



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [The Children's Commissioner for England](#), HC 477

Wednesday 6 January 2016

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair), Lucy Allan, Michelle Donelan, Marion Fellows, Suella Fernandes, Lucy Frazer, Kate Hollern.

Questions 1 – 90

Witness: **Anne Longfield OBE**, Children's Commissioner for England gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, Anne, and welcome to the first meeting of the Education Committee in 2016. You are the Children's Commissioner, and it is our responsibility to ask you from time to time how you are getting on; that is the purpose of today's session. Specifically, we want to probe your commitments, as set out in your recent publication *Ambitious for Children*; we want to hear more about your plans in terms of delivery; and we want to hear your views about matters connected with children generally in the policy arena that we are looking at. Is that all right with you?

Anne Longfield: Of course.

Chair: Great, excellent. I am going to ask you the first question. We have about 19 to get through in about 90 minutes. We have allocated just under five minutes per question.

Anne Longfield: Are they long questions?

Chair: No. The questions are short, and the answers need to be concise, pithy and meaningful, as I am sure you will be.

Anne Longfield: No pressure then.

Chair: No, not yet.

In *Ambitious for Children*, you set out your commitments for the next five years. What powers do you have to make them happen?

Anne Longfield: The question is always: will I have enough power or not? Certainly there was a big debate about that when the role was first considered and, indeed, implemented. There are variations in different countries around that. The powers I have are, first of all, about the statutory nature of the post and the role, which is independent and which does have a statutory responsibility to be accountable—to Parliament more broadly, as part of my employment, but also to children.

One of the most important things is the power to gather data and the power to gain entry to speak to children who are living away from home. I have really felt that power in post in a way that I did not anticipate would be as powerful as it is. It allows me to find a route in not only to ask the difficult questions, but to cut through the layers of complication and to speak to children to get to the heart of the matter. The status and the role come with an important power in terms of being able to attract attention and make recommendations.

I do not have an enforcing role—I would be very happy if anyone wanted to give me an enforcing capability. I am also not given any ability to look at individual casework, as is sometimes the case in other countries. If I had that ability, it would change the nature of the role I have, and it would require more funding, because there are clearly a lot of children in this country. However, I am an optimist—I prefer to look at what the positive powers are. I also think you have to earn the powers in terms of credibility.

Q2 Chair: If we were to recommend some reform of your post and powers in future, what would be the headline recommendation for you?

Anne Longfield: There is recognition of the role across Government. My sponsor Department is the DfE, and I am very grateful for their sponsorship—it is an important place to be, and they have been very supportive. Having said that, the role actually works across all areas of children’s lives. There would be merit in looking at housing this, or having lead sponsorship, within the Cabinet Office and having a closer relationship at the heart of Government. That would be of enormous benefit, because it would allow greater freedoms to work across Government and to work at its heart.

There is also the issue about incorporating UNCRC. That is something other countries have done. It gives additional strength to the role and introduces additional requirement across Government. Those are two key things.

Q3 Chair: You have been in post since February. What are the highlights of the last few months?

Anne Longfield: It was the beginning of March, so it has been 10 months of a six-year role, all being well. It is a fantastic role. I am very privileged to do this job, and I feel the responsibility of it enormously. One of the highlights is its breadth and the ability to speak to so many young people and children across the country. There is also the privilege of being welcome in so many areas and people wishing to speak to me. I made the most of that, certainly in the first three or four months, and I have done so regularly since.

Other highlights are the breadth of scope and scale. This is a post about accountability and holding others to account, but it is also a strategic post. I am very keen to use it strategically and to look at how to change things and to get things done. So the breadth of strategic scope is enormous. Then there is the ability to really bring to the front issues that need to be considered. The most sizeable of those came up before Christmas, in November, with the launch of a major inquiry into child sexual abuse in the family, which successfully gained immense amounts of attention. It began a debate—

Q4 Chair: We will talk about that later—I think Lucy Allan will ask some questions in connection with that report.

You have issued quite a lot of press releases and some reports. How do you follow those up? How do you turn the good words into action?

Anne Longfield: A press release is only a means to an end—it is not the end—and the same is true of the reports. Certainly, there are quite a lot of reports. There has been some very good work, which has come to fruition with reports. But going forward, what I am seeking to do beyond this transition year—the year of work I have largely inherited—is to look at some core themes, which build arguments and narratives over areas of priorities. The press releases, the reports and the like will be part of that pressure to build support and to secure gains. For me, they are important—they are a way of highlighting issues—but they should be part of a longer debate. They should be part not only of commenting on issues, but of an ongoing collaboration in delivering. I am in constant contact with those who are delivering services, and I would hope that that would influence practice and policy, too. This is part of a whole.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are going to move to Marion now.

Q5 Marion Fellows: Good morning, Anne. You have described the extensive process you went through to get children’s views. What was the most surprising thing you heard?

Anne Longfield: I suppose one of the things that is not surprising in many ways is that the complexity of childhood is changing and has changed dramatically. Everything changes, and that is true not least of the digital world that children now live in, which they just didn’t live in 10 or even five years ago. Beyond that, what children always tell you, and what they come back to, is that they value being children—having the freedom to be children, without the burdens of adulthood and the decisions that are needed there—stability around being cared for, spending time with family and friends, and playing out. In this enormously complex world, which feels as though it is getting more complex year on year—certainly, children tell us it is complex—what it comes down to at the end of the day is that everything changes, but nothing changes.

In addition to that—it is not a surprise, but it is good to have it restated—children often see things very differently from how adults see them, and children often see something differently from how professionals see it. Professionals sit in a world of service systems, service provision and all those kinds of responsibilities, but bring it back to what children want and they want the same things: security, adults they trust and adults who are there for

them and will do stuff. That is the lens that they see through. Within all of that, the discipline that is absolutely at the heart of everything I seek to do is to see through the eyes of children.

Q6 Marion Fellows: In drawing up your commitments, which you have done, what account did you take of the resource constraints in the public bodies just now?

Anne Longfield: Well, I suppose I don't see it as my responsibility first and foremost to look at limiting; that is not my starting point. My starting point is what children need, and then there is a discussion to be had about what can be made to happen. Having said that, I did not want to publish something that was a completely unrealistic pipedream, and there are hopefully realistic ambitions in here for things that can be done. So first and foremost it is about the need. I think it is important that in any climate, whether there is enough money or a limited amount of money, to know absolutely what is needed, why you are doing it, what children will benefit as a result, what the priorities are and what the options are.

There is a lot in here about principles—a principle that childhood matters; it is not just building your CV for adult life, which all of us as parents sometimes have a tendency to do, some more successfully than others. The period of childhood has an impact on us, good or bad, throughout our lives. We have to recognise that. With the right support and the right opportunities, most children can flourish. We also need to recognise that vulnerabilities and disadvantage are not inevitable. However much money you have available, those are things to hold on to.

Q7 Marion Fellows: That seems fair. What particular issues are you prioritising in the first couple of years?

Anne Longfield: I launched the document back in July last year, so it is pretty soon off the mark since March. I wanted to do that because, while I did not have the detail in place, I wanted to give a sense not only of the principles and values, but of the ambition and the need. This is an absolutely crucial post with a six-year term, and I want to do everything I can to make this work and to get real change. There are some things in here that are absolutely crucial to the role and that there are more responsibilities around—children in care, for instance. There is also a strong track record on and clear need for protecting children from harm, and indeed in inequalities.

This is very much a framework and I am now looking at what that means in the next year or two. One of the central planks of tackling inequalities that I really want to focus on is understanding vulnerability and inequalities more. I want that to be a plank that will be centrally driven throughout the whole of the work of the five-year period, but certainly gearing up straightaway in the next financial year, and looking to see that in terms of layers of vulnerability. Mental health is one, but I am sure we will come back to that, and poverty is clearly an aspect; there are also the communities that children grow up in. Those are the building blocks for not only a good childhood, but for resilient children moving forward into adulthood. I want to be able to get to the heart of what being vulnerable means, challenging the notion that “It's inevitable. We have to live with this,” and really looking at how we can transform those futures for those children who are disadvantaged. Clearly, there are a lot of roles for a lot of people to do that.

