



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [16+ Care Options](#), HC 1033

Wednesday 14 May 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Education](#) (16P0029)

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Members present: Mr Graham Stuart (Chair); Neil Carmichael; Alex Cunningham; Bill Esterson; Pat Glass; Ian Mearns; Caroline Nokes; Dominic Raab; Craig Whittaker

Questions 155-233

Witness: **Edward Timpson MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families.

Q155 Chair: Good morning, Minister. Welcome back to the Committee; it is a pleasure to have you with us.

On 18 December 2013, the Secretary of State told us that he would undertake a review of how well the child protection system meets the needs of older children, but appeared to go back on that commitment in a follow-up letter. Does the selection of support for adolescents as one of two focus areas for the Department for Education's innovation programme reflect a renewed commitment to review that issue, and is it a recognition of the system's current failings in adequately meeting the needs of that group?

Mr Timpson: Chair, it is good to be back. To answer your question, it is a reflection of a continued commitment to improving protection, safety and planning, and securing long-term successful outcomes for older children who find themselves in or on the edge of care. The strand within the innovation programme that you refer to is an important and serious aspect of that commitment, which recognises that we have fallen short in focusing on those children from adolescence onwards who find themselves in need of extra support from the state. That need often continues beyond their teenage years and into adulthood. We have perhaps too readily fallen back on the traditional models of delivery for meeting their needs. The innovation programme and the very good paper that has been put out on rethinking support for adolescents in care or on the edge of care show—as does some of the evidence that the Committee has already had from Jonathan Stanley from the Independent Children's Homes Association and others—that we need to look at how we can deliver the care and support they need differently from in the past.

Q156 Chair: If I may take you back, Minister, our *Children first* report had three key themes: neglect, thresholds and older children. I do not know which Minister signed off the response to that. Would that have been you?

Mr Timpson: I believe that it would have been me.

Q157 Chair: It was just that we sent that in, with those three key themes, and the reply from the Department—it sounds like it was signed off by you—failed to mention older children at all. That was why we raised the issue with the Secretary of State. Why was the issue of older children not included?

Mr Timpson: I am not sure that the reply did not talk about older children at all. I would need to go back and look at the details.

Q158 Chair: We would be grateful if you did. It seemed to us that it did not talk about older children, which is why we pressed the Secretary of State to do that review.

Mr Timpson: For the purposes of this session, I can make it abundantly clear, backed up by the remarks I have just made on the innovation programme—this was in the care inquiry and the *What is care for* inquiry by ADCS—that we recognise that there is more to do in this area, which is why we are focusing sharply on it within the innovation programme.

Chair: We are glad to hear that, but you will understand that, as a Committee, having identified it as a weakness over time, we want to ensure that we press you and that you do not, in formal responses to the Committee's reports or otherwise, inadvertently fail to recognise the needs of older teenagers.

Q159 Caroline Nokes: We have had quite a lot of evidence from young people on the verge of leaving care, or who already have left it, that the planning and arrangements for the transition from being in care to living independently are not adequate. What steps is the DFE taking to ensure that local authorities' engagement with those young people—explaining the options to them; indeed, giving them some options—is effective and beneficial, rather than just box-ticking?

Mr Timpson: First, you are right to say that young people who are in the process of leaving care, or who have left, have very different experiences vis-à-vis their local authority and the role that it plays in securing safe and suitable accommodation, or nurturing relationships that they can fall back on in times of need. There are some really good examples in some of the recent Ofsted reports—the new single inspections show that places such as Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Essex and Hampshire are delivering very good services for young people—but there are still too many areas where that is not happening.

What measures have we taken? Back in 2011 we strengthened the statutory guidance on pathway planning and made clear what local authorities have to do to ensure that such planning is done in a way that meets the needs of the individual young person. I have recently changed the law such that, if a 16 or 17-year-old is going to leave care, that must be signed off by the director of children's services, because the decision is so important and should not be taken lightly.

We have seen a reduction in the number of 16-year-olds leaving care from 2008, when it was 32%. It is now 16%, so that proportion has halved, which is encouraging. Nevertheless, 16% may still be too high, which is why we have—

Q160 Chair: May be, or is?

Mr Timpson: It may be.

Q161 Chair: Do you think it might not be too high?

Mr Timpson: It is difficult to know without knowing the reason behind each case. We obviously know that some children want to leave care at 16 and that it is right in their circumstances. The fact that we have reduced the proportion by half in seven years suggests that too many young people were leaving care at 16, and that may still be the case.

Q162 Caroline Nokes: The DFE has noted in written evidence the introduction of a new right for young people to request a review of their care pathway, but we have been told by young people that such reviews often do not happen, even when they have been specifically requested. Beyond introducing the right, what is the DFE doing to ensure that young people know about it—a key problem that they identified was that they simply did not have the information—are then empowered to exercise it, and that local authorities respond appropriately?

Mr Timpson: This is a really important change that has perhaps not had the publicity that it deserves—for young people to be able request a review of their care plan is a significant step forward. I know that, when he was the children's rights director, Roger Morgan was a champion of it and specifically welcomed the change. Nevertheless, you are right that too many children and young people either are not aware of the change or, when they do seek a request, find it very difficult to get the support that they need to see it through to a proper review and conclusion.

What have we done about it? In the new Ofsted single inspection, we have made sure that there is now a specific sub-judgment on both care leavers and the planning for care leavers through the pathway plans, so there is a much keener and sharper light shining on that aspect of local authority services. Also, we have collaborated with NYAS and Voice to ensure that better independent advocacy, which is still nowhere near where it needs to be, is available to young people so that they are supported through the process.

Q163 Bill Esterson: Good morning. Stable long-term relationships are vital to everyone, not least young people in care, yet we have heard—not just in this inquiry, but on many occasions—that it is an area that is often lacking and disrupted for one reason or another. We heard evidence about how local authorities are interpreting guidance to suggest that they should appoint a personal adviser who changes over time as care arrangements change, yet other people in young people's lives, such as carers, are in a better position to give them guidance and support. What is your view on that? Is it something that you would look into and address?

Mr Timpson: I agree with you that the common thread that comes out—not just in this area, but in many other aspects of the care system that we have discussed in the past—is

the need for a stable relationship that the young person can rely on, often transcending other placements or periods of their life. The care inquiry I referred to earlier called it the golden thread that should be running through the care system. I completely agree that we need to try to improve that.

