

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Care leavers' transition to adulthood HC 411

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Members present: Meg Hillier (Chair), Mr Richard Bacon, , Harriett Baldwin, Deidre Brock, Kevin Foster, Mr Stewart Jackson, Clive Lewis, Nigel Mills, David Mowat, Teresa Pearce, Karin Smyth, Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

Sir Amyas Morse, Comptroller and Auditor General, Marius Gallaher, Alternate Treasury Officer of Accounts, Adrian Jenner, Director of Parliamentary Relations, National Audit Office, and Ashley McDougall, Director, National Audit Office, were in attendance.

Witnesses: Emma Corbett, Participation Manager, Who Cares? Trust, and Dembo and Emanuel, care leavers, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee. I am Meg Hillier, and I chair the Committee. I am really pleased today to welcome a pre-panel: Emma Corbett, who is the participation manager at the Who Cares? Trust; Dembo, who is a young adult who has experienced the care system; and, similarly, Emanuel. I should explain that we are broadcasting to the nation, so this is your moment on webcast—perhaps on TV, too—for some of our core supporters and fans.

Today we are looking at the issues around care leavers' transition to adulthood. One of the missions of this Committee as the watchdog for taxpayers' money is also to be the watchdog for user experience of Government services and public services. Emanuel and Dembo, thank you very much for agreeing to come along and give evidence. We believe that your voices need to be heard here in this Parliament, by the Department and those who spend taxpayers' money to support both you and people coming after you.

We are really keen to hear from you about your direct experiences of the care system. What you say is recorded—all of it will be transcribed, and there will be a transcript—but it is also privileged information, so you can say what you want. I should warn you that Members may be in and out a bit, as some have to go to other Committees and so on, so don't

be put off by people wandering in and out—it is not that they have suddenly lost interest, it is just how it works. You can see who everyone is round the Committee from their name plates.

We have seen your biographies, but, starting with Emanuel and then Dembo, can I ask you to give us a quick snapshot—maybe three minutes or so—of your experience going through the care system? After that, Anne-Marie will kick off with a couple of questions.

Emanuel: I am Emanuel. I left care at the age of 18. I have had a few good experiences: for example, I lived with my foster carer for 12 years, so I was in a steady placement and was able to learn to cook and clean and stuff. She came with me to the viewing of my flat, so I was able to get advice on what to look out for in a flat, like mould or leaks, because she had the knowledge of what I should look out for.

On the other hand, I am starting to hear about other young people who go to view flats without a social worker, adult or foster carer to give them advice on what to look out for in a flat and then in the future there is a negative effect, because they are lonely and feel uncomfortable in their own flat. Another good experience I have had is that I got to be involved with the Who Cares? Trust and to prepare myself to live independently—I do not want to be in the statistics of young people who are kicked out of their house or evicted, so I made sure that I prepared myself to be on my own.

There are a couple of bad experiences that I have had. I left care while I was still in education. Everyone knows what it's like to move out on your own—you have to wait at home for your deliveries, so while I am in education I am taking days off from school and missing out, so I fall behind in my coursework and am not really catching up. That has had a negative effect on my grades. Another bad thing is that I left earlier than planned. Myself and my foster carer agreed that I could be in the Staying Put policy, but because she could not afford to look after me, everything happened at short notice and I ended up moving out earlier than planned. Everything was messy and there was a lack of planning and communication.

Lastly, I had frequent changes of social workers, so I had to do everything on my own, which was time consuming as well. There was a lack of social workers with experience, so they were confused about what to do, what they could help me with and what my rights were. It was very upsetting to know that I had to do everything on my own, and take a lot of time out for myself and not focus on my education. That was my experience.

Q2 Chair: Before we move on to Dembo, may I clarify something? You talked about your foster carer no longer being able to take you on because of the Staying Put arrangements; that is because the money she would have got would have been £500 a week before you were 18 and then would drop to £150 a week afterwards. Is that right?

Emanuel: Probably, but I am not really sure about how much they get paid—

Chair: Emma's nodding there.

Emma Corbett: Yes.

Emanuel: But apparently it is less.

Q3 Chair: It is quite a big difference, isn't it?

Okay, Dembo, please go ahead.

Dembo: I am going to share two good experiences about living here. When I got to this country, I could not speak English. My foster parents found a school for me to go to and learn English, so for me that was a good experience, because it means now that I can communicate with the wider public, I can speak English and I can raise any concerns that I have.

My other good experience was that I was fortunate enough to get my flat, because it was stable and safe for me. The reason I am mentioning “stable” and “safe” is that when I was living in semi-independent accommodation it was not really good. There was a time when my house was raided by the police, because my neighbours were making noise in the middle of the night. So I was quite happy when I got my flat.

I am going to share two bad experiences, actually. First, I received good support in terms of learning English, but after that I went through the normal route of studying at school, learning and doing my GCSEs and A-levels, and I never had support from my PAs—knowing whether the course I was doing was the right course and whether I was getting the right support for my education. Although they were giving me the fare for my transport, for me that was really bad because if I was doing the wrong course at that time it could really affect my future in the long term.

My other bad experience was this: my case was actually closed without me being aware of it, because I was 21. I thought, when they wrote me a letter, “Yes, I am 21, but”, as I said to my PA, “I am going to dispute this. You might say that this is all right, that you are closing my case because I am 21, but I am not going to university because of my immigration status—you know this, and I know this, so I just want to appeal to your managers.” That is the discussion we had, but suddenly they stopped contacting me and I did not know whether I had a PA—I never got contacted.

So, because I lived an independent life, I thought, “Okay, that’s the life”—I never used to go there and get their support anyway—“and that’s the way it is.” But when I needed them and went back, they said, “We have to reopen your case.” I said, “Well, when was my case closed?” She said, “Oh, we sent you the letter.” I said, “Actually, I have never got a letter from you.” She said, “No, I sent you the letter.” She went to the system to look for the letter. I asked, “Where is the letter?”, and she said, “I might have been on holiday or leave.” I said, “So my case was closed and I was not aware of it.”

Those were the two experiences that I wanted to share.

Q4 Chair: Thank you very much. Emma, did you have any brief comments?

Emma Corbett: No, that’s fine—I am just here to support these guys.

Q5 Mrs Trevelyan: Obviously I know you had a foster carer with whom you had a really good, long-term relationship, but it is really interesting that you both feel your PAs did not really support you in the way that we as politicians feel that they should. They are there in loco parentis, to support you and to help with medical stuff and as you say, getting that school framework right—and in fact, now, supporting you through to 25 if you are staying in or coming back into education at any point. Do you or your friends find that generally the PAs are not communicative enough, or do they not have the skills that you think they need? What is your view on how those PAs are there to support you, as it were?

Emanuel: I am not sure whether you know what local authority I come from—Lambeth—but many young people in my age group have struggled. We have all struggled with our personal advisers and with lack of support and communication. For example, in my experience, I have only been in my own flat for four months, but I have been through so much. I was so shocked, because I had a lack of knowledge about what to do about carbon monoxide. I had no personal adviser, so it was, “Who do I call, or what do I do when there is carbon monoxide?” I never knew how deadly it was. It was very upsetting to know that I had that. If it wasn’t one thing it was another—I had a gas leak and a leak in my bedroom—and when you don’t have a personal adviser there, because they are an agency and they just rotate and they leave, and they don’t really communicate that they are leaving or what your rights are or who you can turn to, it is very frustrating. And I feel like many young people within my local authority feel the same way.

Dembo: I want to share two points on this. I think there are really good PAs who help you and try to help you find your way, but there are PAs there who don’t help you to find your way.

I ended up going to Crown court—by the way, I was found not guilty—for being overcharged with benefit, because I was working. I notified my PAs that I was working 16 hours, because they were paying for my house then, and I gave them my contract letter and everything. They never advised me that because I was working 16 hours—it was not really the 16 hours that was the problem, but the amount of money I was earning could affect my benefit. Because of that, I kept working for over a year. Even though I notified the DWP, I got a letter of investigation from the DWP that it had been overpaying my benefit.

I was shocked when I received that letter, because I had informed my PAs that I was working and I had sent a letter to the DWP and I actually spoke to them. But what really shocked me is that when I went to the investigation, even though my PA promised me that she was going to go with me to the investigation, I found three people who were really investigating me, as if I was really doing something wrong.

I felt shocked, because my PA should be there to support me and give me the right advice. I felt that these other people are not helping me, and I see my PAs as people who should be my parent—if I struggle with something, they are the people who should come and support me. I thought that really they should be the people who should give me the right advice. I was unlucky, because I think I did everything that was right, and that is why I got a not guilty verdict at the court.

The second thing I really wanted to say about this is that PAs should really help us to understand what are our rights and entitlements; if they don't, we will end up losing. That has cost me, and not only in going to court. My second example is that I was left out from going to university, because if my PAs had given me the right advice three years ago, I would have been at university and this year I would have finished studying for my degree. My PAs really did not give me any advice in terms of—because of the immigration status I had then, that meant they could have given me further support to go to university, but they left me out and left me to look for things.

I think mainly my PA did not support me at the investigation because of her case load. She called me in the morning and said, "Oh, Dembo, I can't come to you. I need to go to somebody else who really needs more help than you." And I thought, "Oh God", because I came out as an independent young person and that was why I was left out. I think we need to give them more training and assess them to see how they could really assist young people with the information they are giving them, and telling us what is the right thing that we need to do. We should not be finding our own way for ourselves, because that is what they are there for and what they are paid to do.

Q6 Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Hello, Dembo and Emanuel. This is anecdotal; by that, I mean that it is individual stories that you are telling us. We cannot take everything from those stories, but they are perhaps indicative of what is happening on occasion. What does your gut tell you is the reason for some of the things that did not work out so well? Was it the incompetence of an individual? Was it chaos in their department? You said, "I had sent a letter, but she went back and she couldn't find it." Do you think it is because they are highly stressed and overworked?

Obviously, you spend more time with these guys than I ever have, so I am just wondering if you can perhaps give us what your gut tells you is the reason for this. Is it systemic—something happening in their department, perhaps? Are they moaning about being overworked and not really being able to keep up? Or do you feel it is something else—individuals who weren't performing? What does your gut tell you?

Emanuel: Well, Clive, I think it's a bit of both. For example, I had a social worker previously who went through a tragic thing; I can't really say what it was, but it was to do with death. She only had a week off to cope with what happened, and then she came back to work. I could tell that she wasn't really on top of her job, but I didn't want to tell her, "Can you do this for me, because it's affecting me?" Even though it was unprofessional for her to tell me her personal business, I noticed, and I had to back off and deal with what I had to deal with on my own. I thought that maybe social workers should get support from their managers. Maybe there's poor management within what is going on.

Maybe they should recruit more staff so that they have less of a case load. Sometimes you try to put a social worker in their place—"You should be doing this and it should be done very quickly"—but they should have more staff so that young people can get more time with their social workers, because they have less of a case load.

Q7 Chair: You have talked a lot about your PAs and social workers, but one of the key issues in the Report is the whole Staying Put approach: the Government are saying you can stay with your foster carer until 21, if the foster carer can afford it. It doesn't apply to residential care, which I think is where you were, Dembo. What would your preferred environment be, and that of the friends you know through the care system? Would you prefer to have stayed with your foster carer rather than having the hassle of the independent flat? Are there pros and cons both ways for you?