Chair: We will move on to those sorts of subjects later—

Q8 Marion Fellows: I just have one more question. You have these ambitions and commitments. How are you going to monitor progress towards their achievement?

Anne Longfield: Clearly, within the role and within data collection, I can do that, and certainly around inequalities. One of the things I am seeking to do is an annual inequalities stocktake, if you like, and with that to put in place some of the frameworks for others to do so too. I am very aware that there is a very strong local agenda and an increasing regional agenda too, and one of the things I want to do is put in place some templates around child-friendly working that I hope I will be able to persuade some cities and towns to work with too.

Q9 Lucy Frazer: You mentioned a few minutes ago that the digital world has changed children's lives. You also say that in *Ambitious for Children*. Do you think overall that technology has been positive or negative in relation to children?

Anne Longfield: Is it a force for good or bad? Personally, I have to come down on the side that it is a force for good. It has happened fast, and it has happened in a way that children have not had a lot of control over. The last five years, since we have entered the smartphone generation and smartphones have been available for children, have been enormously swift in that development. Smartphones are with us all; I'm sure we all have one tucked away somewhere. They are the powerful computers we used to have on our desks.

A lot of the emphasis has rightly been on protecting children from the dangers of online, and in no way do I want to say that any of those dangers are not real and that we should not protect children; we absolutely should. But I think also that the digital world opens up opportunities in a way that is in train already; it certainly harnesses opportunities for children. Empowering children to manage that world is something I am really keen to do and I am looking at with the whole notion of iRights.

There was something in the news today about how parents can curtail the time children spend on their smartphones and the like. I often get asked, "Why don't you tell parents to tell their children to only do two hours a night or something?" That's fine; we can do that, but we know it is probably not going to work.

Chair: Restricting time is a really good thing to do, and we are doing five minutes per question.

Q10 Lucy Frazer: That leads me on to the next question. Apparently, there is a Netmums survey that shows children actually spend twice as long as we think on the internet. There are other worrying statistics: only four out of 10 have parental controls, according to an Ofcom report, with 80% of three to four-year-olds having access to the internet. There is a huge amount of dangerous information; there is sexting, pornography and cyber-bullying. There is peer pressure out there. How are you going to help protect children at home?

Anne Longfield: We have to wise up to the reality of the digital world for children. We think it is a huge change, but if you are 12 years old, you think it is normal; you think that it is your community. We have to understand what that means. There is some research on the impact on children, but very little. We have three-year-olds now who can use digital devices, but we don't know enough.

Q11 Lucy Frazer: What are you going to do about it? Obviously, there is a risk.

Anne Longfield: Sure. What I am going to do is undertake some of that research around the impact on children. There is a plethora of people looking at the way that parental controls can work and can work better, and I see that part of my role is to advise parents on how they can wise up and be more informed about the digital world.

There are ways you can work with children to bring down their use. I don't think it is a case of just taking their smartphone off them. You can talk to them about how much time they spend on it, the planning of their time and the like, and actually physically do things with children, which means they are not left to their own devices. Again, there is great scope, and I am interested in looking at how I can help parents to get on top of that. At the heart of this, we have to be looking at children taking control of the digital world and at talking to industry about how they can put better controls in place that enable children to that.

Q12 Lucy Frazer: On that, how will you engage with internet service providers?

Anne Longfield: I have a taskforce already set up at the moment, which is running for the year. It does not have digital providers on it other than the BBC, but it is in dialogue with them. It is only absolutely at the beginning—it is at its first meeting. There has been a willingness from digital and other providers to respond—they want to be seen to respond—but it is very early days in that conversation. I want to go to them at the end of this year with clear recommendations that I will be hoping they respond to.

Q13 Lucy Frazer: You will go to them—so you are not on the digital taskforce?

Anne Longfield: The taskforce will go to the industry.

Q14 Lucy Frazer: You mentioned that the BBC is on the taskforce. How were the members of the digital taskforce chosen?

Anne Longfield: They were chosen partly because of their range of expertise. Some are involved in digital learning and some are involved in digital engagement and children. The taskforce has children and young people on it, so it is very much led by some of their comments as well. Some have experience of iRights. There is a legal representative who is working in terms of the law and children's engagement digitally, so it is a range and spread, but it is not a closed shop. If there are others, that would be very good. It has Professor Sonia Livingstone on it, who is an expert in some of these matters. It is a real spread.

Q15 Lucy Frazer: We have talked about the home and about internet service providers. There are also schools, and we will discuss that in detail later. The NSPCC has said that internet safety should be part of the school curriculum. Do you think that is right?

Anne Longfield: I certainly think that as part of the curriculum, children should learn about life—I am sure we will talk about that at some point—and I think the digital world is part of life. Being aware not only of your presence and safety in the digital world, but of how you can make the digital world work for you is something that should be in the school curriculum, yes.

Q16 Suella Fernandes: You carried out a survey of 700 children and found that many of them wanted less homework, fewer exams and no tests. However, 74,000 primary school children arrived at secondary school unable to do basic maths, and one in eight to 18-year-olds has never been given a book, rising to one in five for disadvantaged children. We have a literacy and numeracy challenge in this country. To what extent are you concerned that there is a tide of underperformance in terms of literacy and numeracy, and how are we going to tackle that?

Anne Longfield: They do say they want less homework, mainly so that they can do other things, and they do say they are very anxious about exams. Notwithstanding whether you think exams are a good thing, they certainly have an impact on children and children certainly say that when you talk to them. Children are not reaching their potential in many of those areas, and my starting point is that most children can if they get the right support.

I think there is an early necessity to look at putting in the very successful interventions in a much more systematic way with children who are demonstrating the need for additional support. I would like to see that really carried through from the early years into school and that important transition phase into secondary school in a much more robust way. If I might suggest an agenda for this Committee—I know it has huge agenda ahead—there is an issue around the transition from primary school to secondary school. For the most vulnerable young people, at that point there is a fall-off that I think does not need to be there to the extent that it is.

Another area that I would be very keen to encourage you all to look at, and I would be very keen to work alongside you, is how schools can help children to become ready to learn more robustly. Some are talking about poverty-proofing schools or helping schools to help vulnerable children. We have the pupil premium. I think there is a real opportunity to be much more robust about that and strategic, too.

There is a real concern about underperformance. I believe that children could flourish better with extra support. I know there are good interventions and I think it is time to look again at how we maximise the potential of the really important resource that is there.

Q17 Suella Fernandes: On the wellbeing of students, what is your view on making counselling available within schools?

Anne Longfield: I would support that. Again, children and young people, time and time again, tell me that they would like to have people to talk to in schools.

Q18 Suella Fernandes: Do you think it should be made a mandatory legal requirement?

Anne Longfield: I think that it certainly should be piloted as a systematic part of a school, and my default would be that it probably should be made a requirement as part of school. Children say they want it. We know that in Wales it is part of school life.

We undertook work with my advisory group of children on access to mental health support earlier last year and the thing they said was that they were most likely to go to someone in a school, but also they would feel most comfortable doing that. They did not feel comfortable going to GPs and did not feel comfortable going elsewhere. They were actually going to the internet for information and had no clue whether that information was robust or not. I would like to see it in schools.

Q19 Suella Fernandes: We heard evidence a few weeks ago about the use of mindfulness pilots to help wellbeing and mental health. Have you got any view or knowledge of that?

Anne Longfield: I think there is some really interesting work going on and some really interesting pilots. I think we need to look at how we can best help children. I just don't think that this is about plonking individuals in schools and waiting for children to knock on doors. I do think there is a real issue about anxiety: it is a barometer of health for children, and children are clearly saying, "Before we get to the stage of having diagnosed mental health issues, we want some help with anxiety, and we want that to be in schools."