Personal advisers, who came in under the previous Government in 2000-01, were seeking to address that. It is right to make it clear that “personal adviser” is a function rather than a specific person who is appointed. It is for the local authority to satisfy itself that whoever is appointed as the personal adviser has the requisite skills, qualifications and so on. I have given quite some thought to how we can use the role of the personal adviser in the child’s life to be able to fulfil it to the best of their ability. It may not be a personal adviser who works for the local authority, but someone who works in the children’s home, or it may be their foster carer. There is nothing in the regulations or the statutory guidance to stop them from using valuable resources, like foster carers, as a de facto personal adviser for that young person, because often they are the nurturing relationships that they value more than any others.

Q164 Bill Esterson: Okay, so we have the importance of continuity and the role of the personal adviser. You are saying that it could be a carer or a professional, or whoever is best placed and has the best relationship. Will you make it clearer in the guidance to local authorities that it could be somebody other than a separate person who is appointed to achieve what we have just set out?

Mr Timpson: I shall certainly go back and look to see whether I am satisfied that it is clear enough. If it is not, I will want to encourage a wider pool of people to be able to fulfil that responsibility and better to meet the needs of that individual child. I should add, in conjunction with that, with the increase in the age of those receiving support from the personal adviser from 21 to 25, for those who remain in education or training—I may be anticipating a question coming up—there has also been a lot of discussion about why those who are not in education or training between the ages of 21 to 25 do not get the option of a personal adviser, in whatever capacity that may be. I have reflected on that and we had a consultation on it. It seems as important, if not more important—for those who are of that age and who are care leavers, and who want to get back into education, but are not currently in any education or training—to have the option of that support and guidance from a personal adviser until they complete their course. That is something that I will change in the guidance that we will publish shortly.

Q165 Bill Esterson: Sure. Now, one of the things we heard was that the personal advisers seem to change automatically at the age of 18. Is that something you can address?

Mr Timpson: Once again, we want continuity where possible. By making it clear that it does not have to be someone from a specific part of the local authority who fulfils that duty, there is a greater prospect of that continuity being fulfilled. For instance, now that we have *Staying put* for foster care, if a foster carer can take on many aspects of the personal adviser role, clearly they will be in a better position to do it.

Q166 Bill Esterson: You used the phrase “does not have to be”. May I suggest that you change the language slightly so that there is a presumption that it stays the same person?

When professionals interpret guidance, you want to leave little to chance, so may I urge you to look at that?

Mr Timpson: I do not have the exact language in the current guidance in front of me, but if it is not clear that continuity is what we are all seeking and that that should be what everyone is trying to fulfil in discharging their duties, we will go back and look at that.

Q167 Bill Esterson: Thank you. The other question I want to ask is about relationships with siblings and friends as young people move to greater independence. What guidance is issued to encourage this?

Mr Timpson: There is guidance around making sure that those relationships that children value can continue and that their voice is heard. A local authority must take that into account when pulling together its pathway plan. Again, I will look at the detail of what we have within the guidance that is to do with that particular area and see whether it fulfils its purpose.

Chair: It may have been a one-off, but one of the benefits of these inquiries is when we meet young people in the position that we are examining. The whole Committee was struck by a young woman who said that she was basically under pressure and obliged to see the parents she did not want to see, who had helped to put her in the vulnerable position she was in, yet she could not see the siblings whom she loved very much. We were struck by the need to try to get that right.

Q168 Mr Raab: Minister, you talked a bit about the move from care for 16 and 17-year-olds. Are you confident that the provision for that kind of accommodation is always suitable and of the right standard?

Mr Timpson: I would be confident in almost every case. I cannot be confident that, on every single occasion, the right decision is being made. We have strengthened the guidance around making it clear what suitable and safe accommodation is.

Q169 Mr Raab: When you say “strengthened”, how have you done it?

Mr Timpson: In the statutory guidance itself, we have made it clear, for instance, that bed-and-breakfast accommodation is wholly unacceptable and that there needs to be greater emphasis on the accommodation requirements of that young person. Now that we have the Ofsted single inspection looking at care leavers, including their accommodation as a specific sub-judgment, we are starting to gather much stronger evidence on how local authorities are fulfilling that duty.

Q170 Mr Raab: Given that, is there a case now for streamlining into one set of both regulation and inspection the arrangements for foster and residential care, and the other arrangements?

Mr Timpson: We have the transitional guidance, which is effectively the equivalent of a national outcomes framework because it sets out what the expectations are on local authorities to make sure that that young person meets the outcomes that have been set out in

their pathway plan. Clearly we always want to try to simplify any framework that local authorities and other providers work from. The updated guidance is a much clearer document that reflects the outcomes that we want to focus on, rather than the process of moving a child out of care, as happened too often in the past.

Q171 Pat Glass: In its supplementary evidence to us, Ofsted clarified its position. Our reading of that is that it will not be inspecting premises; it will simply sample and follow the experience of individual children. That clearly would not be acceptable in relation to schools—if we were not inspecting schools, but simply sampling the experience of a few children—so are you comfortable with that?

Mr Timpson: The whole purpose of moving to the single inspection is that it looks unashamedly at the child's experience, whether that is their period in foster care, their period moving out of care, or their experiences of accommodation as they move into adulthood, where that is relevant. I am comfortable that the new single inspection is a better regime for extracting what is important for both the quality of service that young people are receiving and their experiences, but it is still in its infancy. We have had the first two tranches of inspections in that new inspection regime. It is eliciting both really good practice and areas where improvement is needed. Clearly we will reflect as we get a better picture of performance out there among local authorities in this specific area and see whether we need to do anything differently.

Q172 Pat Glass: If that is the case, are we moving towards single inspection—the experience of the child in education—rather than a hard-nosed inspection of schools? It just seems that there is a very firm inspection regime in place in relation to schools, but not so much in relation to children in the looked-after sector. That kind of reflects our feeling that the Department's focus is on education and not so much on child protection. We are quite concerned about this.

Mr Timpson: I think I can reassure you on two fronts. Both inspection regimes are about standards, whether it is the quality of education or the quality of care. What we have done—in working with Ofsted and coming up with a single inspection, and working towards, in time, a joint inspection—is to address some of the shortcomings in the inspections of children's services in the past, which were not able to extract where things had gone wrong. They were too much about looking in filing cabinets and not enough about the experience of the child. That was what young people themselves told us. That was what they wanted us to know about, and for that to be how you judge whether a local authority is performing or not.

Q173 Pat Glass: In fairness, Minister, if you are the child in the looked-after system, your experiences before that are not going to be great, so you are not going to have an awful lot to compare it to. We have seen some of these places. Do you not think Ofsted inspections should see some of these places?