Emanuel: That was my initial plan. Before I was 18, we had a review meeting, and everyone—my social worker, myself and my foster carer—agreed that it was okay for me to stay on until I finished college. The problem changed after I was 18, maybe because it was new for my foster carer to have an 18-year-old and she wasn't aware of the changes to her pay. When her payments changed, it started to have a negative effect on me, because she kept telling me "I can't do this" and "I can't do that", or "Emanuel, you're going to have to leave now, because I can't afford to look after you."

When I started finding out about rights and what we could have done to prevent me from moving out independently, I found out that maybe we could have sorted out a tenancy thing with my foster carer. I could have applied for housing benefits while living with my foster carer, and that could have supported her financially. I could have lived with her. That was my initial plan, but it was all short notice.

Q8 Chair: It was so rushed, there was no time. Okay. Dembo?

Dembo: I think what we are talking about here is better service for looked-after children from the leaving care team. There are three practical things that I can see would work for other young people out there who are coming to the leaving care stage. One is that we need more training for our PAs, especially about rights and entitlements. If our PAs don't know our rights and entitlements, how are they supposed to help us? That is the first thing. That will also entail them considering how they can care for us and enable us to care for ourselves. At the moment, that is really missing.

There is no point you telling me, "This is what the law says," if you don't tell me in a way that shows consideration for an adult who is worried because he doesn't know what he is doing with his life. Just telling me, "This is the law," and walking off to do what you want to do is not okay. They need to know what our rights and entitlements are and how to show care for us.

Secondly, we need to decrease their case load. Sometimes we lack the chemistry of sitting down with our PAs to discuss what is going on with our lives. At the moment, it is not happening. I hardly see my PAs. I hardly show them into my life. Most of the time they have felt that I was independent and leading an independent life, so I get overlooked. There are so many things that I missed and didn't get that I was entitled to that would have benefited me right now.

Three, I think we need to help young people, when they get a house, with how to support themselves and settle down in their house. It is fair enough to give them a leaving care grant, but the money alone is not going to sort out our problem. I have a friend who has

two kids at the moment; we sit on a children in care council, and we have worked together for about three or four years now. She has been waiting to get a house for four or five years. Now she has got a house, and they have given her a leaving care grant, and she has bought all this stuff—pans and housewares.

For almost two months now I have been going to her house, helping her paint it, which is not to say that I do good work. The problem is that she has been given the leaving care grant and bought all this equipment, but some of that equipment is going to be broken in the house. When I would go to the house, I felt sorry for her. She has two kids and sometimes she actually goes and lives with her friend over the weekend because she wants to run away from the stress.

What we need are PAs who could not just give us the leaving care grant, but support us emotionally and show us how to settle down in our house—give us practical solutions to our problems and not just tell us, “This is the money. Goodbye. You’re off.”

Q9 Nigel Mills: What about your friends from when you were in care? Is your view typical, or were there others who thought, “Great! I’ve reached 18. I’m free. I can do my own thing”? Or were all your peers wanting this kind of support and help?

Dembo: I do think it’s good, when we are 18, to encourage us to live an independent life. I have friends who would not go to their PAs like I would: I really only go to my PAs if I need something. But what we need is this. PAs are really valuable, especially if we face barriers that we cannot cross ourselves. PAs should be the people who are there for us, like a parent or guardian. That is how I see PAs—people who support us and guide us so that at the age of 18 we don’t necessarily need to see them every day, but we know they are there. It’s good to know that somebody is there if you need help and you can go and say, “Actually, this is my problem.”

It’s like a parent. You could go to them and say, “At the moment, I’m struggling to find a college,” and they could give you the right advice. Or you could say, “I’m struggling with my homework,” and they could give you advice, not technically—on the science or the maths of the homework—but by saying, “Okay, have you contacted this person from your school?”

So, do we all need PAs at the age of 18? Probably yes, because we need that parent or guardian. At the moment, I have a friend who has not been in care but they still receive practical advice from their parent, and it really serves them well. I think that’s why we need PAs after the age of 18.

Emanuel: In my case, I did want to live on my own. You get to the age where you want your privacy, and because you’re in care, you have the power to say, “I want to get my own flat and live in my own space.” But in my case and for some young people like me, because we are in education and we know that as a young person on your own, you’re going to have to deal with bills and rent, we all want to stay in our foster placements until we finish education, because we just want to solely focus on our education and make sure we succeed. In most cases, young people want to move out after they finish education, so they can focus

on what they want their flat to look like and have guidance and support in other areas as well—on career options, as well.

Q10 Nigel Mills: Yes. I was trying to ask whether the issue was that people in your situation didn't get the help because they didn't want it—they had had enough of the system or something—or they wanted it but it's just not there or not good enough or there's not enough of it, perhaps. It seems to be the latter: you want and value the help, but it's not quite working for you.

Emma Corbett: We find with young people who say that they don't want the help that they will often say, "We've asked for help before and haven't got a good response. We don't feel like it's coming from a caring place. Therefore, we've made the decision that we're going to try to go it alone." It's that, rather than someone saying, "I don't need help—full stop—from anyone." They will choose to find it elsewhere.

Q11 Karin Smyth: Thank you so much for sharing your experience. Could you say a little about the people you were in education with—their links or support to you at this particular time? How were they linking with your PAs and so on?

Emanuel: Sorry; could you repeat that?

Karin Smyth: I don't remember whether you're in a college or a school, or a further education college. Was there any support from them to you and any joining up with your PAs, social workers and so on to help with the education side?

Emanuel: Because I never knew that the college would support me, I kind of did my own thing and just dealt with it on my own. Later on I would tell them, "I'm not going to attend college tomorrow because I have to stay at my flat for a delivery," and they were able to tell the teachers that Emanuel is not going to be able to attend his lesson because he has deliveries, but it didn't really change things in terms of extending my deadlines and making sure that I got to catch up with everyone else and was able to do my work. It was good to notify them, but I don't really think it made much of a difference.

Dembo: The same thing applied to me. I didn't share much with my college, in terms of whether I was in care or leaving, because I really didn't know what the college could offer to me. I didn't seek help, in terms of any conditions I was struggling with at home.

Q12 Karin Smyth: Is that usual? I think the colleges' and further education sector's pastoral care and concern for their students should encompass some of that. Would you say it is usual among your peers that they didn't know, people didn't tell them, or they didn't come in and support them?

Emanuel: A lot of people don't really know about their support. I feel like if I was notified from the beginning—when you enrol and stuff, and tell them you are a looked-after child—I would have turned to them for advice. Later on in the year, I found out that I was entitled to meal tickets. Instead of me using my own money, the college funded me to have

lunch. I never knew that they could do that. There was a week when I didn't have any income support so I had to wait till the next week, and they were able to give me money to help me throughout that week. It would be good if they notified you about your rights and what you are entitled to in the college. I think it would help if they told young people, so they can be open about their situation.

Emma Corbett: There is definitely lots of good practice. In London, often one of the difficulties is that there is a higher turnover of staff than in other areas outside London. That makes a significant difference, because a lot of the rights and entitlements are decided on locally, so a new personal adviser coming from another local authority won't automatically know the entitlements until they have learned from that authority. High case loads and maybe not much support makes that difficult, so the young people can slip between the net and not get that information. Finding out the information and being able to access the support successfully would make a real, positive difference.

Q13 Mrs Trevelyan: A last question from me. From what you are saying, my feeling is that you feel that the people around you don't really have the right skills—or, as you say, Emma, the toolkit—when they arrive in a new place to be as useful to you as we are paying for them to be. That is what we want them to be for you. Sitting behind you are the Government officials who run this stuff. What would you say the Government need to do better to make it work for you and the children who are coming up behind you, so their support framework is better?

Emanuel: I have got several points.

Mrs Trevelyan: Crack on—he's right behind you.

Emanuel: I'll try to keep it short. My first solution is that they should put more money into children's services, especially the ones that are inadequate. I think it is disgusting to find out that a children's service is inadequate. I know there is satisfactory, then poor, then inadequate. For children, that is terrible. There should be more money so they can support the children. They should give more money to local authorities so they can afford more social workers with less of a case load. The young people want more contact time with their social workers and more conventional support. If the social worker or personal adviser has less of a case load, they will have more time to focus on the young people and fill it up with what they need to do.

My next point is that local authorities that give young people less than £2,000 to set up their home are disgraceful. I feel like that is breaking the law. I struggled to set up my house with only £2,000, and to find out that young people are getting less than that is crazy. My house doesn't even feel like a house. With £2,000, it is hard to make your home a home. Especially if you come from a background where you have been moved from placement to placement, you want to be in a home where you feel comfortable.

My next point is about the Staying Put policy. I know you lot put it in place, but for it to work and be successful I feel like you lot should put more money into foster carers, so they can afford to look after the young people and so it would be effective for the same policy to work. Another point is that if you know that local authorities such as Lambeth are inadequate,

you should intervene and watch over them to make sure that they actually do improve, because a children's service shouldn't just be swept to the side—it should be held accountable. That is all I have to say.

Dembo: My first point is pretty simple: I know that you are listening, but we should listen more. Ten years ago, I'm sure, somebody else was in the same position as me here, saying the same thing that Emanuel and I are saying. So it is time that we listened, but also that we act.

Secondly, I think it is disgraceful that if someone has been looked after by a local authority until they are 21 years old and they are not in education, employment or training, we close their case because they are not in education or employment, but we continue to support those who are in education, employment or training. That is disgraceful. If someone is not in education, employment or training at 21, that is when we need to support them more. Let's face it, if we all in this room have children, we are not going to kick them out of the house at 21 years old if they are not in education, employment or training. For me, if you are 21 years old and NEET—that is the term we use—that means that the system is not working. Whatever is making the system not work—I don't have the answers because I do not work there—they need to start fixing that.

My third point is that we need to set up practical and emotional support when young people are given a house. It is great that people get a house—it is wonderful—but if we don't give them the right support, do we want them to lose that house two or three years down the line so that they have to start all over again? We need to do that.

Fourthly, we need to set up realistic expectations for our PAs. I do not know why this is the case, but I just couldn't believe it when I heard three or four months ago that PAs don't have to have any training or formal qualification. It is time now that we set up a training plan for our PAs so that they can give us the right advice and give out the right information about rights and entitlements, and so that they can care for us and give us emotional support, because we really need it.

I know that one day, no matter what happens, there is a limit and you have to stop caring for us, so we really need to make sure that the people who are looking after us know the information, advice and support they can give us, so that we have a realistic expectation and time frame in which young people who leave care can live an independent life and serve this country.

Q14 Chair: Thank you very much. I have a couple of quick questions. As it happens, you are both young men. On balance, were there enough male role models as you went through the care system? Was there any imbalance—were more men than women or more women than men involved in your upbringing?

Emanuel: In my case, there were more women. I had two female foster carers, and most of my social workers were female as well, so yeah, I had a lack of male influence and male role models.

Q15 Chair: Do you think that that is an issue? Was that a problem?

Emanuel: Well, because I came from a background where I didn't really have anyone to look up to, it didn't really affect me that much, but that is how I feel.

Dembo: I think I had the right balance. I have had both males and females looking after me, and some were good and some were bad.

Chair: Okay, so it was not a particular issue.

Thank you very much indeed. I really appreciate your coming in and giving evidence with such candour. We will make sure that you get a copy of the report, which we will be bringing out in the next few weeks, after this hearing. Thank you for what you have given us, because we are now going to ask the permanent secretary and his officials questions about the report. First, we will have a brief break to change the witnesses.