There is of course also the issue of school nurses, which I think would be useful to review again within the same situation. We know that lots of school nurses are taken off-site quite often and do not get time in schools.

Q20 Suella Fernandes: I am not quite sure how to segue into this, but Ramadan is due to fall during the examination period and the Association of School and College Leaders is planning to work with Muslim faith leaders to try to find a solution. What is your view on how to ensure there is the rigour and robustness we are talking about, but also tolerance?

Anne Longfield: I am not aware of the detail, but my understanding was that there were discussions around arrangements to delay the exam timetable. I think it is really important that this takes place and there is an understanding about the individual children within this. Clearly there needs to be rigour around the examinations themselves, but I would welcome those discussions and I would welcome solutions. I was of the understanding that there had been some progress, but I may be wrong.

Q21 Chair: Your first commitment is entitled “understanding and celebrating childhood.” It certainly focuses on understanding, but what do you think is “celebrating”? How will you celebrate childhood?

Anne Longfield: Celebrating childhood goes back to my first point around valuing childhood in its own right, rather than as just a rehearsal for adult life. I do not think that we are very confident as a nation in talking about childhood. We do not always have a clear sense of our responsibility about childhood, as parents, as community members, or indeed as wider society. We are also not very confident—I say this in the document—about taking steps to shape childhood. The first thing is that we have choices about the kind of society we offer children and I think that is one we should talk about more often.

Q22 Chair: What steps are you going to take to celebrate?

Anne Longfield: One of the things about celebrating childhood that I really want to bring to the fore is understanding what the lived experience of childhood is, so I am going to be holding and running a series of activities around growing up. It focuses on growing up in England, mainly because that is the geographical domain that we are working in, but it is really bringing to the fore what growing up today means. Of course, if you have children yourself, you are reminded for that period of time what it means to be growing up at the age of three, growing up at the age of 10, but if you are older, you tend to forget. I think it is something that we all need to be aware of: the changing nature of childhood. I am going to do a lot of that through visual means, but also have a mass participation day, hopefully once a year, where we ask children around the country either to download visually or in some way curate their own childhood and tell us what that means.

Beyond that, there are a whole series of themes about growing up, and growing up well. I want to look at growing up in the north, because actually I think there is increasing concerns that there may be some lags in opportunity for children in the north and I think that is something which would be very powerful, but also again look at how we can help embed the notion of a child-friendly community within some of our local areas.

Chair: Thank you. Kate is going to talk about children’s services.

Kate Hollern: I will stick to the five minutes, I promise.

Chair: That will be good but you have got to do a deal with Anne, so that she makes sure she is also close to five minutes. That is what we have to focus on.

Anne Longfield: I have no clock or watch.

Q23 Kate Hollern: A very plain, quick question. According to Ofsted, 75% of children’s services departments require improvements. Do you think enough has been done to bring about that improvement?

Anne Longfield: Do I think enough is being done to improve children’s services?

Kate Hollern: Yes.

Anne Longfield: I certainly think that an immense change is going on in children's services. It is a change in the nature of those services, but also it is being done at a time when there is immense pressure, limitation of budgets and real, increasing demand. There was a programme around improving children's services that came from the sector and was halted a couple of years ago, and I don't think that has been replaced to the level it needs to be. The pressures on local authorities to look at how they continue to deliver services and improve their services to children against the budget requirements they have are simply a step into the unknown for a lot of them at the moment.

We know that some are getting ahead of the game. There was an announcement just before Christmas about pathfinders or partners in practice, I think they are called, but actually there are very few of those. I think there is an urgent need to look at sharing best practice on innovation but also seriously to look at how changing children's services are impacting on children. So I do think there is a real need at the moment for a stocktake on where we are with children's services and the impact on children. That is something I will write to the Secretary of State about.

Q24 Kate Hollern: Given the pressures you have described, how confident are you of meeting the commitments that you have made?

Anne Longfield: Some of those are around local authorities and some are not. Certainly, the areas around children in care are very much with local authorities. The pressures around children in care are intense but there is also a statutory duty there that local authorities understand. There is commitment from the centre on children in care, so I think there is a fighting chance of being able to achieve the ambitions around children in care, with more investment and more support.

On inequalities there are real tensions around the ability to secure the kind of ambitions I am setting out without additional money. I do not think that can be done. Additional money will absolutely be needed.

Q25 Kate Hollern: I would disagree with you slightly. The pressure is not just from children in care. Because of the pressures in children's services and other organisations such as education, police and everything else, early intervention is not as strong as it should be. I have a real concern that that will have an impact on your commitments, not just on children in care.

Anne Longfield: No, I was saying that with children in care there is a fighting chance of being able to deliver on the ambitions. In terms of the scale of risk of being able to deliver what I am talking about, I think it is deliverable for children in care. There have already been some positive signs of intention. The scale of change needs to be changed and more investment will be needed, but I think that feels as if it is on a journey to delivery.

More widely, reducing inequalities and overcoming poverty cannot be delivered without not only change and innovation but additional investment. Additional investment in

the form of early intervention is the area where we have seen the tightest squeeze. Local authorities tell me that they feel that they are at real risk of putting children into harm's way by allowing them to get to the point of needing quite intense help. Voluntary sector bodies also tell me about the pressures that they are experiencing at the moment.

I think there is a real priority around focusing on inequalities, really looking at early intervention and the potential for transition and bridging investment to allow local authorities to step out and maintain early intervention. Without early intervention the cost, both socially and economically, will just continue to rise.

Q26 Kate Hollern: And of course there is the burden of the difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers. Morale is quite low in the sector.

Anne Longfield: Yes, and the whole social work recruitment and reform programme is of a sizeable scale and challenge, and of course that goes across at a time of reduced budgets as well. I think the innovation programmes are showing good results, and that is something that can be built upon and extended, but there is an opportunity for a Government that has directly said it wants to root out poverty and to change and turn around children's futures, to do so. I think it needs to be swiftly enacted now if it is to result in real change within my lifetime in this post, but it needs to be sustained over time.

Q27 Kate Hollern: But you are still confident about the commitment you have made.

Anne Longfield: I am.

QChair: Some of your answers touched on one of the big issues—agency co-operation and partnership among social work, education, healthcare and so on. With a title like yours—Children's Commissioner—children are going to be involved in many of those different services at some time in their lives. How are you going to help bring those agencies together so that children do not fall between stools, and so they do not get ignored, with data not being properly passed on, and so on? You have got a real role there, haven't you, to bring together those agencies?

Anne Longfield: Yes, and practically that is one of the things, at its most basic level, that I can often do: I can be a broker and convener. That might be across central Government, or it might be in a local area. That is always valuable, but I cannot roam the country and do that; it needs to be more strategic. It is something which I am deeply aware of and is really at the heart of a lot of my ambition—getting much more joined-up services around the need of children. It is what children tell me all the time they get very frustrated about—having to pinball between different services. It is also a waste and a duplication at a time when resources are very scarce. It is of immense priority.

In terms of what I want to do—

Chair: Yes.

Anne Longfield: In terms of what I do—are you prompting me, there?

Chair: Yes, that is what I want.

Anne Longfield: In terms of what I want to do, I am talking about a programme about understanding vulnerabilities and about proactive tackling of those vulnerabilities. That is going to be about three things: understanding what they are, working together with services to give a joined-up response, and then helping children to recover and move on, as well. Part of that is about modelling new ways of working.

Take, for instance, protecting children from harm. One of the core aspects of the work in its next year is going to be looking at how services need to work together. I want to put together some frameworks. Those might be models of collaboration. I have got a programme being piloted called “See Me Hear Me”, which is about putting the child at the heart. I hope that would be replicated and taken up by more local authorities. I want to look at encouraging more towns and cities to sign up to being child-friendly. For me that signs up to a joint vision and a joint plan, and a joint—

Q28 Chair: Joint meaning planned between the agencies?