Mr Timpson: They do sample, as you say. If you want to take another comparator with schools, of course when you have outstanding schools, there is not the same level of inspectorate oversight. But I think it is right that Ofsted moves towards a single inspection that concentrates on the child's journey through care, and this specific sub-judgment on care leavers is shining a light as never before on what is happening during that period of the young person's life. I would encourage you to look at some of those reports because they are quite

revealing about many of these issues that perhaps weren't quite so obvious from reading reports in the past.

Q174 Pat Glass: I think we accept that it is moving in the right direction; our concern is: is it good enough?

Mr Timpson: That is a question I ask myself pretty much on a daily basis and the answer is it isn't good enough, despite improvements. That is why I remain determined to continue to push the boundaries where they need to go, whether that is by delivering services differently, having a sharper focus on certain areas of the system, or improving quality assurance or accountability—whatever it takes. I want to do what I can to make sure that children themselves get what they deserve.

Q175 Chair: Before I go to back to you, Dominic, I would just like to explore that a little more because it is pretty fundamental to our looking at what happens to 16 and 17-year-olds, and the sampling versus the comprehensive inspection. I know there is a new framework, so the tendency is to see if that is providing useful information—you said, have a look at the reports, they are insightful—and then review it again. But if these children—and they are children—are vulnerable and if the evidence to our inquiry and our personal experience is that a lot of it is not good enough, what is the case for having a light-touch regulation of some of the accommodation and support provided to some of the most vulnerable older young people in the land? How could that be right when we are prepared to have frameworks that go round and ensure that every single education institution is right?

Here we have children that are far more vulnerable than your average child. This is not just where they go to school; this is the environment where they live and is absolutely fundamental to them. I am just trying to work through why we would not want to ensure this. I think it would seem ridiculous if we weren't ensuring that every residential children's home was properly inspected, assessed, graded and all the rest of it—why would we think that these very vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds could be stuck in some house? When we were down in Margate we were told people were getting rich by buying a six-bedroom house for not much money, shoving it full of very vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds and having some nominal regulatory regime and untrained person who was managing and supporting them. That looks like something ripe for pretty full-on inspection. We—or I—may be wrong in thinking that, but I would like to hear what you think about it.

Bill Esterson: Before the Minister answers, can I add to that? Adults who are placed in care are subject to a very thorough inspection regime as well and yet there is this group that just seems to be missed.

Mr Timpson: A number of points flow from that. One is about whether there is any light-touch inspection or quality assurance of homes that are being provided, whether that is supported lodgings or other types of accommodation. Of course, the local authority has to commission those places and it has to commission them against the statutory guidance and the framework that is already there. Ofsted then look to inspect that to see whether they have fulfilled it, so there is already some level of light-touch inspection, both by the local authority and how they commission those services, and what they commission them against. Ofsted are then looking at how the local authority are fulfilling that.

Q176 Chair: But we were in Kent, talking to the people who have that responsibility for young people there. They are saying that people from London and elsewhere are being commissioned into supported housing in their area, which they think is unsafe. They showed us a map and pointed out the child molesters, burglars, criminals—every problem in the area. Funnily enough, the houses are cheap and that is where these people get put. As an MP said to me, everyone knows—technically these people are not under age—where to go for under-age sex in that area.

There are problems there and that is the environment in which the most vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds find themselves, in an unregulated way, except that, “Oh, it’s commissioned against a framework”. Well, according to the people in Kent, who observe the commissioning of other authorities, it is not being commissioned very well. I am struggling to see why I would not want to see more thorough inspection. Ofsted—not just yourself—have said in the submission to us that they do not think that is the appropriate response. I would like to understand that more clearly and I am still struggling to do so.

Mr Timpson: In answer to that and to finish the points I was making, we have the single Ofsted inspection, which now has this specific sub-judgment on care leavers and is looking at this. We want to get a fuller picture of how that is showing us the veracity of the commissioning decisions of local authorities, where there is unsuitable accommodation that is falling foul of the law—the law could not be clearer about suitable and safe accommodation for these young people—and whether that means that we have to go further than we have to date.

Whenever there is some poor practice, to put it mildly, given the examples you have given, Chairman, in any area of public services, there is always the option to look to regulation to try to plug that gap. When Andrew Christie, the DCS for the tri-borough in London, gave evidence he pointed to the fact that you have to be careful that you do not over-regulate because, first, you could remove some providers out of the space that are actually providing excellent care and accommodation and also, as we are looking to try to innovate in this area—

Q177 Chair: How could you regulate excellent providers out of the space?

Mr Timpson: A lot of these are very small organisations. There are costs attached to this. We need to be careful about pushing the pendulum too far in the other direction. I think the best approach would be to see how the single inspection is starting to build a clearer picture of performance right across local authorities and, if there is an endemic issue that is not currently being resolved by the standards, guidance and inspection that already exist, of course we need to look at it again.

Q178 Mr Raab: Surely, Minister, the case for the good, high-quality but small provider would be strengthened by regulation because you would get rid of all the more predatory types.

Mr Timpson: That is not always their experience. If you look at how local authorities commission these services, if there is regulation involved on top of that, it could become untenable for those providers to sustain themselves as a provider in that market. We want to encourage more to come in, rather than feel that we need to narrow it down to a few.

Q179 Pat Glass: Minister, this is an incredibly lucrative market. We have heard evidence that there are hedge funds getting into this now. We are unlikely to drive people out of this market by simply saying, “There needs to be a proper standard here, and we are going to inspect to make sure that it happens.” This is incredibly lucrative.

Mr Timpson: What I am most concerned about is that the quality of that care and accommodation is at the standard it needs to be. I think we would all agree on that. That is why we have very clear transitions guidance. That is why we have made the steps to have Ofsted looking much more closely at this aspect of the care system, because of the issues raised in this inquiry and in others.

Of course, we do not just sit back and assume everything is happening as we would expect it to. It is the responsibility of local authorities to provide safe and suitable accommodation and, where they do not, that now affects their Ofsted judgment. We have never been shy, as has been shown recently in other local authorities, of being very tough on intervention in local authorities that are failing these young people. I am certainly not saying that we just leave things as they are, but we do need to learn more from what Ofsted are telling us from their new single inspection. If we need to do more, then we will.

Q180 Ian Mearns: We did go over to Margate, but I am quite sure that the picture we saw there is replicated in lots of other places where there are similar sorts of property prices and outsourcing of young people from places like London boroughs to other coastal towns and big cities around the country. I cannot help feeling very, very uneasy about it, because the conditions that we saw were far from ideal. I cannot help feeling that we have to have a collective corporate parenting approach involving Government, politicians of all parties who are elected into representative positions, and local authorities and their councillors. It is just too important to be left to God and good neighbours, as it were, in terms of the welfare of these young people. It is replicated on thousands of occasions around the country, and it is not just good enough. We have to put a stop to what is going on now.

