

# Education Committee

## Oral evidence: [Children's Homes](#), HC 83

Tuesday 11 January 2022

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Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Tom Hunt; Kim Johnson; Kate Osborne; Nicola Richards.

Questions 196 - 252

### Witnesses

**I:** Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England; Juliette Cammaerts, Director of Policy and Planning, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England; and Yvette Stanley, National Director for Social Care, Ofsted.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Rachel de Souza, Juliette Cammaerts and Yvette Stanley.

Q196 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Education Select Committee. This is the fourth evidence session of the Children's Homes inquiry, and the Committee will have the opportunity to take evidence from Ofsted and from the Children's Commissioner. You are all very welcome.

Sadly, the Chair of the Committee, Robert Halfon, cannot be with us this morning, as he is unwell. He has asked me to chair the Committee in his absence. We send our best wishes to Rob for a speedy recovery.

This morning we have with us Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, Juliette Cammaerts, Director of Policy and Planning for the Children's Commissioner, and Yvette Stanley, Director for Children's Social Care, Ofsted. Would you all like to introduce yourselves and say a little bit about yourselves for the Committee and for the benefit of those watching on Parliament TV?

**Yvette Stanley:** My name is Yvette Stanley. My role at Ofsted is the national director for regulation and social care—all the stuff we regulate and inspect from children in the secure environment through to children's homes. I also have a safeguarding remit across schools. I came to that after 30-odd years delivering education in children's services for a range of local authorities.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I am Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner appointed in March 2021. Thank you for having me here today. This is such an important topic and a topic that I have been looking at in depth since March last year. The first thing I did as Children's Commissioner was to put out the Big Ask survey, asking the children of England what they needed to thrive now and what they wanted to have successful, happy futures. We had over 500,000 responses but what I was more pleased about was that we had responses from 4,000 children in care, which was a huge response in terms of getting any survey response from children.

You will be pleased to know that what children in care want is very much the same as what other children of England want: stable, loving family, close relationships, great education and good mental health. Those things came up top, just as they did for all the children of England. For their futures they want great jobs, great careers. Children in care were slightly less likely to be happy: just over 50% reported being happy now, whereas for all of the children of England it was 60% to 80%; 65% happy, so children in care were less likely to be happy.

What they did tell us is that they were very grateful and positive when things had gone well for them but, too often, things had not gone well. We saw far too much concern about stability and around placements. That came across very strongly, so we wrote both the chapter of our Big



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Ask on children in care and a policy paper—one of our nine policy papers—which we used to challenge the Government and to try to get some good responses in the SR. We have been working very hard on it. We have also produced a paper for the Care Review, which we shared with you and shared with Josh MacAlister. It is still in draft and I am sorry about that. It came quite late and we have just done it but there are lots of our ideas in it. We are looking forward to talking to you today.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** Thanks so much for inviting me to give evidence on this most important topic. My name is Juliette Cammaerts. I am the director of policy planning and delivery at the Office of the Children's Commissioner. I oversee our policy function, making sure that we are coming up with ideas to help solve some of the big problems in children's lives. I also oversee Help at Hand, which is our helpline for children in care, working with them when they are in difficult and tricky situations. We help unlock problems and I might say a bit more about some of those cases through the course of the session. I also oversee our public service reform and improvement function. That is about tackling in a more cohesive way the more systemic, big picture issues that affect children's lives and bringing the children's voices to the table on that.

I have been with the Office of the Children's Commissioner since April. Before that, I was at the Department for Education as a civil servant working on various areas of children's services policy, and working directly with Ministers on that to try to put children's services at the heart of policy making and making sure that their voices were involved in that process.

Q197 **Chair:** Thank you. You have plenty of time this morning to answer questions from members of the Committee. I will kick off.

A record 8,850 children are in care now, and research commissioned by the County Councils Network predicts that the number of children in care may reach almost 100,000 by 2025. What are the reasons behind that?

**Yvette Stanley:** I am happy to start with that one. It is quite a complex picture. While the total number of children in care has grown, fewer children have been coming into the system for the last three years. We are seeing children coming into the system slightly older and staying in care for the duration, so I thought I would start with what I think lies behind that.

There is some demography behind it. The Committee will be well aware that local areas have been expanding primary, then secondary schools, so we have a growing adolescent population. Policy changes have had an impact—really good policies to keep children out of the mental health secure system or prison—and exactly that number have now transferred into the care system. We talk about pressure on secure children's homes. I think the number of children detained under the court of inherent jurisdiction has tripled in recent years. These are children who would be



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in mental health provision but who are now looking for a secure children's home. Mental health and the criminal justice system are moving on.

There have been other policy changes—for example, disabled children who are in provision for 52 weeks are now looked-after children, and children who are on remand are also now looked-after children, all of which adds to the pot of children. There has been a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers in the system as well.

That demographic change has happened, but I think there have also been some practice changes. I know this Committee has considered and thought hard about children who are criminally and sexually exploited. I think they would probably have gone through a different route, but now they are very much seen as needing safeguarding and protection and there is a lot of complexity behind those children.

The average age of children in care is increasing. They are coming in with perhaps more significant harm and there are longitudinal implications to that: they need care for longer and they need different sorts of care. We still need more foster carers, but we certainly need more residential care homes for children in the right places. The children who are coming into the secure estate are coming with more complex needs—particularly mental health needs—who need to be supported.

It is quite a complex picture, Chair. I will leave it there for now and we can grow on some of those issues.

***Dame Rachel de Souza:*** One of the things I have done is to get out and go to a huge range of children-in-care settings, regulated and unregulated, down to Kent to the hotels where we have asylum-seeker children, children's homes right across the country, and foster care settings. We want children to be in safe, loving homes and of course children want that but, as Yvette picked up, the reasons for children going into care are very complex, and there is a range of things that we could discuss.

I have talked to a number of local authorities and seen some great ones and ones that are improving, but one of the red flags for me is when I see older children—which Yvette just picked up on—older teenagers going into care and that is the first engagement or intervention they have had. I am seeing too much of that, which is why I am very pleased to know that this Committee, other Committees, and the Government and the Opposition have looked at increasing early family help. The Care Review is looking carefully at what interventions we can make earlier to prevent this happening. That is one thing.

Secondly, many children have told me personally and have told our Help at Hand line, that going into care was absolutely the best thing and the right thing for them. I would be very nervous about any target-setting trying to reduce that figure, if it was done in an unhelpful way. If



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anything—and I think this builds on Yvette’s point—we have had fewer children coming into care in the last few years and fewer leaving, and that is where the numbers are growing. For me, the question is: how can we get those older teenagers, the 16s and 17s, either not coming into care through supporting their families to keep them, or, if they are in care, how can we get them back to their families? Because that is often what they want. I know Juliette has some follow-up points to make on that.

**Q198 Chair:** Briefly though, Rachel, what you have said there—particularly about the older youngsters who have not had any sort of engagement with the social services aspect of things before—doesn’t that smack of the thresholds for intervention having gone up over the last few years?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I was not going to get technical yet but of some of the best practices I have seen, a great example would be Leeds, where they don’t have thresholds. What they do is give the appropriate support to children as they need it, both early support and right the way through. I hope the threshold issue is going to be looked at very carefully. Thresholds are clearly too high if the first intervention is late. However, there is some great practice around the country and the challenge for me and the Department for Education is: what are we doing about spreading that great practice and supporting other areas to learn from those improvements? Because that is how public sector improvement happens.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** To build on what Rachel said, obviously our priority is for children to be in the right place at the right time to keep them safe—not just to keep them safe but to make sure that they feel loved, supported and secure. One of the things that helps that to happen is the stability of the placements. We do not want to see children cycling in and out of the care system, in and out of different placements, where they do not have that important infrastructure and grounding of a home.

Children have told us time and time again that what they want is a home. That does not necessarily have to be with their parents. Foster carers and people working in children’s homes do some amazing work, making placements feel like a home, and that emotional side of things is the thing that really matters.

There is some great practice out there but there are also huge amounts of variation. We want to look at those areas, not just at the national, aggregate level in terms of numbers of children in the care system but at what is driving that disparity and how we can be sure that we have professionals who feel supported to make the right decisions, knowing that there will be adequate provision, great provision for children. We want to dig into big disparities looking at not just a simple, “There are too many children in care, or too few,” but at what is driving that practice.

**Q199 Chair:** Certainly in my own local authority, the number of youngsters in care has dramatically increased in the last 10 or 12 years. If more



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resources are required to meet the needs of those youngsters who are at the crisis point, that potentially takes money away from early intervention. We have seen money going downstream from early intervention towards late intervention. How are we going to get round that particular problem?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** We need to look at the system as a whole and the Care Review is a great chance for us to stop and do that. The system is not good enough. Half of local authorities are judged as not good. We are seeing some of these, so we need reform, despite everyone's best efforts. Before I go into what needs to change, I would say a huge thank you to all the people in children's social care who are caring for kids, especially during the pandemic.

However, there is tension. We are seeing huge resource going into the acute end. I was pleased to see the money for family hubs in the Spending Review and I was pleased to see some of the first bits of money to start the change. I will use Leeds as an example. Leeds went from inadequate to outstanding. They got rid of thresholds, and that was a process that took three, four, five years. It involves everything from investing in CPD for social workers to setting up systems so that social workers can be talking about children and getting early family help in. There is a range of things that need to happen.

