800 schools and colleges to train a senior mental health leader. I think most schools have welcomed that. It is something they are keen to do because they see the pressures and, Chair, you mentioned this earlier. Early intervention is, not in all cases but in many cases, far preferable. It will not prevent everything but, where you can prevent something escalating to the point at which someone is in crisis, we need to do that.

Maggie is right in mentioning the mental health support teams. I raised a wry smile, because there is not a meeting I have with Maggie or a chance encounter when I do not reference the fact that I am keen to expand these faster and further, as quickly as we can. We know that they are making a massive difference. The aim is to have around 400 and cover around 35% by 2023, but of course I want to go further and faster, because we know the pressures that exist within schools.

I think there is far more that we can do. I am certainly alive to this issue. I have seen the most fantastic work in some schools around mental health ambassadors, so it is not just up to teachers. Often younger children and young people in particular want to speak to their peers from a year or two above, as opposed to going to a teacher, or they might want to speak to a midday supervisor or a cleaner. I think there is more we can do in the school environment to better support those who are suffering with mental health issues, but I will continue to work with my counterparts in DHSC to make sure that this is front and centre, because we know it is a real issue for children and young people.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We still have lots of questions we could ask but we have kept you here above and beyond your commitment, so thank you very much indeed and we hope that we can complete our report. We too cannot comment on everything and are aware of the other reports that are going on, so we have not, for example, done a lot about the social care system, even though it is a passion of mine. We have not done anything in depth about that because we were quite impressed with Josh when he came in and know that he is still working on all of that. Thank you for your energy and commitment today and let us hope that your optimism is fulfilled in better outcomes for children.