Mr Timpson: Can I just make two points in response to that? I know it was not a direct question. The first is about corporate parenting—as you quite rightly say, that is a national responsibility as well as a local responsibility. One of the reasons we have put out the call for people to come forward as to how we can improve the approach of corporate parenting, beyond the ages of 16 and 18, is so that we do not fall back on some of the approaches to leaving care and accommodation which are not suitable and which you have seen some examples of as a Committee.

For example, in North Yorkshire—I had the opportunity to go there to talk to their DCS and to meet some of their foster carers and young people in care or who have left care—they have what is called the “no wrong door” programme. They have children’s homes that, beyond the time the young person is there, become a hub where they still have outreach support, whether it is health—including mental health—education, mentoring or the continuity of the relationship I was talking about with Mr Esterson, so that they get that continued corporate parenting oversight as they go through the transition into adulthood. I think that is a really smart and creative way of addressing the problem that this Committee has identified. I can give you other examples of bids that we have had into the Department, as part of the innovation programme, for instance. An adolescent care trust has been set up, so that you have a key single point of contact across all services that that young person

maintains, so that they see the same person. Finally, I know that in Hartlepool they make sure that the social worker that that young person had in care remains their social worker as they move into pathway planning and into their early 20s.

Q181 Ian Mearns: Minister, I think it is important to say that we can all quote good examples, but without a decent national framework that people have to adhere to we will continue to get good examples and lots of bad examples; that is the problem.

Mr Timpson: But, Mr Mearns, the transitions guidance, which is law, is in essence a national outcomes framework that says, “These are the outcomes that the local authority has to be working towards through the pathway plan.”

Q182 Bill Esterson: What happens to, or in, a local authority that does not adhere to these legally binding guidelines—if that is what you are saying is the situation? How do you make sure that good practice happens everywhere? That is the missing bit and it has been missing for a long time.

Mr Timpson: When we revised the guidance we took time to elicit where the good practice was in local authorities and built that into the guidance. Local authorities now having to follow the statutory guidance is a reflection of the good practice that we have seen out there.

Q183 Bill Esterson: You are going to make sure that this happens.

Mr Timpson: That has happened—in putting the good practice into the guidance.

Q184 Bill Esterson: You are going to make sure that the good practice happens. That is what we are asking.

Mr Timpson: Well, the way to make good practice happen is to ensure, through the inspection of those services, that it is happening, and if it is not happening, then of course, now, because of the sub-judgment within the Ofsted single inspection, for a local authority to get a good or outstanding judgment is difficult. When they have been particularly poor, as I said previously, we have not been shy in making sure that the intervention that is required happens.

Q185 Mr Raab: One specific issue we heard about in evidence on the other arrangements for 16 and 17-year-olds was the nature of the people with whom they are sharing accommodation—the other residents—and the lack of any vetting in that regard. Would you amend the regulations so that this was an explicit requirement in commissioning?

Mr Timpson: You are talking about 16 and 17-year-olds who are in some form of supported accommodation.

Q186 Mr Raab: In a B and B or whatever.

Mr Timpson: We have been clear about the unacceptability of a B and B. In terms of other settings, there is already—

Q187 Chair: Sorry, you say it is unacceptable, but it continues to happen.

Mr Raab: And we get evidence from people saying it is happening.

Chair: Yes, including from a girl who said that people were knocking on the door, inviting her to come and party in their room. She was scared to leave that room and felt that she had no support. While B and B accommodation is, in extremis, still used, it is necessary to have some sort of check on what the other residents are like, so that you cannot put someone into a place like that when there are a lot of people there with a lot of other problems going on?

Mr Timpson: There should be DBS checks taking place, which you would expect in all those situations, but the most helpful thing for me to do for the Committee would be to look at the specific details of the requirements and see whether they are—dreadful phrase—fit for purpose.

Q188 Mr Raab: It occurs to me that the practicability of vetting a B and B may be so difficult that it would force commissioners not to use them, given that, as you said, they are unacceptable.

Mr Timpson: Local authorities have to make those standard checks, and you would expect them to do that.

Q189 Chair: How do you check a B and B when you do not know who is going to be staying there tonight?

Mr Timpson: I am talking about the reputable provider of that accommodation, the point being that they should not be in the B and B in the first place. There were discussions in previous evidence sessions about banning bed and breakfasts outright. The temptation is there. We need to be a little careful, and I think Andrew Christie alluded to this in his evidence. You cannot rule out the scenario, despite its unacceptability, in every situation, such as an emergency placement at 11 o'clock at night when there is literally nowhere else available. The way to deal with that is to make sure that local authorities go back to the commissioning aspect of their role, both within the local authority and perhaps on a more regional basis. It is also about how local authorities can better innovate and find alternative emergency accommodation that is always available. You have examples—I cannot remember which local authority it is for the moment—where there is effectively a group of different accommodation available, of which one is the emergency placement, so that if there is an emergency at any time, there is no need to go to a bed and breakfast, because the local authority has kept a bed open for that purpose.

Q190 Mr Raab: One final point. The evidence we have heard, and the tone that you have already heard from the Committee, is that there is a lot of interest in the idea that what we really need is a national set of standards, which local authorities adhere to, that cover these kinds of cases. The standards should be brought within the single inspection framework of Ofsted. I sense that you are not there yet. Is it something on which you will at least consult?

Mr Timpson: I will go back to the transitions guidance, which I would say, in essence, is the national outcomes framework. One thing on which I will reflect is this: I have

read the evidence that other witnesses have given, and if calling it something like a national outcomes framework, rather than transitions guidance, is a better way of putting across what it seeks to achieve and the importance of adherence to it, that is something I am willing to consider. When it comes to inspection and oversight, I have said on a number of occasions that we have had the single inspection for a short period of time, and I think it has been effective in drawing out where there is good practice and where practice needs to be improved. As we develop that, there will be an opportunity to go back and consider whether we need to spread the tentacles of that inspection any further.

Q191 Craig Whittaker: Minister, can I take you back to the previous question? I heard what you said, but your report in 2012 said that a conservative estimate would be that 11% of young people are leaving care with no suitable accommodation, full stop. That is what is happening now. How can we change that now? It is unacceptable that that goes on and on. The Committee heard evidence to that effect when we spoke to young people. We spoke to a young 16-year-old lady who was put in a bed and breakfast for three and a half months, which is clearly unacceptable.

Mr Timpson: Absolutely.

Q192 Craig Whittaker: So how do we change it? You are the guy with the reins in his hands. How do we change it to make sure that local authorities are acting with the responsibility with which they are supposed to act?