Anne Longfield: In a local area, yes. That would be part of what I envisage. You would have to have that to become child-friendly: a joint plan, a joint vision and a joint sign-up to working together in a very practical way.

Chair: We will stop there for the moment and let Lucy Allan talk about children in care.

Q29 Lucy Allan: Just quickly picking up something that Kate raised about early intervention, do you think it is quite short sighted of Government not to be investing in families on the fringes of care, and instead waiting for something to actually go wrong in the life of that child and their then having to be put into care? I think that seemed to be what you were saying, but I just wondered—

Anne Longfield: It is, and you have put that very well for me. All my experience and all my work over the 25 or 30 years I have worked in this area has been about helping and strengthening families and strengthening children, and helping to prevent crisis or disaster happening. I worked with Graham Allen to set up the Early Intervention Foundation. I looked after that for the first six months with him and with the Department. It goes to the heart of what I am talking about.

The statistics can be rolled out—£16 billion and the like. I worry that there is a bit of fatigue around some of those figures. They are real, but the social cost of not doing this is immense. We know from local authorities that that area has been squeezed. I would say that early intervention has to be in place to enable us to get to a different place. Family support is something we really need to look at and something that I will be advocating throughout childhood as a vital part of the bid to tackle inequality.

Lucy Allan: We have a debate tomorrow on children in care, and if I may, I will quote you, because it is a very important point.

Anne Longfield: Please do.

Q30 Lucy Allan: Moving on, I am delighted that one of your commitments—commitment 2—is about children in care. We want to focus on that in this Committee. One thing you want to see, which is vital, is greater stability for children going into foster placements. We hear so often accounts of children for whom placement after placement breaks down, the impact on their lives, how they see themselves as unlovable and abandoned and the lack of a sense of belonging. What can practically be done about that? I used to sit on fostering and adoption panels and I would see the same children coming back and back again. They tend to interpret it as their fault, and it is not. How can we get placements that are of a longer duration and greater permanence?

Anne Longfield: Of course, those who are often moved are often the ones with the greatest needs and need the greatest levels of support. A third of children who we talked to in our survey last year said they have moved between one and four times in the last 12 months. Any of us as adults would find that immensely disruptive.

Q31 Lucy Allan: It has an impact on their schooling and their friendship networks.

Anne Longfield: Absolutely. How would any of us cope with moving home three or four times over a period? So much is down to the right decisions around placing, around the quality of foster carers and around the support that foster carers get. I have been really impressed by areas such as Ealing that are proactively seeking new foster carers and looking at how they can support super-foster carers—I am sure they would not like me to use that phrase—and at the notion that some children will require more support and that more support is needed for those foster carers. Interestingly, one thing that children in care often say to me is, “Who decides on what training to give foster carers? We want to train foster carers ourselves.” Actually, that is no bad thing. There is an interesting opportunity there.

As part of a move towards not just providing stability and security but helping children to recover from trauma, I am really interested in looking at how we can help more foster carers take a more pedagogical approach, based on relationships and on supporting the child to develop and move on. That is a really interesting aspect. I know there are great constraints on foster carers and high demands, but there is a need to widen the net of who we attract to become foster carers.

Q32 Lucy Allan: Do you think there is too much emphasis on it being a financial relationship? In some instances, people are receiving £500 a week to foster a child.

Anne Longfield: In the vast majority of cases, no, to be absolutely honest. Sometimes young people who have had a bad experience say that they think maybe the foster carer was attracted by the money, but the vast majority of foster carers have huge integrity. They are doing a remarkable job. They are investing in children’s futures in a way that most of us should take our hats off to. Having said that, clearly it plays its part, and there is a need for support for those foster carers.

There are still horror stories of children not having Christmas dinner with the rest of the family, not being given keys and things like that. Obviously, we need to make sure that none of those things ever take place. It is important to invest in foster carers. With residential care it is about having the right levels of support—not seeing that as a last option, but having an option of specialist support, possibly for the short term, to enable children to get the help they need, and possibly the foster family too.

Q33 Lucy Allan: Can we move on to staying put, which is an incredibly important issue? A foster child might think, “I’m going to be kicked out of this family at a certain time. I will no longer belong when I reach a certain age.” All young people have needs, whether they are going through the university system or whatever. You cannot do that on your own, whether it is trying to find a job or go into independence. I used to be a councillor across the road in Wandsworth. We had a fantastic independent living scheme, where young people would go from both foster and residential care into monitored and supervised living arrangements, where help with some of the practicalities—budgeting and skills of living independently—was made available to them. Is that sort of scheme rolled out elsewhere, or is that unique?

Anne Longfield: I think there are inconsistencies around the move out of care into independent living. Some areas have been much more ahead of the curve in that. Children staying put is very widely welcomed, but I am told that there are great inconsistencies in different areas of the country. There is a feeling that the areas that were already delivering some of this are continuing delivery. It doesn’t seem that there is a great push for every area to do it.

Q34 Lucy Allan: You want it blanket, across the board, up to 25—is that right? That is quite extreme.

Anne Longfield: Up to 25. Clearly, it is not the same level of care that you would have if you were eight years old, but where I have seen it work best, the local authority takes on the responsibility to provide some of those networks and places to go. I have been really impressed by some of the pathways, into both independent living and employment. There is a real opportunity to look ambitiously at offering almost a guarantee around education or training for young people if they leave care. I think that that is part of the corporate responsibility role. We need to look much more ambitiously at apprenticeships and consider some fast-track routes into them, with the necessary support. All those things are needed, and there is clearly the residential care issue as well.

Chair: We want to keep some time for therapeutic care, don’t we, Lucy?

Lucy Allan: Yes, sorry. I have one more. The work that you are doing is really important—

Chair: We’ve got that point. We now want to move on to therapeutic care.

Anne Longfield: Just on that point, with those 150 different regimes going on, there is a real necessity for reality-check stocktaking and also good practice. That is something I am going to be incorporating into what I am going to offer.

Q35 Lucy Allan: The accessibility of therapeutic care for young people in the care system is incredibly important, not least because we see from the statistics that young people leaving care often find that when they themselves get pregnant or have children they have not dealt with some of the issues that manifested themselves while they were growing up in the care system. They then have their own children taken from them and put into care. If care is not dealing with the issues that young people face, we are failing them.

Anne Longfield: I agree. Some of the people who spoke to you before Christmas about mental health and children in care made some of these points as well, and I would support what they said. Our emphasis has rightly been on stability and security, and that needs to continue, but we need to aim higher for children in care. The corporate responsibilities are clearly manifest, but part of that has to be about enabling children to recover from trauma. We know that adverse experiences in childhood will have impacts throughout life: we know that they will be more dependent on public services going forward; we know that they will be more vulnerable in terms of life experience; and we know that the likelihood of being in custody or having mental health issues—the list goes on—is much greater. Knowing those things, we have a responsibility to tackle that. We have 70,000 children in care, which is a sizeable, but also finite number.

Q36 Lucy Allan: Is it achievable?

Anne Longfield: I think it is achievable, although you would expect me to say that, certainly at this stage. It is not that money is not spent at the moment. Some of the therapeutic care is currently very expensive. It may be that that therapeutic care is not the right kind of therapeutic care. Some of it might be about training foster carers to have a more pedagogical approach. Some of it might be about greater stability in the first instance, which will help.

Q37 Lucy Allan: Or counselling, as you were talking about in schools, being made more available?

Anne Longfield: Or counselling in the wider realm.

Chair: Okay, I am going to start counselling on the length of questions and answers. I may run a course later on both. We are going to move on to Kate.

Q38 Kate Hollern: You talk about aligning services: what will that look like? I struggled with the concept.

Anne Longfield: Aligning services?

Kate Hollern: Yes. What will it look like?

Anne Longfield: This goes back to the issue of multi-agency working and aligning purpose. I am acutely aware that services have different starting points and cultures for children. We even call them different things. They can be pupils, patients, victims or prisoners, but they are still children at the end of the day. Going back to the point about vulnerability, if we do not look at them as children and at their vulnerabilities, we are storing up problems for the future.

