



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Narey review of children's residential care](#), HC 691

Wednesday 27 January 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on Wednesday 27 January 2016.

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair), Lucy Allan, Ian Austin, Suella Fernandes, Lucy Frazer, Ian Mearns.

Questions 1 – 61

Witness: **Sir Martin Narey**, Lead, Children's Residential Care Review, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, Sir Martin, and welcome to our Committee. We are very pleased to see you here and I hope that you are pleased to be here and that you will enjoy the experience.

Sir Martin Narey: I am very grateful for the invitation, Chair, thank you.

Q2 Chair: I just want to run through the objectives of the session for the purpose of people in the public gallery and also those watching on television. We are basically going to question you on the purpose, scope and conduct of your review into children's residential care. We want to establish how the review builds on previous work in the area, including our own report back in 2014, and to examine your thinking on particular areas of interest to the Committee ahead of drafting your report. In other words, we will be scoping out areas of concern and interest and how they might be reflected in your work. We have about seven or eight questions and each one of us will be probing you on certain topics. Before we start, I would like to know exactly who you are accountable to, what your remit is, who gave you your remit and where we are in the overall structure of this process.

Sir Martin Narey: The remit was given to me jointly by Nicky Morgan and by the Prime Minister. You will have seen the terms of reference that I was given, which were constructed with my agreement and were intentionally wide. My experience of doing similar reviews is that sometimes you come across something that is slightly outside the terms of reference, which you would like to address. The terms of reference are intentionally wide.

In terms of where I am—as I hope you have been informed—I am in the very early days of the review. It was announced in October, but I have other things to do and I have been

doing lots of things. I have spent about 18 days on this at the moment, on a few visits, some introductory discussions, reading a lot of things—including your report—so I am still at the very early stage. I hope to spend much more time on it in the next few months. I said I would report in spring, and that is probably going to be May rather than March.

Q3 Chair: You are located in the Department for Education, is that correct?

Sir Martin Narey: I am supported by a small team at the Department for Education; about two full-time equivalents, and a couple of people part-seconded: one from the voluntary sector who works in residential care and who has some knowledge and international experience; another consultant who worked for me at Barnardo's and is helping me on special skills. But I do not have an office in the Department for Education. I am independent. I work from home, albeit home is in North Yorkshire, so I spend a lot of time down here in hotels. I am entirely independent of the Department and of Government.

Q4 Chair: It would be fair to say that we have had quite a lot of interest in children's homes in the last few years with various reports, inquiries and reforms. Some of those reports, inquiries and reforms have not necessarily led to anything. Do you think we need another inquiry?

Sir Martin Narey: To some extent, Chair, it is not for me to say. I was asked to do it and I was happy to do so. There have certainly been a lot of previous reports. I have been staggered by the number of publications—I except your report from this—I accept most of them have been heavier on analysis than they have been on solutions. I hope what I might be able to do, I do not know yet, is try to bring forward some pragmatic and affordable ways of improving the system. I do not think there is—to use a cliché—a golden bullet here. I do not think there is something that can be suddenly transformative, but I hope there will be an accumulation of smaller things that will make a difference, and build on and reflect some real progress.

If I am certain about one thing it is that I want to say that—not just in the last few weeks but previously—I have been very impressed by some of the work that goes on in children's homes. This is, as you know, an incredibly demanding population of children. Much more challenging in the past because there were so few of them. There were 58,000 children in residential homes in 1981. There was plainly, therefore, a bit of a leavening in terms of complexity. There are about 6,000 in what we know as children's homes now. They are a very challenging bunch. Some of the staff who work in homes deserve a bit more recognition than they get from politicians and the media about the very, very difficult job they do.

Q5 Chair: We have visited residential homes in the past and many of us have such homes in our constituency, so we are familiar with the territory and we do recognise the enormous responsibility for those who work in those homes and provide the care that is needed. But of course it is an area that nevertheless is clearly exciting interest. To summarise your answer, you recognise the number of reports, and so on, that we have had but you are expecting to come up with some solutions, if at all possible.