Mr Timpson: It is important to look at this over the longer term, as well as just over the past couple of years. Over the longer term, we have seen an improvement in those who are deemed to be in suitable accommodation. I gave you some figures earlier on 16 and 17-year-olds who are now remaining in care; 64% are still in care at 18, compared with 52% in 2008. The trend is moving in the right direction. Of course, we would like it to reach a point where all of us, whether in Government or in Parliament, can be satisfied that 100% of young people are in suitable accommodation. How do we ensure that those 11% are not the recipients of bad practice in the future? I refer back to the answer I gave Mr Esterson on the greater intensity of Ofsted's inspection of the services that local authorities are commissioning—local authorities are commissioning out the decisions that they make against the pathway plan. If we do not start to see the figure fall further and continue in the right direction, we will need to think about some of the issues on which I suspect the Committee may want to pontificate when it comes to making recommendations.

Q193 Chair: Did you say “pontificate”?

Mr Timpson: I did say “pontificate”. It is something I have seen you do regularly, and you are very good at it.

Chair: It was on behalf of the wider Committee that I expressed that concern.

Bill Esterson: Can we be clear: were you were referring to the Chairman, or to all of us?

Chair: Exactly; that is the point I was trying to make.

Mr Timpson: I will pontificate on that.

Chair: Alex, I am afraid most of your questions have been anticipated, but I am sure you have others.

Q194 Alex Cunningham: Good morning, Minister. As my colleagues have said, on our travels we heard some real horror stories about young people finding themselves in unsuitable accommodation, yet we know from the supplementary estimates that there is a 20% underspend in children's services, and local authorities are saying that they are short of the cash they need to provide that sort of thing. How do you justify such a transfer of funds from children's services to pay for free schools and other education projects when there is such need in your own area?

Mr Timpson: First, I don't know where you got that figure from.

Q195 Alex Cunningham: The supplementary estimates, Minister.

Mr Timpson: There hasn't been a 20% underspend in children's services.

Q196 Alex Cunningham: £86 million.

Mr Timpson: I know that when the permanent secretary came before the Committee recently he undertook to write to the Committee with some details in respect of that. There is a number of things to say. First, you talked about children's services, but the directorate, CSDSD, does not deal only with children's services; it has a wider remit, so we need to be careful what we are talking about. Secondly, the Government are responsible for ensuring every pound we spend is spent wisely and not without due diligence. We have five key objectives in my directorate: special educational needs, child care, adoption, children in care and safeguarding. When you set an estimate of how much you require to meet your objectives, what you end up spending to fulfil those objectives may not be what you anticipated at the start.

Q197 Alex Cunningham: So you did not have any use for the money that has been transferred away from your budgets?

Mr Timpson: No, you said it is being spent elsewhere in the Department. *[Interruption.]* Well, I am sure the permanent secretary will give you chapter and verse on that, but my understanding is that it is back in the pot in the budget exchange.

Q198 Alex Cunningham: You could have given local authorities the opportunity to provide suitable accommodation for young people who find themselves in the care system.

Mr Timpson: Perhaps I can give some examples to illustrate my point. We are undertaking the biggest reform of special educational needs in 30 years, and we made an estimate of how much, up until this point in the financial year, we require to meet each staging post of those reforms. Because the pace has been different from what we anticipated, we have not needed to allocate all that money to get to the point we will reach with the reforms.

Q199 Alex Cunningham: So the slow-down has enabled you to transfer money to pay for free schools in some areas where they are not needed.

Mr Timpson: No, that is not correct. Let me give you another example. There was a pilot of payment by results in children's centres, and a decision was made to discontinue it because it did not seem to be fulfilling its objectives. It is easy to make sweeping statements, such as, "Oh, you are not spending money on this; therefore you are spending it on something else." Actually, the departmental spending programme is far more nuanced than your portrayal of it.

Q200 Alex Cunningham: You have spent only 80% of the money that was estimated. Can we expect to see a considerable increase in the spend within children's services as those other programmes come on stream and you find you need to spend more money on them?

Mr Timpson: As you know, Mr Cunningham, the majority of the money spent on children's services is spent by local authorities.

Q201 Alex Cunningham: And they would love some more.

Mr Timpson: I think the vast majority of local authorities have made the correct decision to prioritise children's services, and the permanent secretary gave evidence to the Committee that those figures remained stable despite the retrenchment we have had to make in local and national government to cut the deficit. If you are insinuating that the Department has de-prioritised children's services, that is simply not the case.

Q202 Alex Cunningham: So we can expect more money to be spent in future years as the budgets top up again?

Mr Timpson: Anyone who had the pleasure of sitting on the Committee that considered the Children and Families Act can see a clear demonstration of the Government making sure that all children, whatever their start in life, get the support they need.

Q203 Alex Cunningham: Were you surprised to hear that the non-executive directors on the DFE board had nothing at all to say about children's services, and that they failed to scrutinise the transfer of sums away from the service?

Mr Timpson: I have read the transcript of the evidence that you are referring to—

Alex Cunningham: They did not have anything to say, though.

Mr Timpson: Again, I am not sure that that is a fair reflection of the evidence they gave.

Q204 Alex Cunningham: It is almost certainly the case. If you read the transcript, you will know that I asked them, "Do you have anything to say about children's services?" They did not say anything at all, so it is a correct reflection of the evidence.

Mr Timpson: Paul Marshall was clear about the expertise that has been brought into the Department. If you were to have any collection of non-executive directors from any Department across Whitehall, it would be astounding if, across all those notes, they had an intricate and deep experience of every aspect of the Government's portfolio.

Q205 Alex Cunningham: I am not asking them to have an intricate understanding. What I want them to do is to scrutinise properly, but they do not have any knowledge whatsoever. There are four of them, and not one of them has any knowledge in the area for which you are responsible. Does that not cause you concern?

Mr Timpson: I have sat through a number of very long board meetings with the non-executive directors, who have not been shy in coming forward in questioning me, in and outside those meetings, about the work in the Department within my portfolio area.

Alex Cunningham: Perhaps if you published the minutes, we could see how good they are.

Mr Timpson: There is Sue John, who has experience in children's services, and there are others whom we brought into the Department, such as Isabelle Trowler, the chief social worker; Sir Martin Narey; and Clive Cowdery from the Resolution Foundation. There is a lot of oversight, experience and scrutiny of the work that we are doing. I would suggest that you look particularly at the work that Isabelle Trowler and Sir Martin Narey are doing on social work reform. That is a key piece of work.

Q206 Alex Cunningham: But they are not non-execs, are they?

Mr Timpson: Of course they are not non-execs.