I recognise that we are not in the context of wanting to recreate enormous bureaucracies around services, with new infrastructure and the like, but there are some wise, sensible and necessary moves that local services need to make to work together in a much more aligned way. That is going back to the notion of having a joint vision locally or a vision that people buy into, some ways of working locally and some joint objectives.

There have been some moves around there, but I still do not think that services consider that they are in a joint endeavour to the level that is needed. Clearly, there are very practical issues around sharing information, but beyond that there are issues around alignment that need immensely greater speed of action.

Q39 Kate Hollern: I am sorry but I still do not understand. Objectives and visions are already agreed through local strategic partnerships, safeguarding boards, education boards and governors' boards. What will your structures actually look like?

Anne Longfield: You are right that there is a plethora of agreed visions, but I think there are almost too many of them. What I am talking about is an ambition and a commitment from an area to have tangible outcomes and improvements across all of those plans that people can sign up to.

I am not advocating immense new complicated arrangements, although there will need to be some. Some of this is about simple practice in local areas and about taking this local and working with local communities. There have been some really good examples of agencies working together in some of the lottery-funded Better Start programmes, where you have a very defined programme for nought to threes and agencies working very collaboratively to reach tangible objectives for those children. Pooling budgets is one way that heightens people's minds and focus on some of this.

We need to look at some radical solutions but we are in a situation where there is a danger that services will go back to their core basepoint in terms of their responsibilities. We absolutely do not want that to happen. We need all services to come together to be able to look at tackling children's needs together, with the precious money they have.

Q40 Kate Hollern: We spoke earlier about the challenges facing individual department structures. I think you have a real challenge there, particularly when you talk about pooling budgets, because then you focus on structures rather than the problems of retaining and recruitment and focusing on that objective.

Anne Longfield: Clearly, increasing the quality, including recruitment, leadership and the workforce, is really important within all of this, whatever the situation, but I do think we have to have those brave dialogues about how services work together.

We cannot have people working in silos. That has been recognised by the best authorities and local agencies. Some of the devolution conversations are about doing things differently in some of these ways. We have seen Manchester look differently at the way they can pull together services around family hubs. Those are some of the ways we can bring together services and create some of the glue around what happens already. We do still invest in services, but the part I see being undermined most is the early intervention, the prevention and the glue around them.

Q41 Kate Hollern: I am still not sure how it will look, but it will be interesting to watch.

Ofsted has been very critical of the effectiveness of local safeguarding boards. It says they lack authority. Do you agree?

Anne Longfield: Certainly, some have struggled with the wide-ranging model they have had. They have struggled with the lack of authority and with the immensity of the demands put on them. The review that we now have in place will be reporting swiftly—I think we are talking about a March reporting date. It is a positive review that comes at the right time. A mechanism is needed to bring together agencies around safeguarding. Something is needed. Whether the boards that were established are the right mechanism is up for debate.

Chair: Thank you very much, Kate. Lucy, you are going to talk about sexual exploitation and to do so within five minutes.

Q42 Lucy Allan: I represent a constituency in the West Midlands—Telford—where we have had a serious case of child exploitation and the grooming of young vulnerable girls, particularly girls in care or on the fringes of care. How is your “See Me, Hear Me” approach working, and how are local authorities responding to it?

Anne Longfield: I think it is working well. It is pretty early days. We have a programme of work for the next six months, which is about starting to share learning and holding some sharing conference events or summits—whatever you want to call them—in early summer, which will be really valuable. These issues require the kind of alignments I am talking about, none of which are easy—I am not trying to say any of these things are easy. Obviously, they are completely simple to talk about, but none is easy to achieve. But the three areas that are piloting this around the country have really battled through on some of these issues. The demands around responding to CSE have actually helped to support the importance of this work and meant that it has been mainstreamed, rather than seen as an interesting pilot on the edges. We are now at a point where we can start talking about how this work can be taken forward.

At the heart of this, we are talking about policy that is wrapped around children's needs, an understanding of children, and a recognition that children need to be involved in any engagement from the start and listened to. This is about a vital culture change. Again, this can be described in some areas as a rights-based approach, a child-friendly approach or a child outcome-based approach, but simply putting children at the heart of this starts to make some of the difficult and complex issues about how you can make all this work actually work.

Q43 Lucy Allan: Are the recommendations of Sue Berelowitz still being implemented?

Anne Longfield: Yes. Much of this was about services working together and about children actually being recognised and heard. The fact that CSE has now been taken as a major, national priority, which is at the top of the agenda for local authorities and, indeed, the police, has meant that the priorities involved are now mainstream. That does not mean that in every area they are being experienced by every child. None of us could put our hand on our heart and say—

Q44 Lucy Allan: I have definitely seen a change of attitude and approach.

Anne Longfield: There has been a change. The issue is a priority, and there is scrutiny. There was a No. 10 summit in March last year, which 10 Secretaries of State attended. That gave it the level of commitment needed. There is a need for a follow-up to that to see where we have got in a year, because these are serious issues.

Q45 Chair: Well done. Thank you, that was excellent. Anne, your recent report, *Protecting children from harm*, talked about 400,000 to 450,000 children being victims of sexual abuse. You say in your report that those figures are “tentative and indicative.” How much confidence do you have in those figures?

Anne Longfield: I am very confident in those figures, because they have been rigorously tested. You will be aware that there have been many estimates about the scale of child sexual abuse for some time. The NSPCC put forward very good figures—one in 20—and there have been figures around 11% of children. This was where the data collection came into its own, because I was able to ask every police force and I looked at all the children in need figures. I was able to get with that not only the initials of the child, but the date of birth, so I was able to cross-reference those together to look at the scale and numbers of children who had been recorded. Alongside that, I also did a survey of survivors as well.

We worked with Professor Silverman from the Home Office, who has become somewhat of an expert in making the best possible judgment on finding statistics for what we don't know—previously around trafficked children and modern slavery. He put in place the model that enabled us to look at the ones we know, and then through that model of cross-referencing to look at how many we don't know. The figure that came out was that actually,

one in eight children come to the attention of the authorities for child sexual abuse within the family.

Q46 Chair: A very disturbing figure. That leads me on to the observation that you also made in your report about the problem of waiting for children to speak out. You rightly say that that is not working, given the statistics you have just outlined to us of one in eight. How do you propose that professionals and statutory services move away from the sort of disclosure-led approach?

Anne Longfield: There are immense implications of saying this because clearly, there is a resource issue around one in eight. There is an issue around prevention, and also an issue around a change of culture, in terms of waiting for disclosure.

I am looking to do three things in the next year. One is about prevention and understanding much better the journey that children experience, if you like, within abuse and looking not only at positive work with families, but much greater emphasis on all professionals reaching out to children, understanding the signs and not waiting for children to walk through those doors. There is also a piece around services being much more aligned—I can't stop saying "aligned" now—and working in a much more joined-up way on that response, with the police and social services clearly being the two in there.

I will be looking to highlight areas that are ahead of the curve in tackling this, and there are some. There are really interesting models, such as the Barnahus model, where children have safe places to go and services come to them, and they can get the support they need in one place. There is a proposition that that model—a European model, an Icelandic model—is piloted in a number of places, and I really want to support those pilots.

It is about working with the police to look again at the practicalities of the best evidence interview and the realities of what that means for children who often cannot give the kind of evidence needed. I am really looking again at the data that police need to be able to show the progress we are making.

There are very practical steps, but at the heart of this, the burden we expect children to carry in this process is very high. We expect children to be the ones who analyse what has happened, gather the evidence and come to us, and actually, that is not acceptable. That will not happen.

Q47 Chair: Lucy is going to talk to you about PSHE shortly, but I want to know how you think you are going to bring together three Government Departments as you imply in your report. That is obviously the core of the point you have just made to me and Kate.