As with any public sector reform, there is no silver bullet, but people have been on that journey. Sunderland managed to do it in about 18 months. I think there is a case for learning and sharing from the best practice. It will take boldness to support early family help to prevent things happening, but it will be more efficient in the long run and better for young lives.

Q200 **Chair:** That has always been a quandary from a Treasury perspective. If you shift the focus of spending attention upstream, the problem is you still have the youngsters who have been through the system but have not been catered for appropriately previously to deal with. Unfortunately, we have financial costs but we also have lifetime costs for these kids who have missed out on those early interventions.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Yes. I would say that, to make a change like this, we need not only great leadership at local authority level but support from the DfE and Ministers, because there is risk involved and you have just outlined it. I still think we are putting so much resource into children's social care that we should be expecting more out of it. We should be demanding that early family help be put in and that the resource goes there for the longer-term benefits. It has been done, so we can do it.

**Chair:** Indeed, but the difficulty with firefighting is that there are always fires. That is the problem.

**Yvette Stanley:** Could I come in on that because it is my meat and potatoes? We do not see local authorities routinely taking children into



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care and intervening unnecessarily. The threshold is not too low. There is a delicate debate about state intervention in family life and when it should happen. I do not see spare resources in the acute end to recycle at this point. At some point, earlier investment should reduce numbers but reducing them safely will come at some cost. All the places that Rachel talked about still invest heavily in that acute end. They enable social workers to do a good job by having low enough caseloads to maintain relationships with families, with children, and to do purposeful work to effect change. You cannot invest in early intervention by increasing the volume of work that a social worker has to do.

Rachel is absolutely right about thinking about where you put investment in to achieve purposeful change. For the teenagers that I see coming into the system, the intervention is targeted, significant and not short-term. With the greatest respect—I am a passionate believer in the family hubs too—these families are not going to be hugely impacted. It is about crisis support and often about intensive mental-health services, which Rachel and I absolutely agree are really poor for children in this country. Some very specific services and very intense intervention are needed, not just to prevent stepping up but often to support stepping down safely to families because these are families that are likely to need some enduring support to enable them to keep their children safely.

**Chair:** I will bring Kim Johnson in now, and then Miriam Cates.

Q201 **Kim Johnson:** The Chair has just mentioned the exponential rise in the number of children in care and the fact that it is estimated that the number will rise again by 2025. Yvette, you mentioned policy change. We have known that since 2010 that public services have been decimated, with many local authorities expected to do far more with less funding. To all of you: how do you hold both the Government and the local authorities to account to make sure that those key asks of young children are going to be met, particularly in the light of Covid and the fact that some of these other issues will impact on some of those figures?

**Yvette Stanley:** As the inspectorate, Ofsted both reports on what we see in individual places and tries to reflect back the observations of what we are seeing. You are absolutely right about what we have seen and this goes back to the Chair's comments. As a director of children's services, I had a budget. I had to deal with the acute end, and at some point you just run out of money. The places that Rachel talked about earlier—and we could share others—have managed somehow to keep some investment at the prevention end. Ofsted's observation is that we do see the negative impact of the reduction in prevention services, and we are very pleased that there has been some investment this year in the secure estate.

I come back to something that Rachel said earlier about when you want to make significant change in a system. We know what works. I can talk you through the ingredients of all the local authorities that have gone on that journey, and 50% improved in the last inspection cycle, which is



very positive. They have done it against a contracting budget and different pressures coming into the system. Going back to the Care Review—I appreciate Josh MacAlister’s Jenga blocks—you cannot just improve one bit of the system. I would say that the money that is needed for children’s mental health is an equal part of the solution. I think we have commented on all of these things as part of enabling the policymakers to think about: where does there need to be some national attention, where does there need to be some joining-up across the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education? Vulnerable children and their families are affected by policy across all Departments and I think some more joint planning is needed so that we use our combined resources in a purposeful way. That is what we have been saying throughout our annual report.

**Q202 Kim Johnson:** It would be nice to see that in action. All too often, we have reports and recommendations that are not implemented. Thank you for that.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** When you talk to children, they don’t see their lives in boxes of different services. They just see their lives. “Joined-up” is not just a corporate phrase for how you manage things. One of the most important pieces of work that my team and I are doing at the moment is looking at what an outcomes framework for children’s services might look like.

We are looking at the key things that every professional working with children should be looking at from the early years: what are the EYFS scores? Are they in school? What is their school attendance like? Not just are they in a good school but are they attending and engaged? Are they being supported into employment at the point that they leave care? How many children are coming into care? What is the number of re-referrals?

We are systematically going and asking children, “What are the things that really matter to you in your life? What should everyone around you be focusing on?” If they need mental health support, for this or that to happen in a timely way, and for all the mental health professionals to be saying the same thing as the social worker and the teacher—all of them saying the same thing—so that the children feel they are being cared for as individuals rather than just being in receipt of different services.

Of course, we would be happy to come and give you more information and speak to you all about what those outcomes might be—there are obviously lots of them on the table—at the point of narrowing them down to the four or five key ones that people can focus on to help make sure that children do not just get through the system but thrive at the end of it.

**Q203 Kim Johnson:** Have we not had the Team around the Child and is that not supposed to have been happening for a long time?



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**Juliette Cammaerts:** Yes, you are quite right. These conversations are not new. There have been lots of different things. This is why we are now trying to do it from the children's perspective—not just in the abstract but from what children are telling us—and using their voices to catalyse this energy because, fundamentally, that is what every professional and all of us are here for: to help make sure that children are not just getting through it but are happy. So how do we do that? The power of children's voices in that conversation is what is at the heart of it because that makes things happen—being able to say, "This is what children have told us; let's all get around it." Let's have more real-time data to be able to see if it is happening and what the national picture is across the country rather than just at a local level.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** On the money point—because I think that was the direct question: the funding point—I look at DCSs, look at the system, and I look at somewhere like Leeds, which for years has had political support to ringfence money to make Leeds a child-friendly city, for example, because it is focused on that. Over a period of time, we have seen that, if we can ringfence the money, it can be done.

I look at some of the things happening in the system—for example the costs that some private providers are charging for children's placements—and think, "Is that public money well-spent? If we took a root and branch look at how we were using money in the sector, could we do much better with it and deliver our needs?" Acute will always cost a huge amount of money and it always must have it. When you look at Spending Reviews, year on year, that money does go in—yes, we always want more—but it's about investing earlier.

Q204 **Chair:** Rachel, that is the sort of question we asked ourselves when I was deputy leader of the council in Gateshead. With the finite amount of resources, if we had a blank sheet of paper, would we end up spending what we are spending the way we are spending it now or would we do it differently? The problem is that there is all of that tension built in within systems. You have staffing. You have systems that have built up over years and years, and it is quite difficult to dismantle a lot of that stuff in order to free up resources for new priorities.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** That is why I am constantly talking to the Department for Education about supporting transformation and change for children but with a real vision. I want to see a vision. As regulator, Ofsted is doing a great job but the tail should not wag the dog. I want the Department for Education, the Government and the LAs to have the vision for children and listen to children. That is what should be driving this. Yes, creating the change will need support in the short term, no question.

Q205 **Miriam Cates:** Yvette, you gave a very good description of some of the reasons that the raw numbers have gone up—demographic changes and changes in how looked-after children are classified. That was helpful. Thank you.



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I would like to ask each of you, from your gut feeling and professional experience, whether you think the drivers of need have changed in recent years, and has the level of need changed? I am thinking about cultural changes such as, for example, children's use of the internet—those kinds of things—and family breakdown. Do you think the raw drivers of need have changed or is this just a kind of numbers difference? Who wants to go first?

**Yvette Stanley:** I am happy to start. One of the many cross-government groups that I am on is the Family Justice Board. You might be interested in the numbers of children in the private law system and the tensions within families. There is a huge backlog in the family court system and—what's the phrase?—when two elephants fight it is the grass that gets trampled on. I see children damaged by those tense relationships.

Both our social care and schools' colleagues are saying that there are some families in dire economic situations who are under huge stress and, frankly, we are seeing children living in very poor housing conditions and the stress that that puts on families.

I think we are more aware of mental ill-health these days, and rightly so. We are much more aware of the impact domestic violence has on children. They are not just observers of the violence to others; they experience that violence and perpetrators of domestic abuse often directly abuse the children as well.

There are communities that are under significant stress. That is why some of the early-help services need to be very specific, very specialist and enduring. This is not a quick fix. One of the things that we need to think about is—there is a delicate balance—state intervention and consent versus getting people the support they need. We cannot blur those boundaries. People have to understand the consequences of them not engaging and not effecting change. We need to be careful in that space but we do need to provide some very specific support.

There is some great work out there in the third sector. There are some local authorities that commission the third sector to wrap around, but it has been hit by rising volumes of need and decreasing money because the money has had to go into acute, where there is urgent need. There is a 40% vacancy rate in social workers. Rachel would be appalled if she was running a school with 40% agency staff. They cost more. Placements cost more. Going back to your days in a local authority, those two things are now probably 80% of your social care spend. Unless we tackle those two issues, unless we make social work a profession that people want to stay and develop in, and unless we tackle what is the right cost of a placement, the money to free up to deal with early help will not be there.

**Chair:** Within that is the inherent issue that, if your staff keep changing, the interactions that the children have with the staff keep changing as well, which is not good. It is disruptive to the stability of the child, so that is quite important.