Q207 Alex Cunningham: I was a non-executive director on a health trust fund. I am not an expert in health, but I know that you need to learn and understand enough to be able to challenge the executives and the people making the decisions. Your non-executive directors do not appear to have enough portfolio between the four of them, or any real understanding of children's services, and that concerns me. Can you understand that concern?

Mr Timpson: My experience is that they have shown a keen interest in all aspects of the Department. I have found their involvement in my portfolio area extremely helpful.

Q208 Alex Cunningham: Okay, I will leave it there.

Going back to the B and B thing, the young people told us that they want B and Bs banned. You have told us about a model of good local authorities that have good practice and have groups of people around who can provide appropriate accommodation rather than B and Bs. Can you set a timetable for, or would you even consult on the idea of, first, banning bed and breakfasts to reflect what the young people want, and secondly, ensuring that appropriate provision is in place for young people? Will you ban them?

Mr Timpson: I think I have already made my position clear—

Alex Cunningham: You won't ban them.

Mr Timpson: Just let me answer the question, Mr Cunningham. I think I have already made my position clear: we recently updated the statutory transitions guidance on bed and breakfasts, making it abundantly clear that they are unacceptable. That is now an aspect of the new sub-judgment that local authorities are being inspected against by Ofsted.

From 2012 to 2013, we have seen the number of care leavers who have been identified as being in a bed and breakfast fall from 40 to 30. We are also, for the first time in the Department, collating data to establish, for those who were in care and are now aged 20 and 21, what their accommodation is, so we get a better read-out of what is happening out there and things are not based on anecdotal evidence, important though that is. I am keen to see that data extended to 25, because clearly we want to ensure that any issue around suitable accommodation is addressed right up to that age and not just up to 21.

Q209 Ian Mearns: We have had a lot of evidence presented to us, Minister, that backs up the genuine concern that we feel about this issue. One person who gave evidence said she was pessimistic about local authorities' priorities when commissioning alternative accommodation, that a lot of the decisions made for young people in care were based on the needs of an organisation—a local authority or a provider—rather than the needs of the child, and that in commissioning the cost outweighs suitability and quality most of the time. That evidence has been supported by many people, and particularly in the evidence that we have heard from young people who have been care leavers. The Committee has been told that there needs to be a greater focus on the value of accommodation provided, in terms of the outcomes and successes of young people living there. Do you agree with that?

Mr Timpson: In general terms, I agree with what you just said, Mr Mearns. Commissioning is critical to what then flows for that young person. I think that we have all seen examples of too many local authorities' commissioning arrangements being based, in good faith, around short-term resource issues, rather than the long-term needs of young people, but it does not have to be like that. We know that there are good examples across the country—in the tri-borough area and, particularly, up in the north-east—of authorities pooling commissioning arrangements together on a regional basis, or a group of local authorities effectively outsourcing provision through a joint commissioning arrangement; I think that issue was raised when you last had an evidence session on this inquiry.

There are ways that local authorities can get better and smarter at commissioning these services, and they are being judged against that within the Ofsted framework, but within the Department and through the innovation programme, we want to be more on the front foot in trying to show local authorities other ways that they can deliver services that better focus on need rather than simply on cost, or on what beds happen to be available at any one time. That is not helpful to anybody, particularly the young people.

Q210 Ian Mearns: But up and down the country, there are still young people living in accommodation and circumstances into which the commissioner or the decision maker who put them there would not dream of putting their own offspring; they would not put them in such facilities, if you can call them that. There has got to be a step change, so that, to coin the previous Government's phrase, every child matters. We must have a step change, so that every young person matters, because as regards this transition to adulthood for youngsters who have sometimes gone through a tortured upbringing, with minimal support through that transition, we would not do that with our own kids. We have to have a step change. I urge

you to think again on the issue of the national outcomes framework, because lots of witnesses have recommended its introduction to us.

Mr Timpson: I have taken that on board. Although I would argue that the transitions guidance provides that framework, I am happy to look at how we phrase it or encapsulate it in such a way that it does what we want it to do, which is to concentrate on the outcomes and, more importantly, ensure that they are met.

Q211 Ian Mearns: The crucial question is this: are you absolutely confident that, with what you are doing, local authorities the length and breadth of this country will operate in a way that provides decent and safe outcomes for young people?

Mr Timpson: I am confident that through the clearer and stronger law we put in place, the clearer and stronger inspection that we put in place, and the opportunities provided through the innovation programme, which is a big, serious and heavily financially backed programme—between those three key areas—we can help elicit the step change that you talk about. Of course, none of us can promise in central Government to make sure that everything in local government happens in the way that we would wish, but those I think are the levers that enable us to start to change some behaviour and some of the culture that has existed in some parts of local areas for too long. I am sure it is something that we will return to, and I remain very much focused on that endeavour.

Q212 Neil Carmichael: Good morning, I want to talk a little bit about the age of leaving care. I have noticed that there has been an improvement between 2009 and 2013 in the percentage of young people leaving care at 16 or 17; it has dropped from 39% to 31%. Your Department has suggested that you want to make things even better. I was wondering, what levers of policy are you going to pull to do that?

Mr Timpson: This is about remaining in care beyond 16?

Neil Carmichael: Yes.

Mr Timpson: There is a collection of different measures that we have taken. The first, around 16 and 17-year-olds, I think I mentioned earlier.

Although we have seen since 2008 a halving of the number of 16-year-olds leaving care, there is still enough concern about some of the decisions that are being made for those who are leaving care at 16 or 17 to ratchet up the oversight, and the responsibility for decisions to take those children out of the care of the local authority. That is why we changed the law so that it is the director of children's services who now has to sign that off.

As you know, we have recently legislated on staying put in foster care; 75% of the children we are talking about are in foster care. I was in Staffordshire last week to see the social work practice there of Evolve YP, and they told me of two young people in particular they are working with, aged 17, who are living in foster care and will now benefit from that change. It will be interesting to see how many take that new opportunity beyond the age of 18. I have also mentioned personal advisers and the changes we will make to the statutory guidance, so that even if you are not in education and training between the ages of 21 and 25

but are looking to get into education and training, you should be given the assistance of a personal adviser, should you so wish, to support you in doing exactly that.

I am conscious that young people who are leaving care do not want some of the very arbitrary markers that we put in the ground for them always to be the decision-maker as to whether they receive one service or another. I think we would all agree that we would much prefer to have an exit out of care that is tapered in a way that supports that young person's needs.

Q213 Chair: You lost me, Minister. "Arbitrary markers in the ground dictating"—I did not understand.