Sir Martin Narey: I certainly hope so. But I do not immediately see anything hugely massive. There are some small things that will make a difference. For example, I was very

interested in your recommendation about changing planning regulations so that you could address the issue of the very poor distribution of children's homes. I think I am right in saying that homes in London are about half the need for children, whereas there is an over-supply of children's homes in the north-west.

How to address that is a gritty issue and I want to look further into your recommendation to see whether that can be done because there is no doubt at all that the problem, which we all recognise, about the number of children who would be better located closer to home, is sometimes very difficult for commissioners when there are not the places, particularly for London children. It is almost inevitable that many of those will have to be further away from home than is advisable.

Q6 Chair: I am glad you referred to our report because we did make a number of recommendations. One of the issues that we were discussing just before you arrived was the fact that not all our recommendations, and those of other organisations who have made recommendations, have been implemented. It is a thought we have, and it must have occurred to you, that there are some good ideas still waiting to be put into practice.

Sir Martin Narey: There are some good ideas but they are difficult to translate into practice because of affordability issues. You will not be surprised to know that I have been energetically lobbied by the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign who have pressed me very hard to recommend the extension of staying put. On some of the visits I have done I have met children who it is very clear would benefit from staying put but I am also aware that if only 25% of children in children's homes opted to stay put, the cost to the Government would be about £144 million over three years. That is a huge sum of money. If the proportion is greater than that, if it is 100% it is more than £500,000.

I have done reports for the Government before—not just this Government but previous Governments—and I have always tried very hard to recommend things that are financially feasible. I do not want to make recommendations that will be accepted in spirit but not be taken forward. I want to find a way of doing things that can be delivered against the backdrop of the considerable spending limitations that would be on this Government or any Government, and of course the limitations on local authorities.

Q7 Chair: We do have some reforms, regulatory reforms, introduced in April last year. Have you been assessing the impact of those reforms?

Sir Martin Narey: No, I have not been able to. I have acquainted myself with the new quality standards, for example. I have been asking, in my initial meetings and interviews, a number of people—homes' managers, homes' staff, Ofsted and others—about their view of them. It tends to be generally positive but I have not yet got to a point where I feel I can offer a proper assessment.

Q8 Chair: Is that something you will be assessing and reporting on?

Sir Martin Narey: Yes, I want to do that.

Chair: Because that is an important area of reform.

Sir Martin Narey: I agree entirely, Chair.

Q9 Chair: Last from me for the moment. Ofsted data suggests that there is a 13% increase in children's residential homes rated good or outstanding. That is good news. How do you account for it though?

Sir Martin Narey: I do not want to be saying this too often, but I do not think I can account for it yet. I have been—if I count the visits I made immediately before being asked to do the review and I knew it was a possibility—able to visit only six homes up to now. I have another six or so in the next two or three weeks. Of those I have visited, the fact that most homes are rated as good or outstanding does not surprise me. I have been rather impressed with what I have seen.

Q10 Ian Mearns: Just a supplementary. You said that you are looking for pragmatic and affordable solutions and then you went into the territory about particularly children in London. In the previous report in 2014, we visited Margate, and we understand that coastal towns around the south of England are very similar in that there is an over-provision of children's homes for the youngsters that live in those localities, and they tend to house youngsters from London. But unfortunately, in those same locations, because they are areas of lower housing costs compared with central London, you also have a whole range of other social problems, which makes them not ideal locations to be housing young people who are extremely vulnerable and troubled. So is it inevitable or are we missing something because when you talk about financial feasibility, that then has to be offset against the long-term costs of getting it wrong?

Sir Martin Narey: I agree very much, Mr Mearns. I have not had a chance to get into this, but I understand that some of those homes in Margate have been closed and there has been some improvement in that. There is a new risk assessment procedure for the registration of new homes where dangers in the immediate environment to children are assessed as part of that registration.

But I also understand that this is a very competitive market. Some local authorities no longer have any residential care of their own—a couple of local authorities very recently have announced the closure of their homes. If they are having to buy from a market, which is primarily in the private sector, but also from other local authorities and some voluntary sector homes, they clearly need to take price into account and providers are locating homes in areas where property prices are relatively inexpensive, for example. I understand that. We just have to make sure, or the Government have to make sure, that they are not putting those homes in areas that will be a danger to the children.