Witnesses: Paul Kissack, Director General, Children's Services, Department for Education, Alison O'Sullivan, President, Association of Directors of Children's Services, and Chris Wormald, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education, gave evidence.

Chair: We now move on to the second panel of witnesses for our hearing on care leavers' transition to adulthood. Before we start, I want to introduce Harriett Baldwin, who is the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and also a member of this Committee. Welcome, Harriett. I think this is your only outing here of the year—you are very welcome any time, but this is a formal appearance. Would you like to say anything to the Committee?

Harriett Baldwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I congratulate you on being elected as Chair, and all the members of the Committee. Apparently, I am formally a member of the Committee, but I will let you have all the formal sessions. I just wanted to come along and explain how we interact with you.

Obviously, with your Committee having a very long-standing role in ensuring value for money, there is the need for a Treasury Minister to support you in that role, so that is what I will be doing. We can work together in terms of finding and ensuring value for money. I understand that in the past, about 90% of the recommendations that you have made in reports have been things that we have taken forward as a Government. We also—and me as a Treasury Minister in particular—have to keep strict track of the Treasury minutes that you get from other Departments, in terms of the recommendations that come through. We take recommendations for implementation very seriously in the Treasury. I am aware that I have to sign off with the National Audit Office very frequently, in terms of some of the arm's length bodies that report to Treasury, and that we work very closely together on a lot of the recommendations. We are very keen in the Treasury on transparency of public spending information and think it is incredibly important in terms of accountability for public money.

We also welcome the NAO's recognition of the Treasury's continuing commitment to improve the whole of Government accounts. The Treasury has taken steps to make sure that the disclosures in the whole of Government accounts are more detailed and transparent. We

will continue to raise the profile of the work that is done in this Committee as much as we can and work with you as your partners, in terms of taking heed of the recommendations on value for money.

I wanted to come along and explain my role to other members who may have been a bit mystified by seeing my name on the Committee, and to explain to members of the public how it works and how we work together. That is all I wanted to say. As you say, Chairman, I can come along at any time, but I probably won't. Thank you very much for having me.

Chair: Thank you very much, Harriett. I know the Minister has some pressing ministerial business to attend to, so we shall leave her to go and look at value for money—with that hat on—while we move on to our main panel.

I welcome Paul Kissack, from the Department for Education, Chris Wormald, the permanent secretary at the Department for Education, and Alison O'Sullivan—forgive me, Alison, while I check your exact title. You are the president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services—I read the initials and I always get jumbled up. We had a very good pre-witness session, as I think you'll agree, Chris.

I will hand straight over to Anne-Marie Trevelyan, who is our rapporteur for this session, to kick off the questioning.

Q16 Mrs Trevelyan: Thank you for coming to see us. The challenge of getting joined-up thinking across Government should never be underestimated. As a new Member, I am acutely conscious of the silo issue. I commend the Ministers who set up the strategy and the Department for trying to take it forward so that we can improve the lives of children in our care as a Government and a nation. However, the NAO Report did not fill me with confidence. The evidence from Ofsted's reviews indicates pretty poor outcomes and poor support frameworks in existence. Do you think that the care leaver strategy, which was set in motion in 2013, is actually working?

Chris Wormald: We think it was a very important step but we think there is a lot more to do. We fully agreed the National Audit Office Report and agree with the picture it paints of the care leavers system, which we do need to make improvements on going forward, not least in the areas that you mentioned. We do think that the previous, coalition Government made some very important steps which we expect to lead to improvements in future, but we accept that there is considerably more to do.

On the care leavers strategy, specifically, I think I am right in saying this is the first ever cross-Government strategy on care leavers—and that is a very important step in itself. We were pleased, when we published the "One Year On" report, that all or the vast majority of the commitments set out in that strategy had been implemented; but they were first steps, not the whole story. While the new Government has a lot of decisions to take in this area, we will want to continue the approach of cross-Government working and indeed to go further.

The Prime Minister has already taken one big, important step in establishing a ministerial taskforce on the child protection system, which, although not specifically on the subject of the day—

Chair: Can we stick to the subject?

Chris Wormald: It is a very big symbol showing that this whole area, and cross-Government working, is important. We expect to carry that forward in this Parliament.

Q17 Mrs Trevelyan: Thank you. Paul, do you think the strategy is working so far?

Paul Kissack: I certainly think it is working in the sense that every Department has lined up to a commitment and has implemented those commitments. Indeed, since the “One Year On” document there have been further elements of progress from different Departments implementing further aspects that were not in the strategy. So, in a sense, it is creating momentum across a number of Departments.

I agree entirely with the Permanent Secretary that now, at the start of a Parliament, is a good time to be taking stock of how much further we can go. We obviously have a spending review coming up as well, which will help to set the parameters of some of the ambitions. One of the first steps that the returning Minister, Edward Timpson, took when coming back into post was to write to all his ministerial colleagues about care leavers specifically. We have already had a couple of meetings of senior officials across Whitehall, to start sketching out some options for addressing issues that we are aware of, which you have just heard about from young adults, which are in the report.

Chris Wormald: There is one more thing I should like to emphasise about what the previous Government did. The other very big step forward was having specific Ofsted judgments on care leavers from 2013, for the first time ever. As it was hinted at in the witness hearing, it is not the greatest story and there is an enormous amount of improvement to go, but this is the first time we have had a clear picture of where there is excellent practice and where it needs to be improved. While that shows how much we and our partners in local government still have to do in this area, it gives us much firmer basis for going forward.

Q18 Mrs Trevelyan: Alison, do you feel, sitting at the sharp end with children’s services, that this strategy is working in practice, that the commitments were laid out and that all the Departments have bought into it—which is what we are hearing—and that you guys at the sharp end making it happen are able to make it work?

Alison O’Sullivan: I think it is a mixed picture, as has been acknowledged. I have been a director—I am in my 10th year in Kirklees and am representing all directors and senior leaders here today. I think we would all acknowledge that there is a way to go, but I have been around long enough to have seen significant improvements. I think that we view the 2013 strategy as a good baseline, but even in the last couple of years things have moved on.

So we are seeing a more diverse group of young people leaving care. We know that the majority of young people are coming into care between 10 and 15 years old, as described in the report, and their needs are very complex. I have been in the business quite a long while: it is getting more complicated and we are facing different and new challenges, so there is lots to do. If we could get to a point where the spirit of the 2013 strategy were fully

implemented—I know everybody is committed to doing that at local level as well as national—that would represent improvement, but I think there are new things to take into account now as well.

Q19 Chair: Can I chip in? Alison, you talk about it being a mixed picture, but I think maybe you are being a bit polite. Chris, you talked about the Ofsted inspection. I would not want to speak for the whole Committee yet, because we have not published our report, but although that inspection regime is really important and very much to be welcomed, two thirds of care-leavers' services require improvement or are inadequate, according to Ofsted. You heard our previous witnesses say, more eloquently than any of us could say, that that is just not acceptable. What are you going to do about it?

Chris Wormald: We are doing an extensive set of things, which I might ask Paul to describe. On the Ofsted inspection, the purpose of having a separate inspection judgment was to shine a light on this extremely important area in a way that had not been done before. I do not think we were expecting to find a great picture, which is exactly what the Ofsted reports have shown. That is a very important step forward in itself.

The Department does a range of things to seek to improve performance at local authority level, and the Department is working very closely with the local authority world itself. I do not think there is a difference between the Department and local government in our assessment of where the services are or of what needs to be done to improve them. I do not think it is one of those areas. Paul, do you want to outline the approach?

Paul Kissack: We take a slightly different approach depending on where a local authority is in the performance spectrum. I entirely agree with Emanuel that the Department should intervene if a local authority is inadequate, and we do. We will have a formal intervention in all local authorities that have an overall “inadequate” judgment. We are currently intervening in 24 local authorities, so we have quite a hard edge. Depending on the severity of the failure, we will moderate our intervention accordingly. At the very most severe end, in a couple of local authorities we have removed, or are in the process of removing, children's services from local authority control.

Q20 Nigel Mills: Is that overall failure?

Paul Kissack: We intervene on the basis of the overall mark. There are two limiting judgments: one for safeguarding services and one for looked-after children's services. The care leavers sub-judgment feeds into the looked-after children judgment. Four local authorities have an inadequate care leavers service but have a better than inadequate overall judgment, so they would not automatically qualify. As it happens, we are formally intervening in two of those local authorities, partly because they used to be inadequate and are in the process of coming out of an intervention. There are two local authorities in which we are not formally intervening—Southampton and Bristol—but we are having ongoing discussions and the Minister is in correspondence with those local authorities specifically on the quality of their care leavers services. In a sense, although we do not formally intervene in those cases, we are intervening to some degree in every authority that has an inadequate care leavers service.

Q21 Mrs Trevelyan: To extend that, it is excellent that you decided to make this a specific marker for Ofsted, but if Ofsted goes into a school that comes out as requiring improvement, you come down on it like a ton of bricks within 36 hours—I have experienced that as a governor. That is a good thing, because identifying where there is failure is the whole point of Ofsted. These are the most vulnerable children that we, as a nation, are taking on and looking after. You send Ofsted in now, which is a good thing, but you are not necessarily doing anything about a local authority that is inadequate or requires improvement. You have made a good judgment, and presumably the Minister decided that this was a necessary thing to look at specifically, but we are still at a point where care leavers are stepping into the big wide world and, as we have heard, they invariably do not have as much support as any of our children will get from us. You identify a marker, but you are still not sending in the troops immediately to support the most vulnerable children. I find that surprising.

Chris Wormald: Just to be clear, we apply exactly the same principle as we do in schools. We intervene on the overall judgment of a school, not on the individual sub-judgments. The principle behind that is very clear. We take a decision on whether an institution, be it a school or a local authority, has the capacity for self-improvement. If that is the case, they should be supported to self-improve. If they have lost that capacity, there will be an external intervention. In both cases, we intervene on the basis of the overall judgment of the service, not on any of the individual sub-judgments. I think it is fair to say that intervening in local authorities, because of the scope of their responsibilities, is considerably more complicated than intervening in a school, and it is not to be done lightly, but the overall judgment that we take is one of “Is this an area that is capable of self-improvement?” If it is, the result of the Ofsted judgment ought to be that the local authority itself should deal with the issues, possibly with support from Alison and colleagues; if it is not, we will ask whether an external intervention is required. We apply the same principle.

Q22 Mrs Trevelyan: Alison, do you feel that is right? Having created the strategy with that framework, and having asked Ofsted to look at it specifically, do you think it is a good thing not necessarily to make provision for a local authority that is failing that particularly vulnerable young adult group?

Alison O’Sullivan: I suspect that one of the things that will come out when we look at this in a renewed way will be a sharpening of intervention in the worst circumstances. I also think it is important that we look across the spectrum of performance. I think there is scope, as highlighted in the Report, to make greater use of some of the existing data and mechanisms for oversight. We would welcome more of a spotlight on this particular area. It is a personal passion of mine, and I am trying to use my role to highlight it. If we can get more of a spotlight on this area, we will be able to identify areas where things can be done to improve.

Q23 David Mowat: Just reflecting on your remarks, it seems to me that if some 5% or 10% of local authorities were inadequate or required improvement, your answers would be reasonable. You would go in and look at those 5% or 10% and do what needed to be done.

But here we have a situation in which it is not 5% or 10%, but two thirds. If it is two thirds, that implies there is an issue that is not just a local authority issue. It implies there is a systematic issue, possibly a central issue.

Chris Wormald: No, we fixed on part of our answer, but not the whole answer.