Q206 **Miriam Cates:** Can I put the same question to Rachel? Not how are the needs being met but have the drivers of need changed?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I was a teacher for 31 years, a head teacher for 15 years, and a CEO for 10 years—some of those roles overlapping—in the most disadvantaged areas. I started my career in Tower Hamlets, went to Luton, and I have worked in Yarmouth, Thetford, Lowestoft, right down the east coast. These are my communities. When I started as a Tony Blair academy principal in 2005, my first academy was about 40% FSM. Most of the schools that we take on are similar, 40% to 70%, so I probably see disadvantage just as I did see it. That is in terms of the poverty and disadvantage question.

There are significant issues for me around mental health, around the online world and how that has particularly affected children and young people, a place where they meet harm that they did not before that is harder to understand. We have had the county lines issue, but my bigger concern—or as big a concern—certainly in the communities in East Anglia that I have been working with, are those coastal communities that are working hard, young families working day and night, but wages are very difficult. It is that “just about managing” group that I am very concerned about. I would say that is a change I have seen over the past 15 years.

In terms of children, I think we should go back to what children have told us. Children have told us what upsets them. I would never have talked about mental health as a child; it is great that they talk about mental health and wellbeing. They talk about feeling well, being well. They do not talk about poverty themselves. They do talk about concerns about parents’ jobs and how their parents are doing. That is great for young people, isn’t it? There is a concern there.

They are concerned about their education, getting back to school post-Covid. They want a good education so they can get a good job, and they are concerned about places to go and things to do. I think a lot of that is very similar to what it was.

Q207 **Chair:** One of the problems, though, about youngsters not talking about poverty, is quite often youngsters do not realise they are poor. It is when they look back in life they realise they were poor because their experience has shown them, “Gosh, I didn’t have that,” That is one of the things about asking children, sometimes they do not know what they do not know even about themselves.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Absolutely. I was one of five, a steelworker’s daughter, owning one pair of shoes. We definitely were quite poor, but I did not clock that because I was not vulnerable. I had a large community, great family and a fantastic school and therein lies some of the things that we need to be trying to—

Q208 **Chair:** I am very conscious of time because, believe it or not, we have only covered one question. There have been lots and lots of questions,



but we have only covered one question from the brief. I will just ask you one more because you did mention this. I would like you to park this, if you don't mind, and maybe just let us know afterwards. You did talk about the cost of placements, particularly residential placements. As a Committee, we would like to know how you would propose to regulate those placements so that public money isn't being wasted.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** That is such an important question. Let's first start with children because, as the Children's Commissioner, I always do that. Children do not say to me, "I'm in a privately-owned home," but, "I'm in a home." They just want to be somewhere where they are loved and cared for. The majority of provision is now private. I recently spoke to the private providers and challenged them on the bad practice and some of these ridiculous sums of money that have been charged, but also exhorted them to be part of the solution because many of them are outstanding and many of them are good.

When I was right at the beginning of the school system, we had this debate about whether academies should be profit-making, and it was absolutely clear to me that they should not be, no. This is public money. I would want to see the DfE commissioning a look at how we do this, because when I talk to private providers, most of them are saying to me, "It is ridiculous to be making that level of profit." I do not know how we have come to this situation and it needs urgent action now.

**Yvette Stanley:** As the regulator of children's homes, we do not regulate the financial end. It isn't there in the legislation. CQC has some regulatory powers. I draw colleagues' attention to the NHS, where there are transparent tariffs for costs. Since I joined Ofsted—coming up for four years—we have started conversations with the DfE and the CMA, which I am very pleased Josh has built into his system. It is a real question.

When we started in children's social care, children's homes, they were all run by local authorities or national charities for a different purpose. Seventy years on, the regulation and the legislation needs to be adjusted to reflect that. We cannot afford to lose too many people from the market, so we need to do this with great care, but we do need to look at what is the right price. It is more challenging in children's services because there are lots of bespoke packages around individual children, whereas adults is a relatively consistent offer, but it can be done.

Q209 **Chair:** Call me old-fashioned, I have no problem with anybody—no matter what their background and how they do it—providing good care for children, but I have to say that the idea of a market for children's care does not sit well with me, but there we go. That is just one of those personal foibles. We do need to move on, colleagues, I am sorry.

Rachel, 6% of children in children's homes are not in education, employment or training, while a further 9% are attending unregulated provision. I think most of them would be post-16. We have heard this is a national scandal. Why are local authorities and the Department getting



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away with this lack of oversight and accountability?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** First of all, those numbers are absolutely unacceptable. We need all those children in education—simple. It is unacceptable for them to be out of education or training, even when they are over 16 too. Sadly, this does reflect the calls we get to our helpline. The question why is a very important one. I think two things, in a nutshell. First, we need the local authorities—I write to DCSs about every case I get and ask them to take action—to be like the pushy parent for the children. They are the corporate parent.

Secondly, we need proper parenting of these children, even if it is a corporate parent, to get them in the right schools, to get them in good and outstanding schools—and they have the right to be there—to make sure that there is a proper plan so the child can be successful in school and to pull through any of the issues. When you talk to children on the ground, it is things like, “Oh, I cannot go to school because there are gangs,” and so on. Let’s make sure that those children are taken to school and solve the problems. I think we need to be looking when we are placing a child.

We know there are lots of children placed in homes out of county and out of home. We do not like that, but they are. We should be looking at their education provision at the same time as we are looking at that home. In fact, I would like the LAs to be forward-thinking and thinking about developing foster caring near to good schools so that they are ready to take children. I think there are practical things that we need to do.

Children in care tell us their education is incredibly important to them. I get too many calling me up saying, “I am doing two hours, three hours of tutoring,” because there was a problem with a gang or, “I cannot get into that school.” It is not on. We need the LA to be really discharging its duty here.

Q210 **Tom Hunt:** We learnt in the previous session that there is a very significant and eye-catching proportion of those in care who have special educational needs. To what extent do you think failings or shortcomings in the special educational needs provision nationally has driven this?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** It is very notable, particularly children in children’s homes, and that may well be one of the reasons they are in children’s homes and not in foster care. I absolutely think that that care plan, when we are thinking where a child is, we should be involving a virtual head and really looking at the education plan. We have done a whole plan at every age, what we should be doing at every level, and I know Juliette would love to give you some ideas for exactly what we should be proposing there.

You know I am on the SEN Green Paper group and we are making sure that, in that challenge, children in care are right at the centre of that thinking. We have a strategic moment where we are going to have a



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schools White Paper, the SEN Green Paper, the Care Review and they need to be talking to each other. We need to make sure children in care are absolutely at the centre of both the SEN Green Paper and all the others. It is the very least we can do.

**Yvette Stanley:** Can I come in on that? There is too much variability, but I see children's homes working very hard to get children who have come into care in crisis or moved in crisis into a good local school. They may be settled in a school that isn't good, but that continuity may be very important for them, so I would not want us to make an assumption that you would move a child unnecessarily. It might be very important when a child has lots of turbulence if they are being supported well in that school.

They often have to produce bespoke packages because, while looked-after children get priority in the September admissions process, these are mostly not children who are needing a school at September. Good or outstanding schools—and I have decades of trying to pursue this, both as a DCS and in terms of my inspection of local authorities—tend to be full. How do we get that for looked-after children and who takes them above number? But absolutely, that is the best place.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** We have published a set of practical solutions as part of the Big Ask of what children asked for. One of them is the priority within the school admissions code for looked-after children, which is undoubtedly a positive thing. Our suggestion is to expand it to all children with a social worker because the number of children who are in care at either five or 11 will be a small proportion. Expand it to the wider cohort and say, "We are going to give you priority admission," because these are children who have quite complicated and complex lives, so let's expand it so that they are more likely to then be in high-quality provision and stay in it.

On the point about special educational needs specifically, there is rightly a focus on making sure that looked-after children are in a good or outstanding school and that is right, but the thing that they tell us, time and again, is that there are barriers once they have that place to engaging with education. Sometimes that is SEN. They need an education, health and care plan and they need to go through that process, but often it is mental health support. How do we give that wraparound, holistic support to help them to engage? It is not just attending, but making the most of that education that they should. As Rachel said and as I have said, they do not see their lives in isolation, so we have to have all professionals working towards the same goals, one of which should be education.

Q211 **Tom Hunt:** Many of us have constituents who have contacted us who have children with special educational needs who feel like they have to fight the system to get the support that their children need. It seems to me that often they feel overwhelmed, and that is connected to why it is



that so many young people in care are those young people with special educational needs that have not been met.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Yes, it is such a good point. Again, I would challenge back. As a head teacher, where I had outstanding schools, if the local authority told me it was a looked-after child, I would take them even though I was full, and we have to. I think push, push, push.

Q212 **Chair:** The planned admission number should be irrelevant for a looked-after child, is that right?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Look, the reality is most head teachers will be serious about taking a looked-after child. We are talking about good and outstanding provision rather than RI and poor provision. There are difficult cases. I went to one coastal town I know quite well with seven children's homes and only one good school. That can start to get complex.

**Yvette Stanley:** It is varied, but I think 84% or 85% of the children are in good or outstanding schools. What we are talking about is a small cohort, where you absolutely need to do that child planning in a very holistic way. To challenge back, I have been that awful corporate parent sitting outside the head teacher's door to take my child, but at some point you think, "If I have to make so much fuss to get the child in here, how are they going to be safe, supported, loved and cared for in this?" That is a tiny number, but it does add to that difficulty.