I will just say one other thing. I know from your report that you understand, as I am beginning to understand, some of the circumstances in which it is right for children to be located far from home. I have seen some very impressive and thoughtful examples of that.

I think there are some children who might be located nearer to home but nevertheless, although they are some distance away, are in quite exceptional homes. I think if I was their parent, I would be quite pleased about that. I do not want to identify the particular homes I have been to, if I may, because, having been to very few, I do not want to reveal identities of children I have spoken to and the staff I have spoken to, but I went to a voluntary sector home two weeks ago. A number of the children in there were from a long distance away. I thought the care was stunning. I thought the quality of the care for the children, the staff's knowledge

of the children, the work they were doing with parents to try to make sure that at some point there might be reunification was quite moving. I did not think the distance there was an issue because the quality probably outbalanced the negative issues around distance from home.

Q11 Ian Mearns: But the earlier part of your answer also calls into question, from my perspective, the role of the local authorities in finding places within a market, their role as a corporate parent. When I was a local authority councillor for 27 years, I took my role as a corporate parent very seriously. I am not convinced that your answer indicates that some local authorities are taking the same level of responsibilities that I would want to see for my children.

Sir Martin Narey: I do not know that yet. I am visiting a number of local authorities and I am visiting a couple of the consortia where local authorities have come together to commission places. I have heard staff in homes say that sometimes they do not think the local authority extends as much support to the children there as they might, but I have heard others who have spoken in quite warm terms about the extent to which local authorities take the corporate role very seriously.

Q12 Chair: Before I bring the other Ian in, I want to get your views about the question of residential care in the context of other alternatives and other support for children who need care because, of course, it is not just the homes. It is, for example, the move from a home into a new situation and how those kinds of decisions are being made. Will your report reflect that nature of the issue?

Sir Martin Narey: Yes, it will. From what little I know at this early stage—and indeed your report put an emphasis on stability—I can fully understand that, in some circumstances, if we got some children into homes earlier, it would be better for them. Some of the research seems to suggest that the outcomes for children who are in residential homes rather longer are slightly better than for those who are not.

But at the same time I am sympathetic to local authorities and the huge differential in cost between a fostering placement of about £800 a week and a residential care placement of £3,000 a week. I do understand why fostering is tried first, second and sometimes on three occasions. Someone at a home I visited quite recently said something significant to me. They said that sometimes fostering will fail a couple of times, but suddenly it does just work. I do not want to suggest that, unless I can find—and I have asked, I have not discovered it yet—some assessment tool that could accurately identify which children are most unlikely to survive in foster care. I am somewhat sympathetic to the fact that local authorities all want to try at least two or three times first—in the same way as they might want to try a less expensive children's home before they find a very expensive placement that includes intensive therapeutic care, for example.

Q13 Ian Austin: Just on the question of costs and value for money. I am not against the involvement of the private sector in this area at all, but I am troubled by some of the stuff I have seen. Gravity International circulate brochures guaranteeing 18% return, guaranteed in one year.

Sir Martin Narey: Sorry, which organisation was that?

Ian Austin: Gravity International. They say that their four-bedroom homes make £214,000 a year profit at 75% occupancy and £624,000 profit if all the beds are occupied. It just seems to me that in this area it costs a fortune, the outcomes are not great, and the most vulnerable children are not getting the services they need. If organisations are able to make that sort of money, clearly the money the state is putting into it is not going where it is needed, which is to give the kids a better chance than they have been given so far. Are you going to look at these sort of issues?

Sir Martin Narey: I am going to try. I have had one private sector company that has been open enough to send me quite detailed accounts, although I may need some help from some forensic accountants to get behind them because sometimes it is very difficult to get behind them. Certainly the one I have seen—I do not want to name them—it seemed to me that the profits were relatively modest and the reputation of the homes was good.

If there are organisations that are making very huge profits, it is hard to see how they manage in a competitive market to fill their places but they must do. If they are making those profits, they must be getting children sent there and I do not know but I guess that, despite their making a profit, the costs that they are charging to local authorities are competitive. That needs some investigation. I do not know why that might be. It might be because they pay the staff less than others.