Mr Timpson: The age of 18 or 21. Just because you hit an age, you move on. An example was given in evidence; I think the question was put that if you are halfway through a school year, and you are about to take exams, just beyond your 16th, 17th or 18th birthday, surely it can't be right for you to be suddenly pushed out of your stable accommodation. I completely agree with that sentiment.

The guidance is clear that this should not be happening. But as Mr Whittaker has just said in my ear, unfortunately it is still happening and, again, it is completely unacceptable to all of us. The damage it does to that young person, not only to their educational prospects but their confidence and wider aspects of their life can be immeasurable. All we can do is make clear what the law is and that, through inspection, it is being complied with and meeting those young people's needs. If it is not, we need to see improvement, whether through central Government intervention or not.

Q214 Neil Carmichael: I take the point about arbitrary ages and so on, but current legislation provides leaving care services for all former relevant children to the age of 25 if they are in full-time education or training. In an earlier answer you said that those over 21 would be helped if they were going to go into training, but what about those who are not in training or education and are not going anywhere? Surely they need assistance beyond 21 as well.

Mr Timpson: Yes, and the intention and guidance is to include them as those who could benefit from the support of a personal adviser. I know that sometimes it is easy to categorise young people in the neat boxes that we create for them in Westminster, but I prefer to see it from their point of view and concentrate more on what their ambitions and aspirations are, very much as we have done with the special educational needs reforms. In those circumstances, surely it is incumbent upon us to make sure that they get the support that they need, and not just because they are in education or training. I would want those who we colloquially call NEETs to be able to benefit from the support of a personal adviser up to the age of 25 as well, should they be trying to get some of that ambition realised during that period of their life.

Q215 Chair: So this is an announcement, effectively, this morning—

Mr Timpson: It is something that I am intending to do, but the guidance will be published very shortly.

Q216 Chair: Right. Because there was the anomaly that those who were in education or training had leaving care service support and those who were not got it only to 21 as opposed to 25. And you have said that personal advisers will be extended to all young people, whether in education or training or not, to 25. Is that right?

Mr Timpson: Yes, if they have a clear ambition to get back into some form of education or training. They also need to be given clear advice from the local authority that they have the option of a personal adviser, because, as we were discussing before, there is no point in saying that they are eligible for one if they do not know about it. If they are NEET but want to try to do something about it, they should be able to have a personal adviser to help and support them.

Q217 Chair: How is that evidenced? These hard to reach people may well be at the point of despair or in a spiral of drug addiction and criminality for all we know. They might not be evidencing much in the way of a clear willingness to do this, but that is all the more reason why they need a certain amount of support and intervention that shows them that perhaps there is another way. We are not going to do it again, are we, where the people most in need are the ones who do not get the support? Is that because they are a waste of time and not worth the investment? Who will get this support and who will not?

Mr Timpson: In fact it is the contrary—it is trying to ensure that those who do need that extra support do get it. There will be those between the ages of 21 and 25 who are in employment, who have moved on in life and are living independently—they may have formed a partnership and had their own family—and for them a personal adviser may not be of huge benefit. Whereas those who are struggling, and so far have not had statutory guidance written in a way that benefits them, are the ones that I want to capture.

Q218 Chair: You said something about clear intent that I am trying to work out. Let's take a young woman who has had a child and is living on benefits who might not be evidencing any clear intention of doing anything much apart from living on benefits and looking after a child. How do we ensure that she receives personal advice to help her and her child have a more fulfilling life?

Mr Timpson: There are two obvious ways to try to ensure—as far as we can—that that happens. One is that the pathway plan is up to scratch and of sufficient quality that it ensures that that direction is set out within the plan—

Q219 Chair: So will every 22-year-old, young single mother on benefits who has left care have a pathway plan?

Mr Timpson: If they have left care, they will have a pathway plan. It also goes back to the point that we were discussing earlier around relationships. That is why it is essential that these young vulnerable people have someone who is still in their lives who bridges that period from care to out of care and who can have those conversations with them about where their life is heading, what they want to do with it and what they want to concentrate their time on. Without that connection and that trust with someone else, it will be harder to find out what it is that they are seeking to achieve.

Q220 Chair: We are going to struggle to get clarity on this now. I do not know whether it would be possible for you to write to us. You are planning to do something, but you cannot tell us the specifics until you have thrashed it out.

Mr Timpson: That is right. I am hoping that it will be a fairly short period of time until something more public and prosaic can be presented.

Q221 Neil Carmichael: Are you planning any steps to avoid the situation where someone would have to leave care during an academic year? That would obviously be disruptive to his or her studies.

Mr Timpson: We discussed this just a few moments ago. The guidance is clear that where a young person is halfway through an academic year and has exams coming up, they should not be leaving their placement during that period.

Q222 Chair: Are you going to do anything additional? That is Neil's point.

Mr Timpson: I will go back and look again at how clear it is. I think that it is very clear. I think it is more an issue of the delivery and enforcement of that statutory guidance. I am happy to undertake—

Q223 Chair: How old is the statutory guidance?

Mr Timpson: It is from 2011.

Q224 Chair: Three years on, we are still hearing that it is going on. From anecdote, we cannot tell how often it happens, but to have something that disruptive—I have a child taking exams this week, and I know how stressed she is—coming in the middle of exams is outrageous.

Mr Timpson: What I should say is that on the back of that guidance, which was the work of my predecessor, Tim Loughton, I have written to every director of children's services, not only to set out everything that we are doing in central Government to support care leavers, but to remind them of their responsibilities. There has been, as we know in relation to the setting up home allowance, a significant increase in the minimum amount that they are now committed to spending. It is clearly another area that I need to take up with the ADCS.

Neil Carmichael: We think that it possibly needs to be strengthened, because of the evidence of disruption for some.

Q225 Craig Whittaker: Minister, I am going to pontificate about the spending on the Staying Put agenda, as you would expect me to do. Several of the witnesses that we have had before us have disagreed with your position, and that of the Secretary of State, on the quality of children's homes. Can you tell us more specifically what needs to change and in how many homes before you consider extending Staying Put?

Mr Timpson: I do not think it is a pure numbers game, where if you hit a certain numbers of children's homes at a specific Ofsted inspection level, that somehow is the point

to extend Staying Put. It is more complex than that, and that is reflected in the many changes that we are undertaking to reform children's homes. I was struck by the young people I met recently who went before the Social Justice Cabinet Committee. I think they were the first people to give evidence to that Committee, and they were clear about the other impacts that happen at the time of life from 18 to 21, which are not just about accommodation, but financial management, dealing with debt and how to access other universal services. I would want to think about it in that way, rather than purely thinking about accommodation.