The SEND one adds a further complexity to that, when they have an HCP and you are consulting school after school about whether they meet their needs, and genuinely that school might not be able to meet their needs, but they might be able to with a different support system. It is very complicated.

Q213 **Tom Hunt:** A final question, very quickly. Some of the young people will not have those plans and they may never get those plans, but we know that you can still have learning disabilities and not have those plans. We know that things like dyslexia and dyspraxia can really affect young people's ability to learn. Is there an agenda around when young people do go into care, making sure that they are diagnosed for things like dyslexia and dyspraxia?

**Juliette Cammaerts:** One of the very practical things that I think needs to come out of both reviews is to make sure that any system and any transformation is accessible and navigable, that not everything is very opaque or using highly complex and technical language. Because if you have a system that is designed by people who are outside of it, you often cannot understand the complexity or those barriers there are.

That is one of the things that we have been saying in terms of what children are telling us—to make a system that you can talk about in child-friendly language, so that you can say to a child, "This is where you get this thing," in a very simple way, and help is signposted clearly. Because



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if there is help there but the child does not know it is there, it is not particularly useful. One of the things we are saying is how you make it a child friendly and accessible system, not just to children who can read or who have people who can advocate. We do lots of that advocacy on their behalf, but how you overcome some of those barriers by design rather than just by practice?

Q214 **Chair:** Advocacy might not be enough. What we need is professional adults to shepherd youngsters through the system, not act as advocates for them because it does need that one-to-one nurturing through the process. Unfortunately, we do have a situation where a significant number of youngsters are missing out on education who are in the care system. If that tracking isn't being done effectively, what steps need to be taken to reduce the number of children with a social worker who are currently missing out on the education provision that they should be getting?

**Yvette Stanley:** The work of the virtual schools is absolutely key to this. I have seen some splendid practice. There are places that could be better, but we need to learn from the very best. I am very pleased that the virtual schools' portfolio has been expanded to include children with a social worker. I hope it is not to the detriment of looked-after children. I hope they have the resources to do both jobs well.

I think it addressed Juliette's point about those children who are early in the system because where we started today, Chair, is I told you that children were coming into the system at 14. If they have been at five schools and they have had undiagnosed special educational needs, the recovery process is very hard at 14 or 15, which is why you are seeing children with very bespoke and tailor-made programmes. If we want to break that cycle, it is absolutely making sure that children with a social worker get the best support early on.

Q215 **Chair:** Inherently within that, Yvette, it tells me that you are not massively confident that, by taking on board the youngsters with a social worker under the virtual schools' umbrella, there is enough resource there to move that resource upstream to look after those youngsters who have a social worker and look after the kids who are already in the care system from an educational perspective.

**Yvette Stanley:** I have no evidence either way yet, Chair, because it is a very early development. As an inspector, I always go in wanting to test that the risks have been mitigated and aren't—

Q216 **Chair:** We can be confident that you have your eye on it?

**Yvette Stanley:** I definitely have.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. All right, smashing. I do need to move on, I do apologise. Apsana, please.

Q217 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, panel. I want to



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explore further what has been said about access to good or outstanding schools. There has been mention of schools potentially tending to be full and we have also heard Ofsted's submission suggesting that there are numerous reasons. Also, a children's home, for example, may be located in an area with few good or outstanding schools. In terms of children in residential care, we know that they are less likely to attend a good or outstanding school. Why else do you think this is happening and what do you think can be done to try to make sure that they are attending the best possible schools?

**Yvette Stanley:** Sorry, I think I may have given you a slightly wrong figure earlier, so 84% of children nationally are in good or outstanding schools and 82% of the children in children's homes are in good or outstanding schools. It isn't huge statistically. Obviously you would want every child to be in the best place. I think two-thirds of children entering the care system come from the most deprived areas, but only a third are in foster care or residential care in the most deprived areas. The sector tells us that they struggle to develop provision in the more affluent areas, where capital costs are high. Ideally, we would like a much better spread of children's homes throughout the country, so that all communities are served and children can go to the local school and in even greater numbers in good or outstanding provision.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** On top of everything that has been said, I think I have made it clear that I think LA children should have priority to good and outstanding schools. They should be given those places. They need the corporate parent to act like a pushy parent to make sure that they get those places. We need better data, which is where we were going in terms of really understanding how they are doing, both in school and for all those proxies like attendance and things like that.

On top of that, my concern is that we do not have enough cohesive planning for children in care. What you have are struggles to place children in the home, but not thinking about their education as well. I think Yvette just touched on it, the lack of very good local placements, so children are being sent out. What we need to be doing is designing local flexible placements, building up foster capacity and children's home capacity with links to good schools. We need to do it in advance. At the moment when you are placing someone, it is very difficult to do, which I think Yvette just outlined having tried to do it herself.

It is that forward thinking: having the data to really have a sense of how many young people will be coming into the system, how we can plan for it and always having a plan for a child's education. Children in care have taught me that their education, their desire for a successful future and a good family life, and all those things, are paramount. We should be working with them, not just on where you are going to be now; it is your three-year plan and your six-year plan.

One of the things I like is Pupil Premium Plus has been extended to post-16 children in care. That has been done as a pilot. It has really worked



and helped and I want to see that kept as permanent as well—a little practical thing there. I think that should be brought on, but I think ultimately it is about a cohesive plan.

**Yvette Stanley:** However, to get to that point—and I would really like to get there—you have to have more provision than we have now. People are not choosing a children’s home; they are sending the child to the only place that is available, outside the region. That is what is happening. There were 60 children yesterday waiting. These are the most vulnerable children, waiting for a place in a secure children’s home. If you cannot find a home for a child, there aren’t enough foster carers. People are not doing good matching; they are doing Hobson’s choice today. Unless we tackle the issue of sufficiency of foster care and children’s homes, the icing on the cake of getting that joint planning about the school just cannot happen.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Sufficiency and stability should be our two buzzwords here.

Q218 **Apsana Begum:** The school admissions code states that looked-after children should be given the highest priority for school places, but we have seen through written evidence from Ofsted, in particular, that when the code is breached it can take a very long time to resolve. What can be done to cut the bureaucracy?

**Juliette Cammaerts:** It is a sort of practical manifestation of how the working together happens. Obviously, there are case conferences and planning around children, but just making sure that education is part of that conversation every time. We are under no illusion: there are lots of children who have very complex needs, of which education is not at the top of the list, because for them to even be able to get to the point of being able to access it, they would need a lot of support. We need to provide that support at the point at which they need it, be that SEN or mental health.

The first thing to say is we need to get all of the professionals around a table. Where it works well, that is what happens. That includes education and saying, “Let’s think, before they get put in the children’s home, what is the education element of this?” If they cannot immediately be placed in a school because they have not been in school for a while, lots of these children—we know from speaking to them—have missed out big chunks of their education because they have not been attending or they have not been on a school roll for lots of different reasons. It is how we involve education in that conversation from the off when you are talking about that child, all of the adults in their life, and so that would remove some of the bureaucracy because it is just about working together and what that looks like in reality.

Secondly, to come back to this outcomes point, make school attendance and engagement with school a key thing that everyone is looking at. Children have told us school is not just an academic thing; it does not



just unlock their future. It is architecture within their lives, which are often chaotic, that gives them their routine, their day to day. It gives them a place that they can go to make friends that is safe, where there are adults who they can look up to and talk to if there is a problem. That is vital.

**Chair:** An oasis of calm in an otherwise tortured life quite often for youngsters that I come across, yes.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Apsana, I do think that we have a real moment now. I am always 'glass half full'—you know me—but we have just been through the Covid experience, where I think head teachers have been superb about reaching out and working with children, children in care and children in struggling situations. A lot of them are incredibly aware but their awareness of how to work and their desire to make this work is there. I think it is a great time, with the Care Review and the schools' White Paper, to be putting vulnerable children and children in care right at the heart of the thinking again.

Q219 **Apsana Begum:** Can I ask one final question? The Chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, who is also now a specialist adviser to our Committee, has said about placing a vulnerable young person in a mainstream school that there is a lot of pushback. I guess in a lot of ways there has to be a very robust understanding of the law and a willingness on the part of local authorities exercising statutory powers as a corporate parent. You have talked about being a pushy parent, but it seems that many local authorities are not doing that. From your perspective and what you have seen in terms of local authorities, is it that they need to have a better robust understanding of the law and the willingness to exercise it?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I obviously came into this looking at it from the side of a head teacher, but going around the country talking to children, this was one of the big issues that came up. I have talked to lots of DCSs and I have seen a large number of them who really want to be that pushy parent. I was in Kirklees the other day and its DCS had just been to see the Vice-Chancellor at Oxford with one of her care leavers and it was paying for her doctorate. There is great practice, but I would say there is too much variation. We also go to places where we feel very concerned. I think we should be using Ofsted, the DfE and local councils to improve the areas that are not good enough and doing this enough. It is critical.

Q220 **Chair:** Do we not need to create an atmosphere though that every public body—including schools, which are not part of the local authority anymore—that spends public money within a local authority area becomes part of the corporate parent? Is that not the atmosphere that we need to create?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** In the best places that is happening. You will be pleased to know I am on the ministerial care board and hear Ministers



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trying to think of how to get companies to provide driving lessons for care leavers, a care leavers' covenant and all these things. There are lots of things, but I think it is because we have variability in practice. Let's not go to the bottom, let's take everyone up. I think we should be challenging.