Q14 Ian Austin: Why do you think the average cost of a placement per child is three times the cost of sending a child to Eton? For these sorts of costs you could hire a hotel room and have two or three members of staff providing one-to-one care around the clock.

Sir Martin Narey: I suspect you know the answer to that as well as I do, Mr Austin: the children that go to Eton are well parented, very comfortable, have lots of support, do not have behavioural problems. We are talking about the 8,000 most complex and challenging children in England. They have great behavioural problems. They need a great deal of supervision. They need very high staff ratios. The average size in a children's home is about 4.3 children. The cost is much greater than caring for children at Eton.

Q15 Ian Austin: I think you misunderstand the point I am making. I am not against spending the money if you get the outcomes for it, and I accept these are the most challenged. The kids have been let down most badly by their parents and the rest of society. If you are spending £120,000 or £200,000 a year per kid, the children ought to be getting much more out of it; that is my point.

Sir Martin Narey: It is early days. We might put too much expectation on residential care. The average age of entry of a child into residential care is about 14. The average length of stay is about eight months. It is hardly likely to change their lives, which have already been very, very chaotic. If we were, as I understand some countries do—and I have someone advising me on what is happening in Denmark where they seem to have rather good outcomes for residential care, although I need to probe that—having children in England in residential care for many years, and the outcomes were still quite poor, we might be able to draw that conclusion. But the evidence seems to be that, for the handful of children that do get into residential care, and stay there for longer periods, their outcomes are better than those of other children.

Q16 Ian Austin: So you are looking at the wrong bit of the system then. This is the point the Chair was making in his questions earlier, which is that we have just had a review on this. All the reforms have not been implemented yet. You are coming back to review it again and you are saying it is the one bit of the system that works and the kids are massively failed by everyone else.

Sir Martin Narey: I am not saying it is a system that could not be improved. I am going to work hard to see whether I can identify those improvements. What I am saying is that sometimes residential care gets a bad press. It is sometimes blamed for outcomes of children leaving care when sometimes they have spent only a relatively few months of their care life in residential care. Certainly some of the children in residential care that I met recently, those children are never going to have good outcomes, are never going to improve very much. They will probably go into long-term adult care, but they are being well cared for, they are being loved. Some of the care, although it might not demonstrate much in terms of improvement for those children, is still commendable.

Q17 Lucy Frazer: You are obviously very experienced in reports of this nature. You have spoken openly about steps you have taken so far. You have mentioned this morning that you have spoken to Ofsted, you have been lobbied, that you have visited six homes, one in the private sector. I appreciate you have only done 18 days' work on this but as experienced as you are, you must have a strategy for gathering evidence. What is that strategy?

Sir Martin Narey: The strategy began with a call for evidence and the response to that has been very impressive; about 160 submissions. Some more may yet appear. I have not been able to go through those yet. I have read a handful of them. I am working through them quite slowly and trying to meet people as I go through them.

My strategy is to listen and learn, to visit and learn, to take advice from individuals who I meet and a number of individuals who are professionals in this area, and I am not, who have views on this. I am trying to distil from that some recommendations that will make life easier. There are a lot of people who are willing to offer me advice. One of the curious aspects is—it is much more than has been my experience is similar sort of reviews before—it is remarkable how often that advice is conflicting. How often the advice from people who I have worked with before and whose opinions I hugely value is in direct conflict about the role of residential care.

Q18 Lucy Frazer: Just to drill down on some of those things you mentioned. You said you have 160 submissions. Do you know what categories of people that they are from?

Sir Martin Narey: From all categories. Some from children and many from care leavers, a lot from children—

Lucy Frazer: Sorry, children and ...?

Sir Martin Narey: Care leavers, children who have been in care.

Q19 Lucy Frazer: What percentage is that?

Sir Martin Narey: I do not know. I can find out and let the Committee know, if that would be helpful.

Q20 Lucy Frazer: That would be great, thank you. Sorry, so children in care?

Sir Martin Narey: People who work in children's homes, organisations who run children's homes in the private voluntary sector, from some local authorities, some from professionals. Up to date, very few responses from academics who are in this area, and I will need to follow that up and try to fill that gap. I want to speak to David Berridge who advised this Committee on your last report, for example. But by the time I have digested this, I will have a pretty good picture of some of the things that might be done to improve matters.