Q24 David Mowat: Would you accept that analysis? If it is two thirds that are failing, that is different from 10%.

Chris Wormald: It is not two thirds that are failing. To be clear, “requires improvement” means what it says on the tin. This is a service that requires improvement. “Inadequate” is what is normally described as failing. That said, I agree with the spirit of your question: we had only answered half of what we are doing.

There are two sides to what we do, working with our local government colleagues. There is intervening in absolute failure, which everyone would agree is necessary, and there is what we are seeking to do to improve the system as a whole, which comes to your point about two thirds requiring improvement. Failing is not what anyone wants to see. There are a set of things that we are trying to do to improve the system as a whole, which are not intervening in individual local authorities.

The bit I would not agree with is that central Government intervention is not always the right answer to improvement. It has an important role, particularly in absolute failure, but national Government intervening again and again in local government does not in the end create the kind of system that we want.

Q25 David Mowat: Of these Ofsted reports—you said there is a distinction between what local government people could learn and what central Government could learn—what in your view are the main things that central Government need to have learnt?

Chris Wormald: What we have learnt from what we have done around shining a light on this through Ofsted is first, the picture nationally, which it is very important to have discovered. Secondly, there is the variability pointed to in the National Audit Office Report. There are some excellent things going on in individual parts of local government, but the variability is too high.

Thirdly—this came out of what your previous witnesses said, and from various other groups of care leavers I have seen as part of my preparation for this hearing—there is the importance at the moment of how good the individuals are who are dealing with individual care leavers. I have spoken to some care leavers who have said that they have had a very good time because they have had a good personal adviser, and others who have said it was nothing like so good, as you heard. People’s experiences have varied as people have changed. When you look across the Government’s approach to improving social care, that focus on the professionalism and quality of individuals and how they are overseen, and whether it is consistent, is our biggest single issue. So there is a whole set of things.

Q26 David Mowat: If you take the point, you used quite a good word then: variability. Clearly, there is massive variability. Whose fault is that?

Chris Wormald: I am not sure that is a question I can answer. On that variability, we only have information from the last couple of years, because we have only just shone a light on it. I suspect, but I could not prove, that that variability has been there for decades.

Q27 David Mowat: Sure. It may well have been. Clearly, it implies we are not learning from the best and so on. I asked whose fault was it and you said you were not sure you could answer it. Is there somebody else who could answer that?

Chris Wormald: No, I am not sure there is. When I discussed this matter with—

Q28 David Mowat: Is it nobody's fault?

Chris Wormald: No. That is not the same. Some of the other discussions I have had were with one of the UK's leading academics on this subject: Professor Stein from the University of York. There is no country he has found anywhere in the OECD that believes it has a good system and has cracked this issue—variability appears to be an issue internationally. It appears that this is something that the state collectively has not done as well on as it should have in the past. I am not sure I can say that that is the fault of a particular set of people, but, one way or another, the state as a whole has not done as well as it should have across this issue.

Chair: A couple of people want to come in, but I want to go back to Anne-Marie, because she has been doing some work on this.

Q29 Mrs Trevelyan: What you say absolutely crystallises our feeling, given our experiences of our own local children's services departments. Have Government ever really taken this issue seriously? That is cause for real concern—it certainly has been for me locally, on a number of issues.

The Report, which I think is excellent, highlights that crystallising point at which young people who have had the most difficult childhoods—supported, we hope, through foster care or a good residential home, but perhaps not—make this really difficult transition. It is as if they leave children's services and the Department for Education's oversight and they fall out of the system completely. If they are lucky, their social service has a good framework.

However, we have seen something interesting. The Department has been very good with the pupil premium funding, and it has brought in this really impressive Education Endowment Foundation. You, as a Department, have said, "Let's look at the best. We value this. We think the pupil premium is a big investment financially. It is really important."

I would like to see that commitment in children's services—leaving aside funding for more social workers and all the issues that are national, very expensive and difficult to solve.

The most vulnerable children, whom we have taken into our care, say they need—and the people who are clearly not doing a good enough job to support them need—a framework. Those people need guidance on how they can actually do the best by those children. I wonder whether you are even considering creating something like that so that we can leap to a much better place—40-odd per cent. of care leavers still being NEETs is just wrong.

Chris Wormald: We might come back to NEETs, and I will ask Paul to talk about what we are doing around good practice. We have, of course, done a lot within the pupil premium for this group. There is pupil premium plus, which is very early, but it will hopefully be a successful intervention in dealing with this.

On the heart of your point, in addition to that variability we lack examples of great practice to draw on. When I look at the school side of my responsibilities, it is clear that we have never—even where we have variability in the system—lacked excellent examples that people could look at. We do not have the same body of knowledge across social care, for one reason or another, and that does need to be addressed.

We have done a number of things in that field. In particular, there is the innovation programme, which we have spoken to the Committee about before. Paul do you want to outline what we are doing?

Paul Kissack: Our starting point is the statutory guidance, which sets out a set of practice standards that have to be adhered to, which is good, and the NAO Report talks about good guidance in this area supporting the statutory framework.

Beyond that, and picking up the permanent secretary's point about not knowing what really good practice looks like, we are learning much more about that from the Ofsted inspections, where there are a number of good local authorities and one outstanding local authority, Trafford. Not surprisingly, when that occurs, everybody wants to visit Trafford, and Trafford are invited to speak at every national conference going, which is pretty much how they are spending quite a lot of their time at the moment—rightly so, because that helps to transmit practice across the sector.

Ofsted themselves have an improvement function. They run seminars called “Getting to good”, which are particularly aimed at the “requires improvement” group, who are outside our intervention, but who need to make that step up. With local authorities, Ofsted have run two seminars on care leavers in every region of the country to spread the best practice they have seen.

Q30 Chair: Do local authorities have to go to those if they require improvement?

Paul Kissack: No, I don't think local authorities are required to attend seminars by Ofsted. I may be wrong, but we don't struggle to get attendees.

Alison O'Sullivan: It is not compulsory, but a local authority is very wise to attend.

Paul Kissack: In addition, Ofsted have a best practice website, which is focused on children's social care. There are examples of innovative practice they have found through doing their inspections. In addition, there is quite a lot of good practice guidance, and there are good practice networks on individual areas of care leaver support. The Ministry of Justice has a care leaver champion, and they have set up a national forum to talk about quality and what is best practice. They have issued guidance across the whole prisons and probation service on best practice, specifically on care leavers.

Referring to the FE college discussion that we had earlier, there has been a quality benchmark run by the Buttle Trust for colleges who are particularly good at opening access to care leavers and supporting them with their particular needs at college. That has now been turned into best practice guidance, which I think was actually issued in the last few weeks. In the next few weeks, CLG guidance on care leaver accommodation—how to develop good pathways on care leaver accommodation—is due to come out. That piece of work has been done by St Basils.

There is a network of good practice in the higher education sector. Within the individual sectors, there is a lot of good practice guidance and networks supporting that. That is just the stuff that is done under the auspices of different central Government Departments. One of the most innovative and positive elements—this is picked up in the NAO Report—is the benchmarking forum, which about 80 local authorities are members of. Trafford has already spoken at the most recent event, and they have a two-day conference disseminating good practice. There is a lot going on in the sector.

Sir Amyas Morse: But you are saying that only half of local authorities are participating in benchmarking, aren't you? We will be in a good place when a much higher percentage is participating. Would you agree?

Chris Wormald: I think that that is fair. An overall point here—again from the discussions with Professor Stein, who has looked across the world—is that England's framework for this, as far as he can see and as the academic studies show, is as good as that of anywhere in the world. The challenge is the implementation. *[Interruption.]* In terms of what you do about it, though, it is probably not adjusting the legal frameworks, the requirements on local government, the statutory guidance and all those sorts of things. It is much more about, as we were saying before, the quality of the individuals, the quality of the local authority oversight and all those implementation things. The focus of our good practice work, working with our local government colleagues, is about that much more than it is about this change to the system.

I think it is worth saying—this came out of a care leavers' round table I did at a local authority in the north of England—that the variability is within local authorities as well as between them. I spoke to people who had had very different experiences in the same local authority, as I said, based on the quality of the individual. It is not a situation of, "Here are some good local authorities and here are some that are not"; the variability is throughout the system. That is our big challenge.

Q31 Mrs Trevelyan: Alison, supporting all your children's services across the country, what tools have you got to hand or what would you be looking for to actually get

those improvements? “As good as it gets” is not good enough for any child who is stuck in the care system through no fault of their own.

Alison O'Sullivan: Absolutely. As an organisation, we speak for leaders in children's services, and we do network with each other and share best practice informally. We do not have a resource in order to act in a proactive way to bring about improvements. That does happen on a regional basis by agreement between various local authorities supported by their lead members, but it is not an orchestrated system; it relies on good will. There is a great deal of good will, and a number of the points that have been made highlight the fact that there is actually quite a lot of good and emerging practice to draw on. I think we would welcome help getting a more organised grasping of that so that it can be disseminated and used.

I would probably take a slightly different perspective from the officials in terms of guidance. I am not a fan of guidance for the sake of it at all, and guidance by itself does not change anything. However, I do think that in this fast-changing environment, it is possible that if we have a good review of the strategy from 2013, there might be some clarification, some emphasis or maybe some new issues that have arisen where it would be helpful to have guidance—but very much a light touch.

Chris Wormald: I do not think that we are different. Where there is an actual consensus about what good practice is, putting it in statutory guidance is rather a good idea. What is not a good idea is where people, however clever, from desks in Whitehall start putting things out into the system where there is not a consensus and not a professional agreement.

Chair: We are certainly not for bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake on this Committee.

Sir Amyas Morse: I just wanted to make sure that I had understood what the underlying theme was. There are lots of very good things going on—very good things in individual places, lots of worthy things. I know your hearts are all in the right place, but is the bottom line to all this that, basically, all that is going to happen is that we will hope gradually to get better? By doing more and more good things in different places, we will gradually get better over a fairly slow period of time. Speaking frankly, is that really what you think is possible? I am not trying to hang anything on you, but actually what you are telling us is what is possible. Forgive me.

Chris Wormald: I will put it plainly. As I said right at the beginning, the new Government has a lot of decisions to take in the spending review and beyond in this area, and in all areas. As Paul said, this is an area that the Government will want to be looking at. With that, it will decide whether it wishes to have an evolution of the care leaver strategy from the previous Government or to do something different. We will have to wait and see.

Two other points, however: one thing that we are expecting to improve considerably is our data around this area, which Paul correctly identified as a big area. For a variety of reasons, which I can go into if you like, we are expecting to have considerably better data about care leavers, which will aid everybody—local authorities, academics and national Government. That is one thing.

The second thing, to pick up on something that Alison said, is one of the great challenges around this. This is not a stationary target. The care leaver cohort is changing quite considerably and in quite a short period of time. In particular, people are coming into the care system considerably older—I think it is now one third coming into the care system over the age of 16, rather than one sixth 10 years ago. This is a big change. What the care system has to deal with each year is quite different from the previous year, so it has to change as it goes along, almost regardless of what the Government does, because it is facing new challenges.

We have had changes around remand, homelessness and asylum seekers, and various other changes, so the care system is dealing with a different set of people. So I do not think that just evolution can be the right answer—not because of Government policy, but because the challenge facing social services departments will evolve and continue to evolve really quite rapidly.