Q221 **Chair:** This is the levelling-up agenda for children in care, is that right?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** There we go.

**Yvette Stanley:** Through inspection we do, and I have the benefit of having an education HMI on our local authority inspection, where we look at the work the virtual school and others are doing to do this, I think there are system issues. If you want to go through the admissions adjudication process, that takes many months. It is better to find somewhere that will take the child now because otherwise you have an extended period of bespoke, which may be appropriate initially, but you want to build them back to a full-time education in a good place. It is a question for policy makers about the systemic issue that isn't quite working and how you make that happen.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** That is absolutely why. We have seen the improvement in the support for looked-after children in schools, admissions and Pupil Premium Plus, which the virtual school head has made. Let's expand that out to the wider group of children because often, at the point they come into care, they are quite far down that road. Often, as we know and we have discussed previously, they are older now, so let's get that support in educationally earlier and then let's also normalise having those conversations before the crisis point.

It is great that looked-after children have priority admissions. I think it would help if you were having that conversation about a wider group of children earlier on in their educational experience so that you could get them into the good school early, because we know that, if you do not let get them behind, that is even better than trying to help them catch up.

Q222 **Chair:** One crucial question coming out of that is that, for goodness' sake, we should eradicate the situation where it takes many months to get through an admissions process. That means youngsters are outside of school. These are very vulnerable youngsters in the first place. How can we do that? We need to alleviate that particular problem.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** I have seen it for children that I have placed for adoption as well. Getting them into a school can be a real challenge. It is a question: where is the policy gap when things get stuck? It would be in that child's best interests to be somewhere to make that move.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I am seeing that the best DCS system leaders have been building relationships with their schools so that these are things that are talked about as a community and sorted out. What we want to see are the good and outstanding schools asking to have the looked-after children, but I think this is leadership. We have the law, we



have whatever, but I think there is a leadership issue here. I see it in the best places and I would hope you would all be demanding this is everywhere.

**Q223 Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good morning, everybody. I want to focus on data on education outcomes. Rachel, I think you mentioned this a little bit earlier. Particularly throughout this inquiry we have been hearing about a lack of data on the education in our children's homes. What else do you think the DfE should be publishing on this?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Basically, we need the data that would show that every child is successful—we would look for that for any child—whether that is attendance, which is a proxy for so much in terms of engagement. I want to see attendance; I want to see progress in terms of academic progress and I want to see the academic data. When we are looking at whether we have been successful, in making judgments about whether we have been successful, I would like those things to be seen. That should be fairly straightforward.

It is interesting—this is my real point—that when I went to look at how children in children's homes did last year, I knew that I could find the 2018-19 data on the website, but it is the 2020 data. Obviously, as Children's Commission I can seek it, so I went to the DfE and I asked them for the 2020 data. I have it here. I have it cut only by LAC, not by children now. One thing I would like to see, and I am talking to the Secretary of State for Education about this because I am on his attendance group and I am pushing hard for this, is live data.

We need to see the attendance data now; we need to be able to look. I don't see why we can't. It is only a limit of our current information management systems that we cannot look and see who is in school now. At the moment, we can see the percentage of kids who were not in school. We do not know if they are the same ones as yesterday or today, so I want to see our data systems upgraded and just those basic things would give us a help.

I also want to see data when it comes to children in care—and Juliette will have a lot to say about this—particularly around stability. I am seeing children's homes judged as good and outstanding when there is huge movement of children. That might well be the right thing, but I want to see that data because, underpinning it, children are telling me they want stable relationships and they want a stable home. I think there is too much movement in the system. I would like to look at that stability question and see data on that.

**Q224 Chair:** There is a big question there, Rachel, in terms of the DfE or whoever collecting the data appropriately in the first place. I am not convinced that that is happening. We need to have centrally held data so that we know that no youngsters are falling through gaps in the system.



**Juliette Cammaerts:** One of the projects that we are doing at the moment is a deep dive within 10 local authorities. Attendance is a very useful piece of data at a school level: how many children are in school? How many were in school yesterday? Are they the same? What are the barriers to them attending? Drilling down into that. At a local level, just school attendance can hide lots of things.

What we want to know is: how many children are in your local authority? Secondly, how many of them were in school yesterday? How many of them were in school a week ago? How many were not in school at all and how many were awaiting provision? There are lots of reasons why that might be. It might be SEN. It might be waiting for an AP place. How many weren't in any provision at all? Then, how many are you not sure? It is really drilling down. You need different levels of data to answer different questions and is about that richness of data that we are trying to get to.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** My view is this is possible. I do think it is possible. I think we will need an upgrade on the MIS systems, but we have written to our DCS partners and we are talking to them. They have the statutory duty to hold this data and they have come back and told us that they do not have it. We are working with them on how they can get it accurately.

**Yvette Stanley:** The other challenge is the DfE data sources are better for five to 15 year-olds. There is nothing for pre-schoolers, where we might be worried and might be able to pick up some early trends. The post-16 world is very vague and many of our looked-after children and care leavers are in FE colleges. We cannot collect that data. There is no destinations data on children leaving care. The data capture system has not been designed to get the coverage of the vulnerable cohorts that we would like to see.

Q225 **Chair:** Am I not right in saying, Yvette, that a lot of this data used to exist? We used to collect this data; I am convinced that we did. It was probably about—

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** At school level, that is what we are doing. We are looking and we are talking to the DfE about doing this because I have data-gathering power. I can call for any data. We are working at school level, at local authority level and then at national level. My ambition is to find the children who have not come back to school, find the most vulnerable children and find the lost children. I am determined to do it, not just point out the problem.

**Chair:** There was a system—and I know it was still at the pilot phase—which was called ContactPoint, because my local authority was one of the local authorities that were involved in that pilot. It was done away with. That was meant to eradicate all of these problems. It was done away with in 2010, I think.



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**Yvette Stanley:** Just so we do not forget the children in the private sector as well. We do not have access to that.

Q226 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Finally, one of the many things that you mentioned, exclusions was something that I was thinking of. Is there data available on that? Obviously, I am thinking children in care are far more likely to be excluded from school at various points. You would go for that assumption?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** That is not the case. It is not the case, is it? I just have the 2020 data anyway. Temps, yes, perms, no, because any head is going to do absolutely everything in their power to ensure that that does not happen, but we do have the data.

Q227 **Chair:** It seems to me though, Rachel and Yvette, that there are significant gaps in the sort of data that should be collected to make sure that no children are falling through gaps in the system and, therefore, we do need it. I would love to see some definitive recommendations coming from your own Department.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** We will be reporting on our work on this by the end of February.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** Just on exclusions specifically, one of the suggestions that we have put forward on the basis of what children have said is that let's not create gaps, so if an exclusion is needed—and there may be times when that is the right sanction—let's make sure that they are in AP from day one, so you are not excluding at home, where you know home is a risk factor. Let's make sure that you are in some provision. It might be an in-school unit, it might be a local AP, it might be AP that is allied to the MAT. Let's make sure there is not a time where the child has been sent home from school but isn't in any provision when we know home is a risk factor within their lives.

**Yvette Stanley:** Just to be very cheeky, Chair, that AP provision should be registered and regulated with Ofsted. People should not be using strange new provisions that do not meet standards for these children.

**Chair:** I think we have uncovered there that there are significant gaps in the datasets, which we need in order to make sure that this works properly. Thank you very much. Kate, please.

Q228 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everybody. I want to touch again on funding and pick up on the issue that no funding is provided for looked-after post-16 students and ask you: how significant an issue that is in terms of Pupil Premium education funding in the care system?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** There has been a pilot on Pupil Premium Plus for post-16 care, looked-after children, and I think it has gone very well. I would recommend that that becomes permanent and we will be



recommending that to the Department. I do not know if you want to add anything.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** When you speak to children, they do not see their lives with binary birthday cut-offs, so something does not change when they turn 16, something does not change when they turn 18. If you think how we parent our own children, support does not cease at any given point; we just carry on supporting them. I think that is what we are trying to get to, a system where children and young people feel like there isn't a cliff edge and we remove the cliff edges from the system. We have spoken to DCSs who are doing this very well, where they are like, "This is our cohort forever. Of course, we want to support these children because we want to help them get a job and then when they have their own children. We want to make sure that they feel supported in knowing how to parent. That support is there forever because that is what we want for our own children".

It is coming back to that core principle of what we would want for our children and removing those cliff edges. You need to be in education until you are 18. Support should flow until the point at which they decide to leave education and then get a job and we should help that transition too. We should not have points where children are left without any support because of a kind of on/off switch. What we want is a more flexible agile system of care around them that does not just switch off.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** We have seen some superb examples of it, like Walsall, who make sure their care leavers who are at university have somewhere to stay when they come home for the holidays. We have seen support for PhDs. I have some DCSs talk to me about corporate grandparenting. That is the attitude we should have here.

Q229 **Miriam Cates:** Moving on to children who move frequently between homes, I think the stat that we have here is that there are 8,000 children who had two or more placement moves last year, so they were in three separate homes in one 12-month period. It seems that often they can be out of education for weeks or months. I think from what you have previously said that is partly to do with the fact that there are so few places, so they get placed first and then the education gets worried about later. What are your reflections on why that is and what changes are needed?