Q21 Lucy Frazer: Will you make the evidence public?

Sir Martin Narey: We have said that we will offer a summary of the evidence, but I would have no objection at all to making the whole of it public. It is huge and hard to digest and certainly a summary would be more helpful to most readers, but I would be very happy to do both.

Q22 Lucy Frazer: That would be very helpful. As we have mentioned, there are already a number of reports and for a further report to have credibility the sources would be helpful.

Sir Martin Narey: Absolutely. The Committee already has all the 160 submissions I have had to date, and your clerks may have read more of them than I have been able to at the moment.

Q23 Lucy Frazer: They are very diligent so that may well be the case. Have you changed your methodology at all from the methodology that you used in the report you did on children's social work training?

Sir Martin Narey: My approach there; I did not have a call for evidence there. The timescale for that was much briefer and was made rather more challenging because I was ill during the process and was in hospital for surgery. But the general approach in terms of speaking to, reading up on a lot that had been published before, speaking to people, visiting a number of universities, speaking to students. I used Twitter to garner an awful lot of responses from undergraduates. It was a similar approach. I am glad that the report seems to have made an impact and a number of my recommendations in that area have been taken forward by Government.

Q24 Lucy Frazer: You mentioned you were going to probe the Denmark example where there have been some good outcomes, which is fantastic. What percentage of your work would be looking at academics and other international comparisons in order to form your view going forward?

Sir Martin Narey: If I were to report in May, which I would like to, I have limited time. I want to glean as much as I can from published sources. So for international work I may not visit Europe at all myself, but certainly someone who is assisting me will. I may decide I do not have the time to do so. But I do want to go as far as probing the apparent greater success of other countries. Even though I might find, when I probe it, that it is not as straightforward as it is. For example, from what little I have read of Denmark already,

they seem to have better outcomes for children in care, but they have a much bigger proportion of their child population in residential care than we do. One would expect the outcomes to be better because it will be a less complex bunch. I will certainly do what I can.

I am certainly going to visit Scotland. I am going to Scotland for the first time on Monday, and I am going to Scotland again in the next month or so. They seem to have some good experience to teach us about how they do this—they argue—rather more successfully than us, but again I need to probe that.

Q25 Lucy Frazer: Just one final question: you said you had spent 18 days so far and you are going to report in May. How much more time do you think you will be able to spend on the review before it is published?

Sir Martin Narey: As much as I can. I have scaled back the other things I am doing. I cannot do that completely, some of it is for work for people who pay me permanently, and I have to maintain my responsibility to them. But I am hoping that in February, March and April, the biggest single activity I will be involved in will be this review. My guess, another 30 or 40 days I would hope.

Q26 Chair: The point about international comparisons, certainly in policy making in this area it is extremely valuable to know where success is, but also the context of that success, as you correctly point out. A case study would be useful from your point of view?

Sir Martin Narey: I might share with you, Chair, that last week when I was in the Department for Education there were visitors from Norway, which is frequently cited to me as somewhere that gets it right, and they were visiting England because of their view that we were getting it right. We will have to be careful with conclusions.

Chair: Ian is now going to look at why there are care issues because we cannot just talk about this in the context of—

Q27 Ian Mearns: But before I do, Chair, just about evidence. You have said 160 submissions and when we do a call for evidence experience has shown us that occasionally we get evidence that is clearly influenced by a vested interest. What can you do to ensure that you weed that out?

Sir Martin Narey: I have already seen evidence and I have already had some meetings where I thought vested interests were being pursued rather more than the interests of children. Sometimes the interests of children coincide but I am alive to that issue and will be trying very hard to aim off for it.

Q28 Ian Mearns: Therefore the question that that prompts is, where you think you have gaps in evidence, are you thinking about the people who you want to see personally as a result of that? Are you talking to a wider group of people about who should be filling in the gaps?

Sir Martin Narey: I am trying to see lots of people. I have had 24 meetings already, some with individuals, some with groups. My experience of similar sorts of reviews is that meetings are more useful than written reports. Sometimes people are a little bit more

forthcoming. People are very forthcoming if you can guarantee a certain anonymity because sometimes people are a little bit nervous about saying things; some people who work in care homes themselves.