Anne Longfield: There is a lot of cross-Government liaison work that I do, which might be with each Department or actually might be bringing people together, and I do think there is a core role there for me to be able to broker that and to put in place mechanisms across Government. I talk about the machinery of Government, and that is something, clearly, that you and colleagues talk about a lot in all sorts of things, but I do think there is not only a

necessity but an opportunity to look at a better machinery of cross-Government working for children.

Q48 Chair: Have you got any thoughts on what that looks like?

Anne Longfield: I suppose at its most basic it needs to have a cross-ministerial group around children. It needs, again, to look at stocktaking what is spent and invested in children; because I don't think there is a coherent understanding of spending on children across Government Departments.

Q49 Chair: There is a lot of stocktaking to be done—I have picked that up; but what do you think we need to do to get Government Departments to work together on this issue of sexual exploitation of children?

Anne Longfield: On CSE, clearly there are a number of taskforces already there, and I think there needs to be the leadership from the top and that continued leadership, which is why I said there needed to be a summit, again, probably in about eight weeks' time, to look at progress and follow that through; but, wider than CSE, I do think that leadership from the top, that grasping of the opportunity to make children's futures a legacy issue for this Government, is not only necessary, but is also there as a huge opportunity. It is one that, led from the top, would command—with an extension of something like the family test to children—a much greater sense that Government Departments are working towards one end. It would make much better use of the resources that are there, and improve outcomes across the piece.

Chair: Thank you, Anne. Lucy, I gave you a run in, so now is your opportunity.

Q50 Lucy Frazer: I understand that you want PSHE to be given statutory status. What are you doing to make the case to Government?

Anne Longfield: It has been something that my office have called for for some time, as I know this Committee has. It was a core recommendation of part of that report; it has been taken forward with letters to Ministers and indeed letters to No. 10 as a result of that. I have never met a child yet who has not told me that this was absolute common sense.

Q51 Lucy Frazer: Let us come on to why it is important in a minute. You have written to Ministers and to the Prime Minister. Is there anything else that you have done?

Anne Longfield: Working very much with other organisations that are lobbying and campaigning around this: the reason for talking about children's views on this is to say that actually I think part of the power of the argument is children saying why it is needed and what needs to change.

Q52 Lucy Frazer: And have you had any conversations with the Secretary of State about it? Have you had any conversations with anybody in Government about it?

Anne Longfield: Conversations with both the Secretary of State and those around her, the civil servants, are ongoing around some of these things. I think that this is something on which clearly there is a response being awaited, in terms of the Select Committee here. I am hopeful that there will be a positive response to this. I think there are some changes to the way that PSHE is run at the moment which would be positive, but I think putting this on the statute—

Q53 Lucy Frazer: What would they be?

Anne Longfield: There are issues around the quality of what is run at the moment, and I think there needs to be an investment in specialists to run this. I don't think this has to be run by schoolteachers themselves. A plethora of voluntary organisations and specialists are now running this.

Q54 Lucy Frazer: And what should be taught? Should there be a set curriculum as to what must be taught, or should we leave it to each school to decide?

Anne Longfield: I think it has to be a set curriculum.

Q55 Lucy Frazer: And what should be on that?

Anne Longfield: I think the curriculums are being tested out and run by a whole range of organisations. Coram, for instance, runs a very successful learning for life curriculum.

Q56 Lucy Frazer: What would you like to see?

Anne Longfield: It starts with relationships, understanding of healthy relationships, understanding of your place in the community, understanding of yourself. At a very young age it builds around confidence and self-esteem. By the time you get towards secondary school, you are talking about the wider context and about sexuality and relationships. We know that a lot of children have viewed pornography by the age of 11. We need children to be aware of some of those dangers and to be confident about tackling them. One of the reasons for pushing most on CSE is that so many children say they do not know the words and that they did not know it was not something all children experienced.

Q57 Lucy Frazer: You mentioned a few ideas. Things that crop up from time to time are mental health, technology and sex education. You mentioned the concepts but not those words themselves. Do you think those are three necessary items?

Anne Longfield: I think they should be. I mentioned earlier in my remarks that I thought they should be, partly because in terms of digitality, it is part of the existence of most children and part of staying safe and of empowerment, and partly because mental health is something I see as part of growing up and the anxieties children are facing. These are mainstream issues.

I am aware that we throw an awful lot at PSHE, and we have to look carefully at that balance. My initial default is: yes, they should be, but we should be aware that we are asking an awful lot of a curriculum that may have limited time. The issue has to be that all children have to have access to it, and the way we can secure that—again, children say they want to be able to learn about these things with peers. There is a certainty they get from learning about these things with peers, rather than with family or from relying on hearsay.

Q58 Lucy Frazer: When you say “these things”, is there is a hierarchy of things you would like to see?

Anne Longfield: Relationships, sexuality and consent are clearly very high on the list, from everything I have said about the urgency of the matter in terms of CSA. There is an urgency around mental health as well. There are some core aspects, but at the heart of this—

Q59 Lucy Frazer: So sexuality, not sex?

Anne Longfield: No; I mean sex—sex and relationships.

Q60 Lucy Frazer: Schools are already required to publish their PSHE curriculums and to fulfil various requirements related to the teaching of PSHE. In your view, how would making it statutory make any difference?

Anne Longfield: At the moment, the experience that children tell me about is vastly inconsistent.

Q61 Lucy Frazer: Is that about quality?

Anne Longfield: It is about quality and consistency. Very often, young people say to me that they have had very patchy, swift lessons. At worst, they say they are taught by their maths teacher, who puts on a video. They say they are deeply embarrassed for their maths teacher. They don't ask any questions because they want to help the process pass.

Q62 Lucy Frazer: Is that about the quality rather than the fact that it should be mandatory? If schools are providing PSHE already, is there a need to make it statutory in order for it to be good, or is there something else that should be done?

Anne Longfield: I don't think that making it statutory makes it good.

Q63 Lucy Frazer: So what do we need to do?

Anne Longfield: As part of it being statutory, it needs to have certain levels of quality. It needs to have trained individuals and it needs to have a requirement about who can teach it, but I don't think that just making it statutory makes it good.

Lucy Frazer: That is really helpful. Thank you.

Q64 Suella Fernandes: You published research that showed, shockingly, that though there had been 50,000 reports of child sexual abuse over a two-year period, the actual number of incidents was 450,000. That suggests the true scale of child sexual abuse and exploitation is far greater than what the official figures suggest. This involves police, social workers, social services, the Home Office and schools. What do you think the system is getting wrong and what should change?

Anne Longfield: We will be able to talk about this in much more detail over the next year. From what we know already, part of it is about waiting for disclosure. We are waiting for children to be able to come to the point where they can articulate something and present something to adults in a way that overtly demonstrates that abuse has taken place. Part of the change I am looking for is around spotting the signs of poor wellbeing and abuse much earlier and intervening at that point. Having access to and good relationships with adults, potentially around schools, will be crucial for those things. Two thirds of those figures were around child sexual abuse within the family and a third were around other kinds of abuse, including CSE. Of course, abuse within families is particularly difficult because the relationships in the family create a huge burden for the child. Making that known, providing a reality check, and bringing it to the attention of those who can make a difference, such as practitioners and professionals, as well as parliamentarians, is part of what the next phase is about.

It is also about demonstrating and piloting new ways of working. I have been very pleased with the dialogue that has been happening in some of the professions since that report was published. You referred earlier to the fact that sometimes reports are published and then they are gone, but I have had some very good conversations with principal social workers and others about the reflection and discussions they have been having with some of their teams about what this means for practice and the way they are doing things. I am looking forward to taking forward that conversation with Ministers and others in the Department. There is clearly a need, as we say, for a much wider range of Departments to be involved. We are talking about a fundamental culture change that realigns itself around children first and foremost, and equips all those with access to children to be able to spot the signs early, rather than waiting for the symptoms to manifest themselves.

Q65 Suella Fernandes: What kind of capabilities do you think are needed in schools to carry out that early intervention and identification?