Q32 Chair: We have heard from Kent council recently about the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, but 20 years ago I was responsible for social services in a London borough and we had a lot of unaccompanied children in the borough; Hounslow had similar problems near Heathrow. The situation is not so new. Maybe the numbers change, but dealing with teenagers coming into care and therefore getting independent soon after they arrive in care is not a new problem. Perhaps you are not suggesting that, but you are keeping to the track of saying that there are new issues, and really we are dealing with the same problems 20 years on and longer.

Chris Wormald: Let me give you a specific example of why it affects things. When we look at why the NEET rate has been going up, which nobody wants to happen, one of the big causes appears to be the number of people coming into the care system very late. So as those numbers or this proportion of the care leaver population increase, those people appear from our analysis to be more likely to become NEET later. So that is a new challenge facing the care system as the numbers coming in later go up, as I described.

Q33 Chair: You acknowledged earlier that the data are not good, so this is a bit finger in the wind—

Chris Wormald: No. The National Audit Office correctly highlighted the NEET rate as being much too high and that it was going up. So there are two phenomena going on. In terms of why it is high—these are explanations, not justifications—you can look at the care leaver cohort and see its problems. So 67% of care leavers have a special educational need and, as you know, among special educational needs in general the NEET rate is about three times higher—on average—so care leavers face particular challenges.

As I say, that explains but does not justify why that number is high. Then we looked at why it appears to be rising at a time when the NEET rate overall is falling, and that bit appears to be, from our analysis, about changes in the care leaver cohort and particularly people coming in to the cohort late. That kind of data analysis does not provide the answer as to what we then do about it, but it informs us and our local authority colleagues about what the challenges are and therefore how the care system needs to respond—

Q34 Chair: The corollary of what you are saying, if I am being very simplistic and not at all like the National Audit Office, would be that if you are in care for a long time you do better. That's not—

Chris Wormald: Yes. That is true.

Q35 Chair: That is true, is it?

Chris Wormald: That is entirely true.

Q36 Chair: It seems counter-intuitive. But I digress, rather.

Chris Wormald: But it is a very important point, Chair. We sometimes talk about the care system as if it fails people, and of course it can be better, but actually our data shows that when local authorities take people into care earlier rather than later they actually then do better. And this is part of the great challenge in this area, of trying to work out what is, as it were, caused by the care system and what is a pre-existing challenge of that person that the care system is seeking to ameliorate, and therefore is care a positive thing or a negative thing? There is no international or academic consensus around those things, but as you say it appears that the longer you are in care the better, all other things being equal.

Paul Kissack: That is correct. And just on that specific example, if you look at the NEET chart in the Report, with the 19 to 21-year-olds in the final bar, I think about 37% of those have been in care for less than two years, so the ability of the care system to turn around the lives of people coming in is obviously lessened for those individuals. The experience of Emanuel is increasingly rare, actually—to be in care at that early stage in a stable placement. Increasingly we are seeing the 16 and 17-year-olds.

On the point about changing phenomena, when we look at those figures, as the permanent secretary says, of those leaving care post-16 it is now one in three who came into care after their 16th birthday. Ten years ago, it was one in six. So that is quite a significant change over time that we are seeing.

Chris Wormald: Just to complete the story, there are two big changes that were not there 10 years ago. One is that any 16 or 17-year-old who is on remand is automatically placed into care, and the second is that anyone who presents as homeless is automatically placed into care. So the people coming into care have changed over that 10-year period.

Q37 Mrs Trevelyan: I think that is right. My concern is that it is very reactive decision making, despite having a care strategy. You mentioned that the Ministry of Justice has identified markers for those young people. My concern is that there is a great strategy, with a lot of work going on, but who is actually responsible for tackling what is a very complex cross-departmental role to support the local services on the ground, which are hard-pressed at every level and that situation probably won't get any easier in the short term? Who is actually taking responsibility for making sure that it all hangs together?

It is a great concept and I am very encouraged to hear that there is a lot of work going forward, but, as has been said, it is important that it doesn't remain reactive but becomes a proactive ability to grab hold of whatever changes. The lives of our children change a lot these days, let alone the lives of those struggling with difficult families and having to come into the care system for support. So, who is actually taking responsibility for the overall strategy, so that we can be assured that it will make more progress?

Paul Kissack: The responsibility at ministerial level sits within our Department and this is where the Ofsted regime is really important, because it is looking at what is happening at the local level. What Ofsted is finding is that those authorities that are good or better are exhibiting those traits you are talking about: that ability to grip issues; to be tenacious; to be ambitious; to constantly go the extra mile; to be proactive; and to plan ahead. Those are the things that are characterising the good authorities. So, as they are doing their "Getting to Good" seminars and as they are disseminating good practice, they are essentially disseminating what you are talking about.

Prior to the Ofsted regime, we didn't have that. Of course, as we talked about earlier, where local authorities are not exhibiting that, not surprisingly you find completely the reverse in those authorities that are inadequate. You have a lack of planning—we heard from Emanuel a classic example of lack of planning. It was dreadful; he was clearly unaware of his entitlements and the personal adviser was not providing the support that you would expect in that way. That is entirely characteristic of an inadequate care leaver service, and they are the ones that we intervene in. So we are taking that responsibility.

Q38 Mrs Trevelyan: Alison, with that responsibility sitting firmly with the Department for Education, what do you need from the Department to get your local services to rise up to the challenge?

Alison O'Sullivan: I think to do at a national level what is being described, which is to lead across Government in drawing together people's efforts. We would also like to see a shift towards people being accountable for the outcomes for their Government Department: health outcomes in terms of mental health and well-being in general. Those are the sorts of impact that we have seen flowing from attaching that to the pupil premium in schools. It has brought a spotlight in that setting to what difference can be made and what outcomes can be achieved. So we would like to see that.

Chris Wormald: Shall I say a bit about measuring outcomes, as you raised it earlier and it is relevant? We seek to improve the data we collect every year. As the National Audit Office has pointed out, both our data and that of other Government Departments in this area is not perfect.

The big thing we should be able to do in future, probably from 2016 onwards, is that as a result of the legislation passed right at the end of the last Parliament, we will be able to data match between the national pupil database and lots of other databases, particularly DWP's and HMRC's. That will improve our data across the piece. In particular, it will mean, because there is a flag for children in care in the national pupil database, that we will be able to do much better destination indices for children in care and children in care from different

categories. We will be able to work out if they were in care for two years, for instance, what their eventual outcomes were.

That ought to be an enormous step forward in our ability to track what is happening to cohorts—it does not help us with individuals, because of course it is all anonymised—and to see what happened earlier in people’s school lives, for example, that appears to be correlated with later success and failure. That will be a big step forward.

One particularly difficult area that I should mention, however, is health, because it is obviously quite sensitive to link up with health data, for reasons everyone will understand. Also, because the Department of Health and the health service take the issue of care leavers very seriously, they treat based on clinical need, not background. If you have two people with similar mental health conditions, they treat the person with clinical need first, not the care leaver. I think everyone would agree that that is correct. In other sectors, we give priority to care leavers—for example, in housing and in certain parts of education—but there are some particularly sensitive issues around some services that make it, unfortunately, a very complex picture, for reasons you will understand.

Q39 Karin Smyth: If we can come back to it, I wanted to raise the issue of intervention and pick up on when you do and when you don’t. My authority is Bristol, which is inadequate according to the Ofsted rating. The spend in Bristol is £2,200, when the average is £6,250. How do I as a local Member of Parliament, and local council tax payers in Bristol, know when you have decided that your Department will not intervene on an “inadequate” judgment? You have made a decision about Southampton and Bristol, but on what basis?

Paul Kissack: We intervene almost automatically where there is an “inadequate” judgment overall. The Bristol case is different. It requires improvement overall, but it is inadequate specifically for care leaver services, which is why we take a slightly different approach. At ministerial level, we have engaged with the political leadership in Bristol, and I think we are due to do a review of the care leaver services in Bristol specifically in the next few months, actually.

On the issue of unit costs, there are difficulties with the unit cost numbers in the Report. Our focus is on quality of service; Ofsted looks at quality of service, not unit costs or spend. One of the NAO conclusions—this is true of care leaver services and of children’s social care services more generally—is that we cannot find a correlation between spend and outcomes. To some degree, this is an issue of quality of data, but it raises serious questions about how we can get better at benchmarking cost and quality. It is not easy to do, but it is one of the areas we continue to work on. We have an interactive tool to help local authorities make use of the financial data we have, but we do not intervene on the basis of financial data. Our experience is that where a local authority is inadequate, it is rarely, if ever, principally a financial issue. It comes down to the quality of the workforce and the leadership of the workforce.

Q40 Karin Smyth: Okay. So in a few months, when you have done that secondary review, will it be a matter of public record that that review is happening on the back of the

Ofsted report to look at the subsection, and will people locally understand that it is going to be further intervened on, or that you are satisfied?

Paul Kissack: Yes. We will certainly make public any decisions we take about intervening or not in Bristol.

Q41 Chair: Can I just ask Mr Kissack what intervention looks like? As Anne-Marie Trevelyan described, when something goes wrong in an academy, you are in there dealing with it straight away, very robustly—boots on the ground and that kind of thing. In authorities where you have gone in heavily, what does that look like?

Paul Kissack: It varies enormously. To take a recent example, Sunderland was very badly inadequate, to the degree that the chief inspector at HMCI wrote to the Secretary of State. We had boots on the ground, to use your phrase, within a matter of days. We appointed a commissioner under our statutory powers—he is actually the director of children’s services at Richmond and Kingston—to work on behalf of the Secretary of State in Sunderland. That was done in a matter of days. In very extreme cases where we have a lack of confidence that the council, as a political entity, can turn around the service, we remove it. We did that for the first time a couple of years ago in Doncaster, and we are in the process of doing it in Slough.

For other local authorities that are inadequate, we take a lighter-touch approach. We do that carefully. In Cambridgeshire, for example, which went into inadequacy about three or four years ago, we took a very light touch to intervention because we had a lot of confidence in the leadership, who entirely recognised the picture that Ofsted painted and very quickly put plans together. They went from inadequate to good in one Ofsted inspection cycle, which suggests that it was the right decision not to get too heavily involved with them. We tailor it accordingly, and we have now a group of contracted experts and practitioners from the sector whom we deploy in on behalf of the Secretary of State to advise us on each individual local authority.

Q42 Deidre Brock: You mentioned that the quality of the data you have got regarding the care of these young people is not as good as you would like. In Scotland, I know that service providers have to undertake regular self-audits and inspections to demonstrate how they are implementing the guidance from the Government. Is there something like that here? If not, is that something that could potentially be looked at?

Paul Kissack: Alison will probably be better placed than me to talk about local arrangements. All local authorities have overview and scrutiny arrangements, and they are held to account by their councillors to the public about the quality of services.

Q43 Deidre Brock: How does that report get back to you, so you can assess how effective they are, rather than having to wait for Ofsted, whose cycles are fairly lengthy? If you have got regular self-audits—

Paul Kissack: The principal responsibility, statutory responsibility and accountability sit with the local authority and the council, so that is where the principal accountability

should rest. Ofsted is our means of shining a spotlight on good and poor practice and, in cases of failure, intervening. We will not be routinely collecting information of the sort you are talking about, other than the data we have got, which we can do more with.

Q44 Deidre Brock: Wouldn't it be a good idea, though?