As a follow-up to that, all the data we do seem to have comes from the school census, so there are gaps for children who are already falling through the gaps. To your point earlier, what more data do we need to help stop that happening and that we have information about all the children in the system? I will start with you, Rachel.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Everything I have said about when we are planning placements and planning for children coming into care, is that we should be looking at their education as part of that planning process right there at the start and everyone working together with the virtual



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head involved. There might be very good reasons for movement and there are also sufficiency reasons for movement, which are unfortunate, but at the very least that should be done. The professionals should be together planning the education provision.

I hear it too much, where I have young people contacting us talking about having only a couple of hours of tutoring a week when they have great ambitions for their future. I think we absolutely can do this. It is very practical things about the planning stage.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** We talk a lot about placement stability. We discussed earlier in the session how school stability is another very important thing. We cannot underestimate the stress on a child who has moved house three times and then has to move school three times. That is quite difficult. How can we coalesce around that child to help them in that transition into a new school? Do they need additional bits of support educationally to help them catch up? Obviously, they might come in at a different point in the curriculum or whatever is being taught. How do we think about this as if you were the child? What do you need to make that transition easier?

Otherwise, you risk getting to a point where you start at a new school and that in itself feels very difficult and adds to it. You sort of disengage quite quickly or you do not settle in, you do not fit in, and then you think, "I cannot attend," and it does not help with your mental health. How do we provide a package of support, as well as the school place, to help them settle in, to help them access that education in a meaningful way and to help them catch up? Without that additional support, a good school place might not be enough to help them re-engage.

**Yvette Stanley:** There are some observations from our inspections. We inspect children's homes and, as I said earlier, we have the opportunity of discussing every child and looking at their journey. Then, in the local authority inspection, we would ask in advance of turning up for data about placement breakdown and those with a large number of placements. From that latter bit I can disaggregate.

If a child comes in in crisis, uses police protection, they are with an emergency foster carer. That is one. They are then placed with a foster carer for assessment. That is two. They go home. That is three. There will be an element of those. What we absolutely need to land is those children with multiple placements, who tend to be teenagers, and what is happening there is that there is no matching. They are not arriving in a placement that is meeting their basic Maslow needs and that is often around mental health and wellbeing.

We are seeing a smallish—but too big—number of children who have multiple breakdowns, disruptions in placement, because of the sufficiency issue and the inability to choose and match the right placement, to take the thing that is available. We must tackle both those issues. We must be ambitious to make sure they have the minimum number of placements,



and we look at that on inspection, but we also must tackle the provision map, which is not there to meet these children's needs.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** The last thing to add is there is something important here, which is about speaking to the children and young people themselves, "How do you feel about all these changes? What support do you think you might need? What is stopping you from going to school?" Actually, involving them in those decisions, talking to them and making them feel listened to. Children often say to us that where services work well they feel like they have been heard and feel like what they have said has been acted on. That is not just a thing you would expect the Children's Commissioner to say, but talking to them. These are often 15 year-old or 16 year-old children, who have a voice, so let us ask and let us listen and let us act.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** To come in behind that with a hard recommendation: the Wood Review on safeguarding, one of its recommendations was that the Office of the Children's Commissioner would look at an outcomes' framework for the safeguarding panels. What we are thinking about with all those safeguarding partners is: what should we be measuring to base that outcomes framework on? We have picked up some things today around stability, around achievement in school, but also around a child's next steps and Yvette picked up about destinations. That is a piece of work my office is doing and we will be very happy to report back and share on that. We need to be able to measure it, because if we do not we cannot pick up these issues around variability and have the challenge that we need.

Q230 **Kim Johnson:** You mentioned sufficiency, Yvette. Does that also relate to the high numbers of agency staff and whether that impacts on the ability to develop school placements in a timely fashion? If so, what needs to happen to rectify that issue?

**Yvette Stanley:** If we are thinking about stability of the social work workforce in local authorities, obviously, if you are moving around local authorities you do not get to know your school's developed relationships, so it cannot help. The relationships with health are so important.

The other thing that we would flag is the challenges of the adult care system are well-rehearsed and on Radio 4 every morning. The children's one is much in the background. For years I have been saying that 20% of children's homes managers are vacant at any point in time. We are seeing now high use of agency, and we do not want to close a children's home because they have high agency. It is going to disrupt children, so we must make "judgment of Solomon" decisions in the regulatory space.

Until we have a proper workforce strategy for the children's workforce that does not just cover social workers but covers that whole breadth of provision, and we are paying and training people to take up those posts and stay in them and they can see career progression, then that workforce instability is feeding into the children's instability.



**Dame Rachel de Souza:** In terms of workforce strategy, I am raising that challenge both at SEND review level, at White Paper level and to the Care Review. Two things. Where I have seen strong corporate parenting and strong LAs who are doing really well—who Yvette goes in and judges as good and outstanding because they have the vision and are doing it—you often see greater stability. That is one of the answers to the funding question. That you are not spending huge amounts. Some of the best places I have seen have stable, long-term workforces.

The second thing—and my esteemed colleague might disagree with me—is that if a child is away from home and in a placement in a different county, I want to hold that DCS, that corporate parent, responsible. I want to inspect them, not just the children’s home. I want them to be responsible for what is happening, and the education of that child and their outcomes and success. I feel strongly about that.

**Yvette Stanley:** We do that through our ILACS inspection and we constantly triangulate, so if my team are inspecting children’s homes and we are seeing poor pathway planning for specific children we will then take that information into our local authority inspection. It will be a line of enquiry at local authority level.

Sorry to bang on about sufficiency, but the further a child is away the weaker your relationships, the chances are that the school that would take Wigan’s child because they know Wigan is not quite so keen in taking, in my case, Merton’s child. It must be that you are taking everybody’s looked-after children who are living locally, not just the local relationship. There is that complexity.

Q231 **Chair:** You also cannot rely on a workforce strategy coming from individual local authorities, because all that happens is a local authority that gets a good workforce strategy, has the planning, has the training and process, has that stability, will then become subject to poaching from surrounding local authorities. Therefore, it must be done on a much more strategic basis, surely?

**Yvette Stanley:** Just so that I am not quoted as being awful about agency staff, we see some good agency staff who stay for years. Why do they stay on an agency contract? That is a question, but they do stay for years on an agency contract. We can also see places that have a hugely stable workforce who do not have a clear practice model, who are not up to date with the training and the current practice. Neither end of that continuum is ideal, but we do see places that have a clear workforce strategy. This sufficiency is one where no local authority or provider of children’s homes can do this on their own. It needs to be a combined effort with a joined-up workforce strategy that tackles issues, such as pay, qualifications, progression and ongoing professional development.

Q232 **Miriam Cates:** This is a question for Yvette. We have been reading about the Staying Close initiative, which I think has been piloted in four areas. The idea is to keep children leaving children’s homes when they turn 18



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connected to the support they have had to minimise homelessness, joblessness and those kinds of things. Ofsted's submission to the Committee is saying that it is an underdeveloped initiative. How do you think it can be developed better and what kind of positive improvements should we be seeing from any national rollout?

**Yvette Stanley:** We do point-in-time surveys and we talk to young people on all of our types of inspections. There is a lack of certainty as a young adult, so children at 14, 15, 16 are getting worried, and we are seeing them getting worried about what is going to happen to them at 17 or 18. If we can provide certainty and continuity it is absolutely great, but it does come at a cost. It is not always appropriate to have an older adult in with younger children in that children's home, so we need to think about what is best for that child and the other children. It does come with a financial tag as well, so if it is going to be rolled out people will have to think about how it is going to be funded and supported.

Sorry to be boring, but if you are keeping children in those homes that is a place that a younger child cannot take. All of these good policies—the ones I mentioned in mental health and youth justice and staying put and Staying Close—mean you must have even more foster carers and children's homes on the basis that we have a large care population and we are going to keep children in that provision for two more years.

**Q233 Miriam Cates:** What might be a more practical or affordable alternative? As I think Juliette has said, in the course of normal parenting you do not suddenly cut your child off. The kind of support you provide just changes naturally over time as your child becomes more independent, so what alternative could you foresee that is practical for children who are leaving care homes at 18 and do not have any other support in the community?

**Yvette Stanley:** It is desperately sad that children have been in our care for any length of time and they have no support in the community. It is our role—it is all of the sector's role—to make sure that there are established relationships that endure and that is often with their birth family. They may not be safe to live full-time with their birth family, but there might be a bridging relationship that you can continue.

We are keen to become the regulator for supported lodgings. It is a hugely diverse sector, from things that would look and feel like a care home if you lived there and that provide intensive support to houses with multiple occupancy run by landlords that are awful. We have seen horrendous stories about those young people. Perhaps through that we can develop provision that has outreach, so there is more support, something that is a bridge back to the children's home.

As a DCS and in this role, I have certainly visited supported lodgings providers who provide absolutely that wraparound care for 24 year-olds who have been in their supported lodgings. It is cheaper, but it does cost. Therefore, we do have to think about developing a continuum of offer into 24 year-olds, 25 year-olds, for some. My 28 year-old has had to



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come home for a sub during Covid, due to being furloughed. What do we do for the 24 year-old, 25 year-old in care?

**Chair:** It does not finish at 28, I can tell you.

**Yvette Stanley:** Oh dear.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** I certainly support everything Yvette said. I would like to add one more. We have been working closely with the Care Leaver Covenant and with a range of care leavers' groups and talking to care leavers about what they want. One of the things we could do something around nationally is around employment. How do you pay for your rent, look after yourself and so on? What young people, care leavers, are telling us is that they want a great job and any help to get that.