Anne Longfield: Again, as with mental health issues, schools are the places where children go and teachers are the ones who have very good relations with children and often spot changes, so it is right that we look at work around schools. One of the things I put forward as a consideration, and one that I wish to take forward, is looking at social workers in schools. I know that that is not new to many areas, but we know that having a social worker in the school means that a lot of issues can be dealt with as they arise. Some of those issues around early worries and concerns, from either children themselves or practitioners and teachers, can be dealt with at that stage, rather than escalating.

One thing we did as part of the first year of the inquiry was hold evidence sessions with a whole range of professionals. We heard from them about the worries they had about setting off an escalation process that, really, they didn't feel they had the evidence to sustain, and we heard their worries about the impact that that would have on children without being able to get any support for them or, indeed, any conviction for any perpetrator. That creates a great gulf that really leaves very vulnerable open children to potential harm. That is the gulf that we need to fill in terms of the change of culture. Social workers in schools and greater skilling-up for teachers to be able to spot the signs and act are part of that. Mental health support in schools would go some of that way already.

Chair: Michelle, you are going to be discussing the ministerial taskforce on child protection.

Q66 Michelle Donelan: As you know, the taskforce was set up in June. Have you attended any meetings so far? What has your level of engagement been to date?

Anne Longfield: I haven't as yet, but I am certainly hoping to be invited and would ask to be invited.

Q67 Michelle Donelan: Have you had any engagement at all so far?

Anne Longfield: With individual Ministers within it, but not with the taskforce formally.

Q68 Michelle Donelan: Bearing that in mind, how do you think you will be able to influence it and get the issues you have raised to the top of the agenda?

Anne Longfield: The report has come at an important time. There has been the work on CSE and the work on institutional abuse. This work on child sexual abuse within the family is really part of it and really important in understanding the range of abuse that children are suffering. I think it has been recognised as such; I have had a very good response from Ministers in both the Home Office and the DFE. They are both working on their response to me; one of my powers is that I can expect a response. But clearly, working within the remits of these taskforces will be absolutely key. One of the messages I have had from the taskforce is that they are looking for practical examples, for pilots, for good practice; and certainly the "See Me, Hear Me" work is something that I am seeking to fill in. I am in close contact not only with Ministers in those Departments, but with the Goddard inquiry—they

were briefed extensively before the report was launched—in terms of feeding this into ongoing dialogues.

Q69 Michelle Donelan: So it is not concerning you that you have not been invited to date and you don't think that that is questioning your level of influence on it or the effectiveness of the—

Anne Longfield: I would like to put it down to the Christmas period in December, given that the report was only launched at the end of November. Clearly, I wouldn't want to let any grass grow on that, so I won't be backward in coming forward—in putting myself forward. A number of taskforces, groups and different dialogues are going on around this. I think part of the next stage of maturity about some of the solutions is bringing together that drive and dialogue into a coherent piece around abuse.

Q70 Michelle Donelan: What do you think will be at the top of the taskforce's in-tray?

Anne Longfield: I think CSE is still a very pressing issue. I think it is, because there are so many CSE issues going through the courts still. It is still an issue that people are grappling with. It's still an issue that the police have, rightly, put at the top. We know that this is a top priority, and we are only starting to see some of the cases coming through. But in terms of moving forward, prevention has to be high up in that taskforce in-box, but also starting to look at some of the practical models for how this can be turned around locally.

Q71 Chair: According to notes I have, one task of the taskforce, if I can put it that way, is to “overhaul the way...police, social services and other agencies work together”. Do you think overhauling is enough, or does something much more radical need to be done?

Anne Longfield: It depends on how you define “overhaul”. I see overhauling as pretty radical. If I was doing the overhauling—

Q72 Chair: Well, “overhaul” gives you the impression that they work well together already; it just needs improvement. I would say that the situation is much more serious than that.

Anne Longfield: For me, overhauling is about dismantling what you have and putting it back together in a different way.

Q73 Chair: I think I'll take that as radical.

Anne Longfield: And that is probably where we need to be. We are going through a period of questioning of public services across the piece—their role and what they are for. I have been really pleased with the Charlie Taylor review on children in custody. One of the

first questions he asked was: what is custody for? If we are to have the kind of change programme against the radical level of change in funding that we are looking at in public services, we have to have that fundamental and radical review. So dismantling and putting back together in a way that is fit for purpose not only for children and families, but for the context and time we're in is something that I would want to support. Does that go far enough for overhauling?

Q74 Chair: We will be looking at agency co-operation ourselves in due course. I think it's a really important issue; it has cropped up several times in some of your answers. So stand by for some action.

Anne Longfield: I think it's at the heart of it. It comes back to the basis of what services are for.

Chair: I don't agree with your understanding of the word "overhaul", but we will—

Anne Longfield: I know you don't want me to carry on, but—

Chair: No, I don't. I want to move on to question 16, which Suella is going to ask, because we have done question 15 as far as I can see.

Lucy Allan: We have, although if I may make just one tiny point—

Chair: It has to be small, Lucy.

Q75 Lucy Allan: How can we persuade the Government to invest in early intervention? I know we talked about it earlier, but how can we as a Committee and as MPs, and you as Children's Commissioner, do that?

Anne Longfield: Part of this is about reaffirming the absolute benefits and reaffirming the messages, and doing so forcefully, robustly and charmingly—all those things. Also, part of this has to be about looking in the mirror of what we don't do. This isn't a concept; this is a reality. Then it is about looking at some of the practical measures that could be put in place.

Q76 Lucy Allan: And there is evidence?

Anne Longfield: There is evidence. The Early Intervention Foundation has lots of evidence, but I think we need to look at a practical solution that is something like a transition fund that would allow that breathing space to allow local areas to make the leap into realignment and into early intervention and prevention. I urge you to do that, and I would be very happy to do it.

Q77 Suella Fernandes: The Government are committed to eradicating child poverty and have proposed changing the definition of child poverty from relative income, which has been quite flawed, arbitrary and target-driven, to one that encapsulates a wider variety of root causes such as family breakdown, income levels and exam results. What do you think about that change?

Anne Longfield: The issue of poverty and the scale of poverty cannot be a side issue. That has to be at the core and the centrality of all that we do, and it certainly will be at the forefront of all my work on inequality. This is something that, UK-wide, is at the centre of what the four Commissioners presented to the UN in terms of areas and gaps in performance. I have no problem with a wider basket of measures around poverty, and I think that a greater understanding about pathways to poverty, and a focus on life chances as part of that, has merits. There has to be income measurement as part of that. If we don't measure the fundamental issue about a lack of money, we are missing the core point. Those two can work alongside each other. I supported an amendment to the welfare Bill that was tabled by the Earl of Listowel on the reintroduction of the income measurement, and I will continue to support that, too.

As a nation that has our level of resources, scarce though they may be comparatively at various points, we have to tackle the issue of poverty head on. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to root out poverty, and we know some of the ways that can be done. Some of it will be around local interventions, and some of it needs to be led nationally around some of the areas of greatest need.

Q78 Suella Fernandes: What kind of practical support do you think will make a tangible difference to the parents of children in areas of poverty?

Anne Longfield: One of the big things we need to recognise, and remind ourselves of, is that the majority of children living in poverty now have parents who work. Clearly there is concern around hard-working parents, and we need to understand that the image of children in poverty is now one of working households. Often they are working in short-term jobs, shift employment and unstable work, so work, good income levels and the minimum wage are all very important. Clearly, support in terms of welfare as part of that is also really important.

There are practical things from which families really benefit. My track record before this job was around Sure Start. I am very supportive of looking around and developing inter-family hubs that have a focus on poverty, which would be about helping families with debt and work skills. It would really be looking at harnessing the benefits in which we are already investing in terms of early education for two, three and four-year-olds, which is coming up to 30 hours for three and four-year-olds. Again, it is about making the reduction of poverty a core aspect and objective of all those who work with the early years. That is part of the mission, in the ether, of those who work in that area, but it is about an explicit objective to reduce poverty for all those who work with children in that area.