Alison O'Sullivan: Certainly, if you look at a local level, in every council the statutory responsibility for delivering these responsibilities sits with the lead elected member and the director of children's services. In every council, they have arrangements to hold those people to account and to discharge the responsibilities that all local elected members have, as corporate parents, to these young people. There are usually bodies called corporate parenting panels, which involve a wider range of elected members from across the political spectrum, representing a local area, in scrutinising that work. As Paul indicated, there is also an overview and scrutiny function, which very often takes a thematic approach, and commonly looks at performance in relation to looked-after children, including care leavers, on a regular basis. It is an expectation in my own authority that quarterly the overview and scrutiny committee looks at the performance data for looked-after children in general. That is usually the case everywhere. If they have concerns, particularly themed scrutiny of those issues will take place. People—elected members—will call in experts to advise them sometimes. They will certainly take views directly from children and young people themselves, and feedback from frontline staff—that kind of thing. Those are the sorts of arrangements that operate at a local level.

Q45 Deidre Brock: The Scottish Government set up the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Would you consider something similar? That would send a very strong message that this issue is incredibly important to the Government and that they want to ensure that they are seen to be taking it very seriously.

Paul Kissack: It is like the question earlier about whether there is a single centre of expertise like the Education Endowment Fund, and the answer is that in this area there is not. One thing that the new taskforce set up by the Prime Minister will look at is the concept of a “what works” centre in this area. Whether or not there will be one is a matter for ministerial decision and spending reviews, but there is a case for looking again at the architecture we have for bringing together the increasing evidence we have on good practice. And it is increasing, partly through the innovation programme—the New Belongings project that underpins Trafford—and partly through Ofsted inspections. We have a growing amount of evidence about what works, and there is a real question for this Parliament about how we bring that together in a way that works best for local authorities as well.

Q46 Deidre Brock: One more thing, although it is slightly away from that: as I understand it from reading the Report, and from elsewhere, research shows that it is very important to maintain relationships and attachments for children in care. The Scottish Government are introducing a mechanism whereby if children leave care but then feel that they are not yet ready and need somewhere to which to return, they can. Is that something you might consider?

Paul Kissack: That mechanism already exists for looked-after children up to the age of 25, although they are obviously not children at that point.

Q47 Deidre Brock: Sorry, no, it's 25 in Scotland.

Paul Kissack: I think it's 26 in Scotland actually, but it is 25 in England. The mechanism already exists for those who return to education and training, so you can leave care and live independently with very few services from the local authority because you do not want them, but then come back to the local authority and say, "Actually, I want to re-enter education or training." The responsibilities under the Children (Leaving Care) Act apply in those circumstances.

Q48 Deidre Brock: And yet those young people who gave evidence earlier did not seem to suggest that they could do that.

Chris Wormald: I think they were pointing to something that has been raised with us, which is an anomaly in the system. Everyone gets support until they are 21, and then if you are still in education or training you get support until you are 25. The point that has been made to us—we will have to go away and think about this—is that that means that if you are a 23-year-old and NEET, you get less support than someone who is in education. Now, that was of course done for the best possible reasons. It was only quite recently that we introduced any statutory support for care leavers, and it was considered that if you were in education or training it should last longer, but we need to go away and think about that.

Alison O'Sullivan: If I have understood it correctly, in Scotland they have extended the age to which children remain in care and looked after to 21, so they have the full status up to 21, and then they have after-care support—for lack of a better shorthand—to 26. That is quite a different statutory position.

Q49 Deidre Brock: I think it can even go beyond that, at their own discretion.

Alison O'Sullivan: The glaring anomaly in this country is that, having extended the ability of young people to remain with foster carers for longer, that opportunity has not been afforded to young people living in residential care or other settings. We know that it is not as simple as just saying, "Well, you can stay living in your children's home to that age," because that might not be appropriate, but there is an overall question about how long we should be caring for young people and how long we should be supporting them for. I certainly feel that in today's world we ought to be caring for young people for longer and supporting them for longer still.

Chris Wormald: These are not straightforward questions. I met some care leavers at one of my round-tables who were very pleased to be 18 and adults. They did not want to be in care; they wanted to think of themselves as adults. They wanted support, as your previous witnesses described, but they wanted to be considered adults and live independently, albeit with the proper support. We have a challenge across this issue, and I am not quite sure what the way out of it is. As soon as we start setting entitlements in law, we end up with these age

cut-offs and therefore a cliff edge. We used to have one at 18 and we now have ones at 21 and 25. It almost doesn't matter what you do with the entitlement. You might have the cliff edge later, but you still have something that you don't have for people not in care, which is a day when you are no longer entitled to the support.

A lot of the points that have been made to me as I've been preparing for this hearing are that what you really want is a lot of local flexibility. You want systems that are more about when people are ready as opposed to how old they are. I know that some of the best local authorities we've looked at are trying much more to have that philosophy of how they—

Q50 Chair: So is this something that the Government might consider introducing—ready days rather than age days?

Chris Wormald: It's very, very difficult in terms of statutory entitlements, because as soon as you have a statutory entitlement—you all know this from passing laws—you have to be able to say who it's for.

Q51 Chair: But in terms of value for money, if a budget were attached to an individual, it could be spent by the local authority, couldn't it, Ms O'Sullivan?

Chris Wormald: And we are looking at things like the payment-by-results scheme and social impact bonds around children in care, for exactly the reason that you say—that sort of approach, where you spend money and make savings later.

Q52 Chair: Something this Committee is very hot on—spending money now and saving money later.

Chris Wormald: Yes, but as I say, there is a fundamental dilemma. You want clear statutory entitlements, for the reason some of your witnesses were saying—you want to know what you're entitled to—but as soon as you have them, there's a cliff edge with not having them that people who are not in care don't face, because their parents take a decision based on the person, not how old they are. That is one of our challenges.

Alison O'Sullivan: I recognise that dilemma, but given that 44% of 22-year-olds are still living at home—in the rest of the population—I think there's a big question about whether we're just expecting too much too soon.

Chris Wormald: And this is why the Government wish to press forward with Staying Put, which came up earlier. As the National Audit Office rightly says, it's much too early to say whether it is working well. We will get the first figures next month, I think, but it will be several years before we know whether it is working well. But certainly the principle behind it—that people can stay with their foster carers beyond 18—has been widely welcomed by local authorities and others. We will have to see how that works in practice.

Q53 Teresa Pearce: I have just a quick question. My constituency is in south-east London. It sits half in one borough and half in another borough. The town of Thamesmead—it's the same place, but it's in two separate boroughs, so the people are the same, but the spend is very different. One is well below average and one is well above. Does that mean that young people in Thamesmead have a postcode lottery, depending on which bit they live in, as to what sort of care they get?

Chris Wormald: Again, we have been looking at this question—a number of people have raised it—and it is, again, very difficult. Some of the system works by national entitlement, and a lot works by local discretion. A lot of the feedback we get from individuals is that there is not enough local discretion and therefore not enough ability to tailor to the individual. You get, as you do with all local authority services, those geographical cliff edges where you get a different service on one side of the line from the other. In this case, it is a fully devolved function to local government, and local authorities choose what they spend. We don't set even a national notional amount for children in care.

Q54 Teresa Pearce: Is that fair? If you're a young person who needs care, is it fair?

Chris Wormald: I think that is above my pay grade. There are few questions more political than: what should national Government do, what should local government do and what should the state not do?

Q55 Chair: But you're the permanent secretary and accounting officer. Ultimately, you are the Department responsible for making sure that children who are in care and who are leaving care—you set the framework and the strategy centrally and, as Teresa Pearce has rightly pointed out, there's a very stark difference in the same town in London. What are you going to do about it? You have given a technical answer, but don't you think it's shocking that—

Chris Wormald: On that specific point, we do continue to think that local discretion and local flexibility is incredibly important in this area. Of course, if you look at different ends of the country, you might well have very different challenges facing your care leavers that require different levels of spending and so on.

Teresa Pearce: But this is the same place.

Chris Wormald: We are not in favour of setting national rules around spending. We are very much in favour of what the Comptroller and Auditor General was describing earlier—much better benchmarking in this area, and a much bigger focus on those value-for money questions. So we would want to see local authorities looking at these questions, but we are not in favour of introducing new national rules or new national spending requirements.

Q56 Chair: I am surprised it doesn't concern you a little more. We did notice, when we got the figures, how stark it was.

Chris Wormald: There is concern, and then there is what you do about it. In terms of concern, we are very concerned about the variability and the lack of correlation between spend and outcome that the National Audit Office has correctly identified. We don't think that the answer to that question is a lot of national rules; we think the answer is good practice and benchmarking the areas to which the Comptroller and Auditor General pointed earlier.

Q57 David Mowat: I think we have heard you all say at various times this afternoon that the principal statutory accountability for the delivery of this care is local. That prompts the question: what is the principal central accountability in this area? For what do you feel yourselves accountable? Is it to set a framework and a strategy, and that's it? Is it to monitor the whole programme? Another way of asking that question, and maybe you could answer it this way, is in two years' time, perhaps when you move on to a different job—maybe Mr Kissack first of all—how will you judge whether you have done this role effectively?

Chris Wormald: In terms of children leaving care, the National Audit Office set out the roles and responsibilities of both DFE and other central Government Departments correctly in its Report, and it correctly described our role versus the local authority role. I endorse everything that is written in the Report on that subject. How will we judge the performance of the system as a whole and the indicators that have been picked out in the National Audit Office Report? We want to see those indicators going in the right direction as a result of the strategy, the inspection, the good practice and the other measures that we are taking. We do not have a single headline indicator target, and it is not right that we should, but we do want to see all those indicators moving in the right direction.

Q58 David Mowat: I think you would judge yourselves by appraising the performance of the system as a whole, because obviously you are not responsible for the individual parts of it.

Chris Wormald: Yes, it is a shared responsibility between national and local government.

Q59 David Mowat: Does that mean that in, say, two or three years' time, if you are still getting two thirds as requiring improvement or inadequate, you, as the custodians of the system as a whole, will have failed?

Chris Wormald: I am not going to take a particular measure. Particularly with that measure, our intention was to shine a spotlight on performance that was, in a small number of cases, excellent or good. We do not set ourselves targets for how many inadequate schools, or how many inadequate local authorities, there should be.

Q60 David Mowat: No, but with respect we discussed earlier that there is a difference when two thirds are failing versus, say, 5% failing. One is a systemic issue, and the other might just be local delivery.

Chris Wormald: We would want to see those numbers going in the right direction, rather than in the wrong direction, but, as with schools inspection, we do not want the bar to be lowered. Indeed, over time, we want to see the bar for good performance going up, which is exactly as we have done with schools.

Q61 David Mowat: Fair enough. You say that that particular indicator is not the one to which you would hold yourself accountable. Is there an indicator to which you would hold yourself accountable?

Chris Wormald: Not a single indicator, no. As I thought the National Audit Office—

Q62 David Mowat: If there are several, what would they be?

Chris Wormald: I will fail to get the list right, but we look at the NEET rate, the figures for homelessness and suitable accommodation, and educational performance.

Paul Kissack: The age at which people leave.

Chris Wormald: Yes. We have a basket of things that we look at. The previous Government did not wish to set specific targets because, as you know, very specific targets frequently lead to hitting the target but missing the point.

Q63 David Mowat: This is my final question. You have repeatedly said that this is a statutory responsibility for local authorities. If you and your group in the centre weren't there, would local authorities notice the lack of added value?

Chris Wormald: You would have to ask Alison that question. National Government can make a big impact on a small number of things in this area, and I think it is important that it does and that it does it well. What affects the lives of individual care leavers is not even at local authority level; as your witnesses were describing, it was, "Did somebody come to my flat with me to help me?" It was local—way beyond the level of the individual council.