We are seeing some good schemes. Civil Service has a great internship scheme and we are seeing lots of good practice across local authorities. I think we should be looking at that practical help. Things like jobs and helping with that overtly. Things like driving lessons that comes up a huge amount of times. I know the Care Leaver Covenant is talking to different driving schools to see what can be done there. Help with energy bills. These are very practical things that could make a substantial difference and help on that pathway to independence. That is on top of the things that Yvette mentioned.

Q234 **Chair:** Before I bring Kate in, we have talked about the Staying Close initiative. Do you think that should now have central government support, as an exemplar of good practice?

**Yvette Stanley:** If you want a step change, often you must set an expectation. You must resource it—at least initially—and then you must cajole and persuade everybody. It is quite hard for local authorities with the pressures that they have on the acute end to pump-prime new initiatives. In all honesty, I do think that thought must be given to how you nurture some of these good initiatives and then set that expectation and hold people to account for delivering it.

Q235 **Kate Osborne:** We have touched on relationships for care leavers and, Rachel, you just touched on a couple of things, but getting on for nearly half of care leavers aged 19 to 21 are not in education, employment or training, compared to around 12% of other young people. What should be done to drastically improve outcomes for care leavers? I know you said some of the practical stuff around them wanting good jobs, maybe things like driving lessons, but what can we do before they are at that point?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** All the things we have talked about, about ensuring a plan for three years, a plan for six years, when you are going into care and talking to the child and understanding what it is they want and trying to achieve that. It goes back to what Apsana and I were talking about, around corporate parenting. We need to demand so much



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more from corporate parenting, so that it is absolutely a natural thing that we would be thinking about: where can we assist to get this young person a job? How can we ensure that they are in education? It is down to that.

We have 100,000 children in care, a certain amount of care leavers every year. We can do this. It is about Government and local authorities taking the corporate parenting role seriously and doing it. We are seeing it done, so my challenge is that leadership challenge.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** When you speak to care leavers, which we do, day in, day out, the biggest thing that comes through is that the best early help for care leavers is when they are in care. There is not a distinction between the support you give children when they are in education and then young people when they leave care. The best thing you can do, the strategies for avoiding children and young people becoming NEET, are often similar for children in care or care leavers as for other children. It is about having practical support in terms of: when you are going to interviews one of the things that the Care Leavers Internship Scheme does well is how you do an interview, what you should wear, where you buy your lunch, those types of things. If you do not have an adult in your life necessarily you feel alienated from that.

Providing that support so that children can access education and are engaged in it. There are a proportion that do go on to HE and we should remove as many barriers as we can for those who want to go to HE. We have covered some of that: accommodation in the holidays, how you navigate the different systems, those are the practical things. Who is the adult who is helping you with that? Again, it comes back to support parenting. If not, how do we help avoid the problem rather than also just solving it when it happens? Making sure that children have an idea of what they want to do.

Aspiration is not the blocker. If you speak to them they want jobs, they want to have families that they can love. They want to have all of the things that everyone else has. Children in care are not an amorphous group. They want to be treated just like any other child, so we should use the same strategies.

Q236 **Chair:** Juliette, I have a funny feeling that, while there are 41% of care leavers 19 to 21 who are NEET, it is not an even picture across the board, local authority by local authority. I am sure it is not brilliant anywhere.

**Yvette Stanley:** It is varied, and we would look at that in our inspection. I think within that group you will see some children with mental ill health. You will see some who are pregnant, or with children, and you will see some who have been in the criminal justice system. It needs even more intense support for those. I am not suggesting that because they are in those situations we accept it; I am saying the solutions will be much more complex.



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Where things are better, the relationships with the personal advisers that they have are strong. They are the people who navigate those other corporate parents who may also not be doing as much as we would like.

I would like to go back to housing. For any of us who have children in private rented housing that is hugely difficult. What happens when your landlord evicts you and you need another deposit? Who do they go to for that? There is financial support at key points.

My children in care always said to me, "I am ready to be independent," and then six months into independence they would say, "I would quite like to be back now," What is the age? It is sad that we think that it is a good thing that children at university have somewhere to come home for or to go to. That is such a lonely position. It is great, because it is better than we had but who is holding them safe? Who are the relationships and the people who are holding them safe?

I would like to add in the complexity. Now our local authorities are rarely the providers of local housing. It is not easy to be a corporate parent in the way that it was when I started my career and I could get 50 allocations from my registered social landlord every year. It is tough to get that.

Q237 **Chair:** The numbers of NEETs are going up. I think a couple of years ago it was 39%. Now it is 41%. That is the 2021 figure, 41%, but it was 39% in 2020. It is going in the wrong direction.

**Yvette Stanley:** We need to look at the data. Are unaccompanied asylum seekers in there, who cannot work because they do not have leave to work? The issue is that universally we do not know. We need to know, we need to understand the stories of those children, and get the right response.

Q238 **Chair:** Are they even counted, though? That is the thing.

**Yvette Stanley:** Going back again to where we started about the level of need of some of the children who have come in late to the system, Cassandra-like, I think that the children coming out of care in a few years' time will need even more support than those of a few years ago needed. How are we going to rise to that challenge?

Q239 **Kate Osborne:** It goes back to your point earlier where you were saying about the lack of data and information there. I think you have covered this, but, when we look at the transition from residential care to independent living, it can be another one of those cliff edge moments. What measures can be introduced to improve support for the transition?

**Juliette Cammaerts:** It comes back to the point that we have been talking about: what the outcomes we are looking for are. Every professional working with children and young people should be aiming for the same thing. Once they leave care NEET seems like a good focus, because it is such a good proxy for other things.



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We know that those transitions are particularly bumpy and we are pleased that you will not be able to be in unregulated provision before you are 16. That seems absolutely right. Again, it comes back to what you would want for your own child. We would like that to be until 18, so that we avoid that gap at 16. It feels uncomfortable that there are children who are doing their GCSEs who might have to go through a placement move during that period, when what you need for your education is stability.

It comes back to the placement not driving the education, but sometimes you need the education to drive the placement decision, as in, "This is not a good time for that child to move" and the child will be telling you, "I just want to get to the summer holidays" and then what might happen. Having that dialogue with the child and saying, "Let's talk to you about your placement decision. Let's make sure that the plan is created with you" and that the box is not just ticked that says, "We have spoken to them." It is, "How can we help you manage this transition?"

Again, when you speak to children and young people—and this is a fairly basic tenet but is really important to them—they just want an adult, one person who is their person. That one adult is the person who helps them to navigate those transitions and who is there and who is their constant. It is the stability of relationships as well as placements and the architecture around them. It is: where is the stable relationship? That is the key to navigating those tricky times.

**Q240 Kim Johnson:** What do you think is the role of unregulated care in services? We have talked about sufficiency and whether that is a backward step in terms of delivering care for children.

**Yvette Stanley:** I certainly see that local authorities are not using unregulated care to save money, because Rachel and I have seen some that are hugely expensive—£9,000 a week was one. That absolutely does not surprise me. I have sat in meetings with local authorities where their commissioners are on the phone because they are bidding for a place with the neighbouring borough and the price goes up.

I go back to the huge number of children on deprivation of liberty orders. They are often in bespoke placements with wraparound, particularly mental health, care. It cannot be right that a child whose needs are so great that they are in front of the court of inherent jurisdiction or placed in unregulated settings.

There needs to be some provision planning for the level of complexity and the market needs to be stimulated, whether that is local authorities or other providers who have good and outstanding provision coming forward to take those places.

We have tried to be helpful in our one manager, two or four very small children's homes, so that we can get some bespoke one child placements. There are a number of children out there who for their own safety or the



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safety of others need to be cared for at least initially alone during the assessment period. The provision map must be developed to meet these emerging needs and, absolutely, through all our inspections, we need to take firm action when people are not giving the oversight to some of this work where they absolutely should.

**Q241 Chair:** As a concept, we are talking about vulnerable young people here and whether they are now past 16 or 18. Do we need local authorities to place youngsters in unregulated provision? That is the crucial question. Unregulated means unregulated.

**Yvette Stanley:** They are not overseen. Absolutely, if we see them placing them in really inappropriate places with untrained staff and so on, absolutely we hold local authorities to account for that. Sadly, what we are seeing is people go to great expense and a lot of effort to create very bespoke placements that are not regulated and then the providers are not willing to register. My question is: are they the right people to provide those sorts of provision?

We do need to tackle this, and for a long time supported lodgings has not been regulated. It is absolutely time to make sure that there is a standard for that sort of provision and that children are supported into that young adulthood.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** My view on this is that we need to treat children in care as we would treat our own children, championing their interests, providing them with love and support. I was pleased to see making regulation compulsory to 16 as a first step. Minimum standards, okay, a step on the way. I am pleased to see it; it is better than not having it, but I want care to 18 and I want regulation to 18. I know that there are sometimes very particular cases and issues, but we can deal with those. My view is unequivocal on this. No unregulated care. I want regulation to 18.

**Q242 Chair:** Rachel, do you mean their 18th or 19th birthday?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Yes. I mean, just in terms of the relationship does not stop there. I understand why we stopped at 16; I am pleased we are going to be looking at minimum standards, but I want to race to the top, not to the bottom. I think there should be no unregulated.