Q79 Suella Fernandes: Do you have any ideas of practical support relating to these various factors of family breakdown, alcohol and drug dependency, and exam results?

Anne Longfield: So much of it comes back to early intervention. Many of the issues around addiction, violence and alcohol abuse can be tackled by understanding families, being available to families and having practical services in place to bring down some of those levels.

Again, in terms of family breakdown, there is relationship support. Figures coming through absolutely show that if you strengthen relationships, you are going to be able to increase stability. There are well-versed programmes running. We could fill the room with voluntary sector representatives who would tell you the difference it would make. They need funding, and they need a home and to be part of the glue of what we offer in the most disadvantaged areas.

Chair: Lucy, you have some questions now.

Q80 Lucy Frazer: Yes, about mental health. A lot of things I wanted to ask you have been covered, but I would like to ask you about a few key things. We know that looked-after children are more likely to suffer from mental health problems. We know, as you said, that school is a great place for them to find out more. You mentioned the idea of social workers in schools. Have you taken any steps in relation to that initiative, or any other to help people in school?

Anne Longfield: In terms of policy proposals, they are at that stage at the moment, but I will be seeking to look at practical pilots. One thing I want to do is not just to talk about policy proposals. Clearly I am in a first phase here, but I hope what you will see over time is that actually I want to use this role to broker pilots, local areas and others on working with some of the proposals I am setting out.

Q81 Lucy Frazer: That sounds like a good idea. Do you have an idea of what your first pilot might be?

Anne Longfield: In the area of mental health, I think it will be around the practicality of making some of the ambitions around *Future in mind* a reality. Clearly there is a view that it is necessary to have a joint assessment, approach and collaboration. I would like to have a child-led pilot around some of those that talks about and looks at how best to respond to need and to incorporate this with local agencies.

Q82 Lucy Frazer: That sounds great, but what does it mean? Is there a person on site? Are there joined-up services?

Anne Longfield: I don't have massive resources to put people on site. I require and rely on local areas to come to the table to deliver some of these things. I am proposing to put together models of how some of these things can work. It might be that I end up kitemarking some of these models as Children's Commissioner models, if you like—I do not know how far some of that might go.

I would put together models of collaboration around mental health in local areas. An awful lot of these things will require local collaboration, often around schools, but with children driving it at the heart. I want to have models in place that others can adopt, roll out and make their own, whatever that might be.

Q83 Lucy Frazer: You also mentioned children going on to the internet to find out information about mental health. When we met some young people, they also talked about that. One of them said that when you search self-harm on the internet, Tumblr would come up with a message saying, “Do you need help?” Is that something that your digital taskforce is dealing with? If so, how can it?

Anne Longfield: It is something that we are looking at and certainly that is what the group of young people came forward with. If any of us do it, as individuals or as parents, we would be horrified by what comes out. We have absolutely no way of knowing what level of advice is in there. One thing that was said when we launched that work was that we needed a kitemark for the quality of advice given, and that is something that the Government could take a lead on.

Q84 Lucy Frazer: I think the issue is that it is not advice. You search self-harm and you get people saying, “Self-harm is brilliant.” It is not about the provision of services; it is what people should be seeing. It is not even about the quality of that, because people do not even get to that stage—they see information from others.

Anne Longfield: I am talking about the actual advice as well though. There is something we can do to give more certainty about the quality of advice that is there, and we can get more advice out there. We have to put warnings up for children; we have to inform them of the dangers of looking at some of these sites and following some of these issues. In terms of a digital taskforce, I am not technologically advanced enough to know quite how you would stop some of this, or whether it is possible, but, certainly, it is something we would want to be talking to industry about.

Q85 Chair: We already have two Ministers around the Cabinet table looking at education—the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. Some would say that that was one too many, given the need for a super-Department dealing with education, but you want a third Minister.

Anne Longfield: It doesn’t have to be a third. It could be one of those leading on this.

Q86 Chair: Why do you want a Minister for Children, given that you have that paraphernalia of two Departments? Do you think you’ll get one?

Anne Longfield: This comes back to my previous points about having a strong drive at the heart of Government around children’s issues—strong co-ordination and a strong set of objectives that others actually buy into. No matter how fantastic a piece of work in the

Department is, it will only ever be as good as the relevant aspect of the child's life. We need to look at how we can help children holistically, for all sorts of reasons, including very practical ones to do with money, so it comes back to that.

As I said before, there is not only an opportunity, but a necessity, for the Government to make children a priority, and I would like to see them as one of the top three priorities. I would like to see the triple-lock response to children that we see to pensioners. That requires someone who is looking at children's issues across the piece. That may be the Secretary of State for Education—I am not, of course, trying to devalue that important role. Having the issue of children explicitly at the Cabinet table means that the kind of viewpoint that I bring, which is not about looking at pupils, patients, victims, prisoners and the like, but about looking at children, is part of that debate at the heart of what we do. If we had that, and a children's test on policy, we would really start to put in place an accountability and governance framework that could really drive things.

Are we going to get that? Well, it depends on whether the advocacy is successful and if we can persuade people to make that leap to putting children first. But not to do so is not only missing an opportunity, but preventing children from flourishing to the level they could.

Q87 Chair: If all the Ministers entitled to attend Cabinet are actually in the room, things are already pretty congested, because there are over 30. I just leave you with that point.

Anne Longfield: I am sure there is an extra chair.

Q88 Chair: I still wonder how it could be an effective decision-making body with that number.

Anne Longfield: It may be about additional responsibilities.

Q89 Chair: My next question: what does a national children's test with assessment look like?

Anne Longfield: Sorry? Say that again.

Chair: You are proposing the introduction of a national children's test with assessment. What does that look like?

Anne Longfield: We have a family test at the moment, or a commitment to a family test—I was very pleased to hear that commitment from the Prime Minister some time ago. That commitment was based on the principle that children are often overlooked when decision making takes place and that a family test across Government would be a way of addressing that in practice. That is a very positive move; it is a very clear commitment. There are issues about how robust it is and about whether it covers the range of things, or has the teeth, you might want it to—clearly some of those things are outside my remit—but, as a starting point, it is very positive.

Given that this is about giving children more weight in decision making, I think it should explicitly include them—I would say there should be a family and children test, or indeed a children test, in there. That is an extension; the principle is already there. In terms of what would go in it, that would obviously be something that you would seek to work through, but it would be around the basic principle that policies and decisions enhance children’s wellbeing in life rather than detract from it.

Chair: Michelle, you have one last question.

Q90 Michelle Donelan: Your role is to promote and protect the rights of children, which means safeguarding and improving their lives. In five years’ time, how would you like them to judge you as, in effect, you are really accountable to them more than to anybody else.

Anne Longfield: I am accountable to them and they are the ones who I would seek to answer that. I hope that they would see me as being on their side as a powerful advocate, and that they would say that I had high aspirations for children, and understood how children live their lives and their experiences. I hope that they would say that they had seen positive improvement in their lives locally. There is a kind of test I always give various decision-making conversations. It is a kind of Grimsby test: if it can work in Grimsby on a wet Wednesday, hopefully it can work in lots of places—you could choose anywhere in the country.

This has to be about stuff working on the ground for children. It is not a conceptual dialogue; it is about raising eyes and raising ambitions. That is part of it, but the end product is that kids have to feel that their schools are there and are better prepared for them, that they get better help with schools actually meeting their needs, including mental health support, and that, if they are in care, they feel that their needs are being taken into account and they have more chance to stay where they are. I noticed that you were looking at residential care and I hope that staying put is one of the recommendations coming out of Sir Martin’s review of that shortly. It is about really practical issues.

The other thing is that I hope that children will know that this post is there for them. One of the underlying aspects and goals throughout all this is to make children aware of this post and to use it. One of the places to start with that is children in care. We hope that by the end of next year every child in care will know not only that I am there for them, but how to contact me through their advice line.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that final answer and the answers that you have given to our other 18 questions.