That is, by miles, the single most important thing: the professionalism of those people and their oversight. As I said at one point, that is the core of the Government's whole strategy around social care. We need improvements in the workforce, and that is probably the biggest single thing we can do nationally. You now want to ask Alison the same question.

Paul Kissack: On this point, I am conscious that throughout the hearing we have not really talked about some of the most fundamental reforms that central Government is driving through the system. One of those—probably the most important—is the social work reform programme, which the Minister has said is his top priority for this Parliament. The other is the development of new and innovative practice through our innovation programme. We talked a lot about those at the last hearing as being the fundamental drivers.

It partly plays to the Comptroller and Auditor General's question about the difference between incremental change in a particular area like care leavers versus systemic change.

When we are looking at the possibility of systemic change, we are looking at the workforce and the practice systems in which they operate, and the ability to change the statutory framework and free it up to better meet the changing needs within social care. We are hoping that those are the pillars which will drive that more systemic change.

Q64 Chair: That is a good Whitehall answer—that is not a criticism, but just a fact. Perhaps from the ground, Alison O’Sullivan, you could just respond to that.

Alison O’Sullivan: In terms of the things that need to be better and the things that need to be different, Emanuel and Dembo put those very eloquently earlier. Those are the kinds of things that we would all want to be judged on in terms of making a difference. We look to national Government not just to shine a spotlight, but sometimes, with determination, to get hold of a particular issue and have a will to make a difference. I think if we see that will exercised in this area, as it has been in relation to adoption, we will see a lot of progress. It is because we look to Government to give leadership and to influence the balance of focus, the balance of resources, sometimes, and certainly policy.

Q65 David Mowat: How do you see that being exercised in this area?

Alison O’Sullivan: I think the 2013 care leaver strategy was that signal, and I think it has made a difference. As I commented earlier, I have been in this business quite a long time and I absolutely recognise that there is a lot that we need to do better, but we are doing a lot of things that we used not to do. We need to recognise that we have been on a journey. Yes, it is a grounding, but we have more to do.

Q66 Mr Jackson: First, I apologise for my late arrival. I was in the statement, which is still going after two hours and 10 minutes. I suppose it is appropriate at this juncture to put on the record my support and praise for my own local authority. Despite very difficult circumstances, the social workers in Peterborough City Council are doing a fantastic job in this area and in adoption and fostering.

May I press you, Mr Wormald, on something that you said about 10 minutes ago on social impact bonds? This Committee is very interested in those. You might want to provide us with a note, but off the top of your head, do you envisage—in terms of the time scale—a pilot in the next year? What sort of cohort would you look at? What key performance indicators would you consider, what would be the time scale and what providers are out there? How important is this in terms of future policy development? I know we are not meant to get into policy—

Chris Wormald: I will ask Paul to comment, because he has found the right page of the briefing.

Mr Jackson: This is about value for money, and it is about pump-priming and seedcorn investment.

Paul Kissack: There is a payment-by-results fund, the Fair Chance Fund, which is alluded to in the NAO Report. It is jointly run by Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Office. It is not specifically focused on care leavers, but the latest data that we have show that around 15% of the young people who are NEET undertaking the programme have some experience of care—that is slightly different from being a care leaver in the definitions used in the Report—and around 10% are care leavers. That is an arrangement to get young people who are not in education, employment or training into work and into good housing. There are seven providers trying different systems, and it is payment by results. I think there is a social impact bond element to that as well. We are talking to the Cabinet Office about the possibilities of doing social impact bonds in the looked-after children and care leavers area. They already run through the youth engagement programme with DWP and MOJ a number of SIBs. Again, they are not specifically targeted on care leavers, but they will certainly cover some care leavers as part of that.

There are a couple that I am aware of that are run locally. One in Essex is focused specifically on adolescents and trying to avoid adolescents being brought into care by providing better support outside the edge of care, but they are exactly the cohort that we would see in other circumstances coming in at age 16 and 17 and spending less than two years and potentially ending up in our NEET cohort. There is a similar adolescent-focused social impact bond operating in Birmingham. There are not an enormous number of social impact bonds across the country as a whole. They are difficult things to get going, but the new Government have signalled that this is an area that they want to see grow, and we are talking to the Cabinet Office about the possibilities to do so in looked-after children and care leavers.

Q67 Mr Jackson: Thank you for that answer. My concern is about sustainability. You will be well aware of the ongoing debacle of Kids Company. You will also be aware that the social impact bonds in the criminal justice system are now potentially under threat as a result of funding pressures. If you are going to proceed on that basis, the Department needs to learn the lessons of that. My final point is that it should be evidence-based in terms of any academic, empirical evidence that is available in terms of linking back to the education and work outcomes, and economic activity, for instance, of children and young people. With that proviso, would you be able to do a note for us?

Chris Wormald: I will certainly do a note. A lot of the decisions that you point to will of course be spending review decisions, but this is an area in which we are very interested, and we would be interested in learning the lessons that you quote from other areas. This sort of area where there is a need for up-front investment and the savings the taxpayer accrues in several years' time, frequently in a completely different budget, is the type of area where social impact bonds can have a big input, so it ought to be the sort of area that we look at.

Q68 Mr Jackson: Does the Treasury support it?

Chris Wormald: There will be questions around this in the spending review. I believe the Treasury supports social impact bonds in general and has committed to look at them further. Am I right?

Marius Gallaher: Yes.

Paul Kissack: May I raise a point about SIBs in this area? One of the attractions of them is that they require you to do a more sophisticated level of data analysis than we tend to do, because it is all about understanding the likely trajectory of a young person without the intervention and then the actual trajectory post the intervention. The raw data do not allow you to do that. The overall NEET rate, picking up the permanent secretary's questions, is partly a reflection of the likely trajectories of these children had they not been brought into care. So the SIB requires us to do that more sophisticated level of data analysis and really understand the value added—or not—of different services.

Chris Wormald: That relates to what I mentioned earlier.

Paul Kissack: Yes.

Chair: A big error: we have hardly touched on the housing issue.

Q69 Mr Bacon: My apologies for not getting here at the beginning. I, too, was listening to the Prime Minister's statement on Syria.

Have you ever suggested to care leavers or to local authorities acting on behalf of care leavers that they are given assistance to build their own dwelling?

Paul Kissack: Not quite, but we have just funded the first ever care-leaver-led housing co-operative in Stoke, which is probably the closest we have come to that.

Q70 Mr Bacon: Is that where people bought houses for £1 and then did them up with soft loans?

Paul Kissack: I am not sure whether that is exactly the same thing. I could send you a note on the programme that we are running, but it is a set of houses, with 10 specifically dedicated to care leavers. As a care leaver decides to leave the co-operative but keep the house, the local authority has pledged to—

Q71 Mr Bacon: That's different. I was referring to old Victorian cottages that were being knocked down, or at least were under threat of being knocked down. The council in Stoke sold them for £1 each and then gave £20,000 of soft loans for essential repairs, and they have now been brought back into use. This is slightly different. This is building.

Now that the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 is through Parliament—I know, because I wrote it—there is a statutory duty on every council to have a register of people who are interested in creating a dwelling to live in, either as a group of individuals or as an individual, and then to have regard to that when exercising the statutory functions of housing, planning and regeneration and so on. It seems to me that if it is possible—as the Community Self Build Agency has proven in Bristol, under the excellent leadership of Stella Clarke—to do this for veterans, homeless people and disabled people, it ought to be possible

to do it for care leavers as well. I quote the strap line from the Community Self Build Agency website: “Building Lives by Building Homes—Helping People Help Themselves”.

Further down on the website—I am sorry to labour the point, but I will—is an example of someone who was helped and said, “I was encouraged by the local council to apply for the CSBA Scheme, I rang them and said; ‘I am disabled, unemployed, on benefits and I know nothing of building.’ They said; ‘You fit all the criteria!’ I have never looked back.”

Given that, as Rod Hackney, the architect who used to advise the Prince of Wales, once said, “It is a dangerous thing to underestimate human potential and the energy which can be generated when people are given the opportunity to help themselves”, and given that there is no cohort of people for whom that is more likely to be true than care leavers if they are given possibilities and self-respect, may I suggest that you think about having a pilot with the Community Self Build Agency to see what might be done? Not only is there now a statutory responsibility in this area, which will commence shortly, but it has significant possibilities for helping to solve a problem, since we have in this country a housing supply that does not rise to meet demand.

Chris Wormald: We would be happy to look at that. As I say, I am not aware that there have been any specific conversations on that specific idea. One of the points that goes with your point and that many of the care leavers I have spoken to have made is that as well as wanting support, they want to take control of their own lives. They do not want to be in a position where it is simply the state doing things to them. I am aware of schemes—New Belongings is one of them—that are very much focused on, “Can we give care leavers a voice and a stake in their future?”, so that they are the decision maker, and that goes very well with what you have just said. So we are happy to take that away—

Mr Bacon: And it is possible that we might even come up with a recommendation in this area. I am only guessing. Thank you.

Q72 Chair: I think we are being quite indulgent there. May I follow up on the housing front? We have not really gone into this so much, but there is a real concern about the number of people in inadequate housing. We had some figures—in Portsmouth half the people are in inadequate housing and in Kent there is a two-year waiting list for social housing—which are not surprising and those of us who represent areas where there is a squeeze on housing know the problems. In the Report, paragraph 1.16 is the reference for the Kent element. Do you not think that there is more to be done on this? There are also challenges. How are you linking up with other Government Departments and with local authorities? I will bring in Alison O’Sullivan on number points, if I may, because there are issues around local delivery here, but you cannot say that it is just down to local on this issue.

Chris Wormald: No, not at all. We were talking with Department for Communities and Local Government colleagues about this issue last week as part of our preparation for this hearing.

Chair: Which one of you will answer? I will let one of you answer, because we are running out of time.

Chris Wormald: Paul.

Chair: Who is responsible for the policy in the Department?

Paul Kissack: We are talking to CLG colleagues and have talked a bit about this. As we think about what comes after the care leaver strategy over the next Parliament, accommodation needs to be one of the big areas. Again, it is an area where we probably know more now than we did two years ago at the time of the care leaver strategy about what good practice and poor practice look like, thanks to the Ofsted framework.

There are good examples out there where local authorities have gripped the housing issue in particular. Those examples are usually characterised by areas where the children services department, the housing department and providers come together with clear protocols and to develop clear and usually care leaver-specific pathways. Brighton is an example that Ofsted has talked about as being particularly good. If you read Brighton's protocol, you get a real sense of what they are trying to achieve in terms of that continuity, and they have come from quite a problematic base.

I mentioned earlier that St Basils has been commissioned by CLG to produce some new practice guidance. Brighton is one of the good practice examples mentioned in that guidance—it is not published yet, but I think it is due out later this month—that is specifically focused on care leavers and how you develop the correct range of different accommodation options, because that is one of the critical issues here. You need everything from emergency placements, so that you do not have to fall back on bed and breakfast, through to lodgings and semi-independent and independent housing, some of which will have floating support and some of which will not need floating support, depending on the needs of the children. It is a big challenge for local authorities to develop the correct suite of different accommodation options. That is one of the specific things that Ofsted looks at through its reporting mechanism.