When it comes to the appropriate time to push the boundaries of Staying Put into other areas of care placements, I think I said during an Adjournment debate that I would do it in a heartbeat if I was confident it would provide a better prospect for every young person who needs residential care for their placement. We are not at that stage yet. We commissioned the work from the National Children's Bureau and from the Who Cares Trust, which I understand Natasha Finlayson has explained is under way and is making progress, to get over some of those legal and practical barriers—I know that Sir Martin Narey shares this view—that we need to overcome. But I have also said that I don't think they are insurmountable.

Q226 Chair: Is there any estimate on cost? How much does it cost to extend Staying Put?

Mr Timpson: I don't have a figure to hand. I do know that we have spent £1 billion a year on residential care. That is for about 9% of children who are in care. So there are other issues around the commissioning of those services and whether the decisions that are being made are getting the best value, not just financially, but for the young people in terms of quality.

Q227 Chair: The argument is that we are not sufficiently confident of the standards and that is why we are not extending it. That sounds like a weak argument. You have just given a fuller and subtler version. Some people out there might suspect that maybe it is just the cost that is a key factor. That is a perfectly legitimate concern of the Government. Would it be ruinously expensive? You are taking a very expensive service. The average cost is £200,000 per child in residential care. That varies enormously. If you extend it you are talking about a lot of money. To what extent in a time of austerity are we struggling to justify the money? No one is talking about money. Everyone is talking about other things. I just want to know whether the money is a factor.

Mr Timpson: Based on the figures I have just given you about the overall cost, clearly money has to be a factor to be taken into consideration. You cannot ignore that. When we extended the Staying Put arrangements for all foster care we found £40 million of new money over three years to pay for it. Of course it is a consideration. One of the reasons why one of the two strands in the innovation programme is around adolescents and their care and accommodation, is because we think we can get more out of what residential care homes currently offer. We should be more ambitious for how they can be used in the example I gave around the hub model, "No Wrong Door" in North Yorkshire. There is money that we are making available from the Department, despite the entrenched financial period that we are going through right across Government to try to promote different and more effective ways of residential care playing a greater part within the care system.

Q228 Craig Whittaker: I want to take you back to what you said earlier. Let me be quite blunt with you. Roger Morgan's report in 2012 clearly said that 46% of young people feel as though they are pushed out of care when they don't feel they are ready. We already know, because we discussed it this morning, that 11% of young people live in unsuitable accommodation when they are pushed out of care. Is what you are saying that we are not prepared to extend Staying Put because of these homes that are not of a standard, but that it is acceptable to push them out of a regulated home scenario and put them into an unregulated home scenario?

Mr Timpson: What is not acceptable is to move a child or young person out of residential care without having properly planned—set against their needs—where they move on to.

Q229 Craig Whittaker: You are the Minister. While all the changes and the pilots are taking place you have an opportunity, as a short-term measure, to let them stay put if they so require. But you are not doing that. What we are doing is pushing them out into places like B and Bs and hostels which are totally unacceptable.

Mr Timpson: I think we share the same ambition, which, as I tried to articulate earlier, is for young people leaving care to do so in a way and over a period of time that best reflects their needs and what they are seeking to achieve in life while providing them with safety, security and stability set against their maturity and the risks to them, so that they do not fail. That ambition extends to not simply saying, as I put it rather inelegantly earlier around arbitrary staging posts, "Because you've hit 18, all bets are off and you now need to move on to adult services." What I want to do, as I hope I have demonstrated with the other changes that we have made in this area, is to have a much more tapered approach to young people leaving care, so that we do not hit the cliff edges that have existed in the past. You could argue that there is always a cliff edge, because there are ages at which we have to say that the legislation is directly related to, but I agree with something that the Chairman said in the previous session, which was that by pushing the age up from 18 to 21, you give those young people more opportunity to gain maturity and resilience, so that they have a better prospect of succeeding.

Q230 Craig Whittaker: I absolutely share and appreciate your ambitions, which are a step in the right direction, but my question was clear. While all these changes are taking place to look at extending Staying Put, why not let these young people have the opportunity to stay put, rather than put them in an unregulated accommodation status, which is currently what is happening?

Mr Timpson: That is the purpose of both updating the transitions guidance and, more importantly in many ways, the innovation programme. We want new providers to come forward seeking to do exactly that, so that we do not find ourselves falling back on the traditional approaches.

Q231 Craig Whittaker: But what about young people in the meantime? It will take time to get the innovation programme pilots up and running and the round tables that you are holding to consider some of the hurdles that we need to overcome will also take time. You

have said previously that it would take a year to do. What about the young people now? Why don't we just let them stay put for the minute until we come up with a different model?

Mr Timpson: Because of the issues that I have raised around the reforms that are already under way in residential care and around some of the legal and practical barriers that exist, which we are seeking to try to surmount.

Chair: Thank you. Shall we ask about “staying close”?

Q232 Craig Whittaker: Yes. We saw in Ipswich a scenario where they were implementing a “staying close” agenda, basically meaning that young people can move out of care but remain close to the care home. What can the Government do to enhance and progress that in policy, because it seems to work really well?

Mr Timpson: I have not had the benefit of visiting and it may be something that I ought to go and see, because it sounds like exactly the sort of thing that we have been looking to encourage through the innovation programme. It has some similarities to the north Yorkshire hub that I was talking about earlier. In the changes that we are making to residential care on the back of the “out of sight, out of mind” inquiries that took place, we have ensured that the rules around out-of-area placements have been tightened. When it comes to those moving out of care and keeping those links and relationships going, there is a good case for looking at how we can enhance the prospect of that happening. Some of the bids that we have had into the innovation programme are bang on that particular point, so this is an opportunity for me to encourage others to come forward and do the same.

Q233 Craig Whittaker: How many of the bids that have we had so far into the innovation programme will affect young people?

Mr Timpson: I do not know off the top of my head, but we have had them from right across the board, including local authorities, voluntary groups and new providers seeking to come into this space. It is evolving all the time and more bids are coming in as the programme develops.

Chair: Thank you for your evidence today. We will continue to hold your feet and those of the Government to the fire on looking after these most vulnerable young people. As I think we have made clear, there is room for further improvement, but it is also worth noting that, despite a period of austerity, as you say, and cutbacks in council spending more generally, we are seeing improvements in the number of children being forced out of care at 16 and elsewhere across the board. We need to go further, but it is worth marking the fact that the most vulnerable children in our society have a better deal now than they did previously. Let us hope that they can say that four years from now.

Pat Glass: Some of our children.

Chair: Some. It is always some and never all. Let us hope that we can continue the process and keep the attention on a group of children that it is easy for people to lose sight of. Thank you.