**Q243 Kim Johnson:** Given that there are unregulated, do we have any details about the numbers of unregulated provision nationally?

**Juliette Cammaerts:** Broadly, it comes back to the data point. They are all registered and Yvette might want to say more about this. Children should not be placed in unregistered settings. I was going to make a point on the minimum standards. It is about best practice and what good looks like, rather than what is acceptable. One of the good things about the inspection of children's homes is that they look to children's experiences and they ask children of their experience of being in that setting. We want to see children's voices incorporated into those



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standards. When they are 16, 17, 18 they are still children, really, and we need to speak to them in the same way that we would when we inspect a children's home.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** To illustrate that, one of the first calls that came into me when I took on the role of Children's Commissioner, was from a 16 year-old girl, Barbara, from the Birmingham area, who had been brought up by her grandmother and who had no contact at all with family. Grannie was very ill and dying. When Grannie died she had conversations she did not really understand. She was taken by a social worker and put in unregulated hostel rooms, not introduced to anybody else in the house. Everybody else in the house was 25, 26, and she was terrified.

This young lady happened to be at a local independent school and was an Oxford candidate and from an underrepresented group, a black girl. Luckily, her school had the wherewithal to come to me and we worked it through with her and she was able to put herself into care and find a foster parent. When there are cases like this, we are getting at least 10 a week, that is why I am so strong on this issue.

Q244 **Chair:** The fundamental point is there will be a lot more that do not come across your desk.

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** Exactly. This is an articulate person who was able to reflect afterwards in a very non-bitter, non-judgmental way, "Please do not let this happen to others."

**Yvette Stanley:** To reassure, we look at all those different types on inspection, but I do not think there is a national database of the children who are in unregulated health. The previous Children's Commissioner looked at it a great deal. There are lots of data sets set in different policy Departments and with local authorities, but there is no national knitting to do the state of the nation for these different groups of children.

Q245 **Kate Osborne:** Is one of the issues around unregulated care the time it takes to become regulated? If I understood it correctly, having spoken to one of my local authorities just last week, they were saying it took nine months in one instance to become regulated.

**Yvette Stanley:** It depends on the starting point. Do they have planning permission? Have they recruited a manager? There are various stages of the process. We can do it very quickly. In fact, we registered about 300 children's homes during Covid, so we are quite nimble and we could do it in a couple of months, but do they have all their ducks in a row?

We see that the biggest barriers are planning permission, getting the facility, getting the work done and recruiting the manager. Often local authorities will say, "This provider says they have been with you for X weeks" and we will say, "We still do not have all the documentation". If there is ever a case you want us to look at we will and we have absolutely leaned our processes. We cannot lean them more, because we



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need appropriate checks and balances, but we will always look into an individual case.

Q246 **Tom Hunt:** What further powers do you think your organisation should be given in order to scrutinise and improve educational experiences of children in children's homes?

**Chair:** What is your shopping list? Come on.

**Yvette Stanley:** I think we absolutely can. From an Ofsted perspective, talk to the children, and review their individual journeys. We can triangulate that back with their home local authority and we can pursue that on their inspection.

The challenges that we have outlined today are the joining up pieces. It is making sure that the admissions process outside of the standard one, you had a whole heaps of things earlier, Juliette, that I think are the knitting bits that would help.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** Yes. As an organisation we use our data powers often. One of the things that this conversation has already taken us to is that if you do not know you cannot manage it. Being able to use those data powers is one of the key strengths of our office.

More than anything, it is the more qualitative data of talking to children. It is not that we require a further power; it is that we want people to listen to the messages that we learn, so the big ask: half a million children told us how they felt and what they needed. We must use that. That is a huge pool of children and we must use that as a catalyst. It is as much our own power as harnessing the power of children and young people's voices to effect change, rather than us needing more things and not just seeing educational outcomes data as just numbers, but asking, "What was your experience of education?" Often a positive experience is not measured by numbers. It is measured by relationships or the fact that you were given some support to learn the violin, and that opened a door for you. It is those intangible, innumerate experiences that are most valuable for children and young people.

Q247 **Tom Hunt:** Finally, it was touched upon earlier, but it seems that if you are in care you may be at greater risk of being involved in things like county lines and so on. What further work can be done to try to support those young people so that they do not go down that route?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** From our Help at Hand helpline we do hear of quite a few cases. First, we need to reassure ourselves that over 50% of young people in care are telling us that they are safe and happy, so that is quite important, but we do hear cases. Certainly, issues are raised about gangs, sex exploitation, about county lines. For me, it is right back to when we were talking about when we plan those placements, do those care plans, that we talk about education.



Juliette and I talked about the professionals coming together almost in case conference listening to the virtual head, the education partner, everybody. An example to bring this live, we were in a children's home recently where apart from a couple of hours tutoring a number of girls there in this particular children's home had a bit of tutoring but we could not see why they were not going to school. When we asked about it, it was because at the school they are at risk because there are gangs, and people outside. What those two girls needed was someone to take them to school and bring them back. It is often very practical solutions that solve these big, frightening problems.

**Q248 Tom Hunt:** I have been approached by a few constituents who were in care who are aware of this inquiry. One of the things that they said was that they were bullied at school because they were in care. We know that the way these county gangs operate is to target young people who are particularly vulnerable and do feel alone. I can see how it could be a problem. In terms of bullying, is that a problem and do you think anything could be done?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** It seems like some of the conversations that your constituents who have been in care have been having are about when they were at school. I think in the past few years because of the really good rollout of training schools Heads with the support of virtual heads are far more aware of county lines, how to recognise exploitation, how to recognise radicalisation and what to do about it. That is one piece, but let's never move away from the practical here, because it is often a practical solution like being taken to school if you are at risk.

**Q249 Chair:** In best practice situations you have bespoke, individualised pastoral care programmes?

**Dame Rachel de Souza:** On bullying, every school should have an antibullying policy and be proactively setting an ethos where this does not happen and children should be able to move forward. We learned with the "Everyone's Invited" website that it is not always the case that children feel able to come forward, and we need to be able to reach out to them. I am talking to lots of head teachers' groups and academy trust groups through the CST. They are constantly questioning themselves and asking how much more they can do to be able to reach out and asking for advice and support, which is why we wrote our recent paper, practical support for parents, on sexual harassment, for example. There is good practice, specifically on children in care.

**Juliette Cammaerts:** There are two things. There is being able to distinguish what the driver is of that behaviour. Sometimes being involved in county lines or gangs will be the driver for having come into care in the first place, and sometimes it will be a consequence of exploitation once they are in care. There are two different drivers there.

We have spoken a lot about relationships and having an adult. The other thing that children tell us—and this is all children but specifically children



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in care—is about the want and need for a community, a group of friends around them, places to go, things to do. They seem fairly prosaic and are important to everyone, but they can be even more important for children who do not have other infrastructure in their lives.

Of course, they will have specific challenges and I do not underestimate that some of these children will have huge challenges that we need to help them overcome, and it seems far away but it should not be. The antidote to lots of that is a purpose somewhere else, and feeling like they have something else that they can be passionate about, and how we help them access those things.

**Q250 Tom Hunt:** For many young people who might not have a sense of community a gang can provide that.

**Yvette Stanley:** It fills a social and emotional need. In the work that I used to do with sexually exploited girls their groomers were the people who gave them the most conspicuous care in life, so we must replace that in some way.

The only other thing I would add—and I do not have the answer for this—is that if we look at knife crime we appear to be in a situation where we are asking children or families to move, to relocate, because we think we are displacing the risk to that child, and they become more vulnerable in another place in the country because that child, even if they are with family, does not have the social networks. I do think there is another joined-up policy discussion about policing, housing and social care. Social care does a lot of the heavy lifting but it cannot provide the whole solution. There is a more social policy discussion about families who are experiencing that sort of risk to their children and children in care and what we do to wrap services around to make them safer, not to just make them differently less safe—if you get my drift—by moving them around the country.

**Q251 Chair:** Tom, I am terribly sorry, we are running out of time rapidly for the 12.00 pm deadline for broadcasting, so I do apologise. I have two quick last questions. Yvette, as representing Ofsted, you mentioned a £9,000 per week placement. Can we ever see a £460,000 a year placement being good value for money from the public purse?

**Yvette Stanley:** I think there are lots of complex health placements that do cost that and they may be lifetime costs. I am thinking of children and young adults who need 4:1 24/7 care, but I think they should absolutely be exceptional. We would probably all say that there is not enough transparency in the system so that any of us can provide our intelligence and make that judgment. It would be helpful to get to that place so that we can have bands of tariffs and it is clear what a home is providing, what the NHS locally is providing, because sometimes that is the extra cost. There is a local CAMHS but we cannot access it, so local authorities are paying for more CAMHS. It is a challenging one.



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Q252 **Chair:** Lastly, we did talk earlier on about the Staying Close initiative. From what you know about it, is that worth rolling out? It is a simple yes or no question.

**Yvette Stanley:** It has been very small scale, but the young people involved have said it has made a significant difference, so I endorse at least extending the pilot to some other places and see how it lands.

**Chair:** That is very useful. Thank you all very much for this morning's session. From our perspective, it has been very useful and a very full discussion and interchange. I want to thank you for all of the work that you do. Lastly, I will pass on my best wishes to Rob for a speedy recovery. Thank you very much indeed.