Q73 Chair: Also, it really is a challenge. We have touched on funding, but because of the lack of data it is difficult to know how funding is working—I will bring Alison in on this in a minute. With housing, funding is a real issue. If people are already overcrowded and having to be rehoused and there are other people on the waiting list, of course you can set aside a certain amount for children in care, but in places like Kent—where there are a lot more children coming into care as older teenagers who will then need to go through this pathway—it seems to me that two years isn't so long, given the pressures they are under; yet it is a devastating two years for that individual child. It is important to remember what our witnesses said at the start: the impact on the individual is what should be driving you and your Department, as the accountable officers, and us as parliamentarians trying to make sure that the Government is held to account for its delivery on this issue. Paul Kissack, you can say what you said from Whitehall—it is all very well and good, and there are nice models—but on the ground how are you making sure that it is actually possible for councils to deliver on housing?

Paul Kissack: What I am describing may be a Whitehall view of a model, but it is a model that is focused on looking at practice on the ground. If you look at Trafford as the one outstanding example we have got—

Q74 Chair: Will you fund it? Will you make sure that the funding is there for local government? Without the funding, it will be very difficult to do.

Paul Kissack: It is very hard to talk about funding on anything just before a spending review, as you will appreciate, so the answer to that is I don't know.

Q75 Chair: But it will all fall apart if there is no funding for housing for those young people.

Paul Kissack: As I say, housing is one of the areas that we will need to look at if there is any sort of revised or refreshed care leaver strategy over the coming Parliament. It is one of the issues on our Minister's mind, and we will be talking with his CLG counterparts.

Chair: It is something I am sure we should alert DCLG to.

Alison O'Sullivan: There are a couple of areas that overlap here. There is the housing side of things, and then there is the commissioning of a range of supported living arrangements. As Paul quite rightly said, we need to have the right local mix. Clearly that has to be in the context of other pressures or opportunities that there might be in a local area. It is a clear responsibility for the local authority to secure the right provision, one way or another, and one of the very fruitful things that happens in lots of cases is good collaboration between social care and housing colleagues within local authorities, who engage with the broader housing market, too—it is not just about public sector housing.

That is really important, but the other important element of that relationship is making sure that young people get the advice that they need to navigate their way through that system. Even the most thoughtful young people get in a mess with their money, and if you start off life at the age of only 18 with a housing debt and then cannot get access to housing, you are stymied from the beginning, so having that going hand in hand is an important element. Where there is good practice you will see those kinds of arrangements in place.

Q76 Chair: Do you think that there is a need for more money locally to make sure that this works properly? Certainly in areas like mine, where there is such a squeeze on housing, people who might have waited a few months in a hostel now wait—

Alison O'Sullivan: We are clearly in an environment where the funding is squeezed on all fronts, and, as we know, we are in a context where local government in particular has had a very big reduction in overall funding. That shows itself in lots of parts of the system. It is a credit to local representatives that they have prioritised these kinds of areas and we have seen either the sustaining of funding or, in many cases, the increase of funding to support care leavers. We have seen demand go up, but we have seen the investment keep pace with that more than you might expect, given the constraints on funding in recent years.

Q77 Chair: Okay, thank you. The other area we haven't really touched on is mental health. The permanent secretary touched earlier on the challenges in delivering health

services differently. Roughly two thirds of people in care are in care because of abuse or neglect, and 35% of people leaving care had five or more placements. There is a real correlation between those figures and people's behavioural or mental health needs. Although I hear what you are saying, permanent secretary, about the challenges of healthcare being done primarily according to clinical need, are there any plans to ensure that if someone in the care pathway needs mental health support they get it? Without that the whole jigsaw falls apart, even if everything else is going well.

Paul Kissack: Towards the end of the last Parliament the Department of Health published a taskforce report on children and young people's mental health called "Future in Mind", which set out a range of ways in which the current system is failing not just care leavers but young people across the board. Some of that is about investment. The previous Government made a commitment to invest an additional £1.25 billion over the next five years in mental health. Some of it is about data. There are really poor quality data in this area. The Department of Health is committed to improving data around access, waiting times and outcomes, so we will know more as a result of that. It will take time to develop, but it will give us a better set of data, which we can then match back with the data that the permanent secretary was talking about earlier, so we can track some of the care-leaver outcomes through the system.

One of the things that care leavers bump into particularly is the transition from CAMHS—child and adolescent mental health services—into adult. Increasingly, in the good practice that we are seeing, which Ofsted flagged, that transition is much smoother and there is much less of a cliff edge. "Future in Mind" committed, essentially, to moving away from the current four-tier model and that strong division between adult and child mental health. The latest NHS England guidance in this area is much more focused on smooth transition. As I have said, through the Ofsted reports we are seeing examples of that, so, again, there are examples that we can learn from, including of mental health practitioners in Derbyshire and Essex, I think, embedded in children leaving care teams, making sure they get access to the service as part of this new transition.

Q78 Chair: On education and training, first, what support do leavers need to continue education or training and has the Department given any thought to what Barnardo's director, Lynn Gladwell, said about it being particularly hard for young people, and especially care leavers, to get their foot in the door and begin a career? Barnardo's called for care leavers to be encouraged to go on to apprenticeships and called on the Government to reserve 20,000 apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds from the care system, to give them a fair chance of getting on the job ladder.

Chris Wormald: I will answer on apprenticeships. Paul can talk about the wider context. We are in discussion with Barnardo's; they are always worth listening to on this subject. Nick Boles, the Minister responsible for apprenticeships wrote back to them last week, saying he wanted a dialogue about their ideas. Actually, it is important that the conversation is about traineeships as well as apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are jobs and the Government does not decide where they are. A lot of the people who Barnardo's are talking about are not yet job ready, and it may be a traineeship package getting people ready to go on an apprenticeship that is needed, as opposed to just reserving an apprenticeship for them.

In the authority in the north that I visited, I heard some people describing people who had got apprenticeships who were not ready for it and then failed, and it did them no good. It is about making sure people are ready for it. However, we are very interested in having a dialogue with Barnardo's and others around their ideas.

Paul Kissack: It is probably worth saying that, at the local level, a number of local authorities are doing this already. Hampshire, for example, which I think is responsible for about 1,000 apprentices working in the council—obviously, a very large employer across Hampshire—and it reserves, I think, 150 of those 1,000 specifically for care leavers, and provide an internship and traineeship programme that takes people on a pathway into that.

On your wider education point about what care leavers need to continue in education, part of it is about excellent advice from personal advisers—sadly, we heard earlier that that is not always the case—and part of it is about financial support. There is additional financial support in higher education, for example, which is provided by the HE bursary that local authorities are required to provide to care leavers. Actually, 60% of universities themselves provide additional support to care leavers that can come in various forms, including financial support. For example, Leeds University waives deposits and provides 365 days of accommodation a year for care leavers. So the HE and FE sectors put in a range of additional support. All care leavers are automatically entitled to the 16-to-19 bursary, which provides £1,200 a year for young people. That is provided through the college.

The real answer to the question about what young people need to go into further and higher education is better prior attainment in education. That is the single biggest predictor. The NEET rate for care leavers who manage to get five good GCSEs, including English and maths is 15%—the same as the rest of the population. The thing that inoculates you against NEET is good prior attainment. So the real focus is on trying to provide better education earlier.

For people in the care system we can do certain things through social care. We have the virtual school heads that we talked about last time, pupil premium plus, priority access to the best schools, etc., but of course many of the children that we are talking about come in aged 16 and 17, after a lot of key stage 1 and—

Chair: I am not saying that that hearing in February, in which we talked about those things was not a good one—that is arguable—but it was not a good story. However, we will put that to one side for the moment.

Paul Kissack: It is worth saying that the educational outcomes at key stage 4 are getting better for this group of young people, and have done very consistently.

Chair: Your optimism is admirable. We want to see improvements, but we still see too many children in this situation and it is important to acknowledge that.

Chris Wormald: We agree, and that is the reason for pupil premium plus.

Q79 Chair: Alison O'Sullivan, did you want to come in on these points?

Alison O'Sullivan: Just to make a brief comment on that and, if I may, a comment on mental health. The comments that have been made about being ready to be able to make a success of apprenticeships are really important. There are examples of local authorities working not only to provide that kind of support to help equip young people to enter into apprenticeships, but to create apprenticeships in local authorities. They are trying to do what a good parent—a reasonable parent—would do themselves, so I think that is an important part of the equation.

On the mental health discussion, it is important to recognise that we are trying to support young people in building personal resilience, and very often, there is a degree of distress or trauma that young people are trying to overcome, so it is really welcome that “Future in Mind” has a specific section in it. There is a chapter on vulnerable young people, and young people in care are specifically mentioned as requiring greater support as part of the ambitions of “Future in Mind”. It is really important that not only are local areas ensuring that the needs of those young people are reflected in the local transformation plans that are being developed as we speak, but that the Department for Education is looking over the shoulders of the Department of Health as they check whether those transformation plans are going to deliver in all aspects the ambitions of “Future in Mind”.

Q80 Mrs Trevelyan: I have been encouraged by quite a lot of what I have heard, despite the Report being really depressing when I started. The first thing I would ask of you as a Department is that you get a full benchmark of where we are in children’s services. Ofsted has done only 50% of the children’s services and we really need to get that base level done quickly, if necessary by moving that forward specifically, so you know that the data are absolutely clear going forward and not that we are working on 50% of—maybe, overall, less than 50% are not in a bad state. We don’t know that and, for me, that is a very important marker, because we cannot really make the progress and you cannot make the decisions for Ministers unless we have that.

It is also about you finding a way to raise the skills. The strategy is across eight Departments, which is excellent, but the people on the ground who are doing this work—we heard about this from our witnesses earlier—are those personal advisers. From what I have heard, and I have spoken to some in my own patch, I do not feel that they really have a good handle of MOJ, housing and health stuff. It is quite a complex role. It is difficult when you are a parent, but you put your back into it as best you can, and your kids hopefully have a bar of chocolate when you are still sitting, trying to understand how it all works. However, when you are a personal adviser, you are coming in and you are leaving. They need to be better trained, and that should be an absolute priority, because the strategy will work better if they, on the ground, are getting that right. But that is the level of training, which comes back to what I raised earlier about having a centre of excellence. I wonder whether the EEF are already gathering a lot of that evidence through the pupil premium plus work. That is something you could use as a starting point to build that.

Q81 Chair: We have a Division. My final question is, where does responsibility lie for fixing the system and what is going to change—in one minute?

Chris Wormald: In one minute?

Chair: Because we have a vote, and we should be going really.

Chris Wormald: As I have said throughout, this is a shared responsibility between national and local government.

Q82 Chair: So where does the buck stop? If it does not work, who is going to take responsibility?

Chris Wormald: With an issue like this, unfortunately, it is impossible to say that it is a single set of people. There are eight Departments who have to work together—

Chair: That is the problem, isn't it?

Chris Wormald: And there are a lot of local authorities. I don't think you can name an individual. The ministerial lead and departmental lead at national level is very clear, and that's DFE and Edward Timpson.

Chair: I am sorry to rush you at the end. If you would like to add to that later, please feel free. We have a Division, so rather than try to come back on that, I would just say that somebody needs to be responsible and accountable, otherwise the witnesses we had at the beginning, and the people who follow them, will end up being let down, through no fault of the good people trying to do things well. But where there are eight Departments, and many Paul Kissacks in each Department trying to do a good job, as well as thousands of people on the ground, unless someone takes a grip and takes responsibility, we may be sitting here in five years' time having the same discussion—I hope not.

Thank you very much indeed for coming. We look forward to following up. We will publish our report in a couple of weeks.