I will have met hundreds of people, I would expect, before I publish my report. I hope that will give me a fairly accurate picture of what we need. As I explained to Ms Frazer, I will try to fill the gap, because there has been a somewhat disappointing response from academics, whereas on my review of social work, I was overwhelmed with responses from academics for understandable reasons. I will seek to fill that gap.

Q29 Ian Mearns: You are looking at and focusing on residential care, it is just one part of a wider system for children in the care system. Problems in residential care may reflect failures in or problems in the wider care system, so do you think it is appropriate that you are conducting the review solely on residential care and looking at it in isolation?

Sir Martin Narey: I agree with the general point, that you can view residential care only in terms of Government strategy in the context of a wider system. It is perfectly legitimate for me to be asked to look at this relatively discrete area and contribute to a wider discussion. It is then for Government to take whatever recommendations I might make, if they agree with them, and make them in the context of the wider management of the care system.

Q30 Ian Mearns: But if your review solely concentrating on residential care throws up in stark relief, from your perspective, evidence of significant failures in other parts of the system, which have led to children being in residential care, will you highlight those?

Sir Martin Narey: I certainly would. I am not saying that this will be an answer because, as I explained to the Chair, I am somewhat sympathetic to the very difficult job local authorities have. But some people have said to me, and I stress I do not know if it is true, that if there was more consideration in finding not just foster carers, but the right type of foster carers, more emphasis on matching particularly challenging children with particularly experienced able, possibly better remunerated, foster carers, then we might make foster care more successful and avoid the need for residential care. I need to explore that, but that is an area where I may well be saying something that is not absolutely about residential care, but about a child's life before residential care happens to them.

Q31 Ian Mearns: I have not seen the evidence myself but I gather that evidence to your review highlights the need for a national strategy for children's care provision. Would you support the development of a national care strategy that considers residential care within a wider context?

Sir Martin Narey: I would certainly have no opposition to it. It would depend what the strategy said. I am sometimes a bit—if I am honest as a civil servant for 23 years—sceptical of the effect of Government strategies. Things are improved sometimes by rather more concentrated day-to-day and incremental improvements. But of course I would welcome such a strategy and that is a matter for the Government, not for me.

Q32 Ian Mearns: You are conducting this review at the same time as the Taylor review into youth justice. It seems to me that there might be an overlap with your review and

with regard to secure children's homes and outcomes for children in care. Have you had any contact with Charlie Taylor and is there scope for joint activity between the two reviews?

Sir Martin Narey: He is quite a long way in front of me but, yes, I have met him. I had a very useful discussion with him quite recently. He is reporting on something that has been much more central to my working life. He is talking about youth justice, in which I worked for 23 years. I would be disappointed—I have not seen his report yet—following our discussions if I was not able to do something that was complementary to what he has already done.

Certainly I am not spending very much time on youth justice and secure accommodation for precisely that reason. I will be looking at the provision of welfare beds in secure accommodation but I am not going to spend much time looking at the youth justice system, which he is reviewing.

Q33 Ian Mearns: I just think from the perspective of transparency you have a connection with G4S, so if anything drifts into an area where G4S are managing a establishment how would you manage that?

Sir Martin Narey: I did have a connection with G4S. I was not required to do it, but when I was asked by Michael Gove to join the Home Office Board for presentation reasons I severed my relationship with G4S. Although I do not apologise for having that relationship, and even after the appalling events at Medway, there are people in that part of G4S trying very hard to run prisons and accommodation for young offenders, which treats offenders with dignity and decency. I make no apology for having tried to help them to do that a little over the years. I did a total of about 15 days' work for them over three years. But I have severed that entirely. They understand why. Certainly any recommendations I make in this report, people have to judge themselves, but it will certainly not be influenced by any of the interests of G4S or any other provider in the public, private or voluntary sector.

Q34 Ian Mearns: Thank you very much for that. Will your review address what has been termed over-criminalisation of young people in residential care for minor offences? Do you agree that the way incidents are dealt with in children's homes should be brought in line with those currently existing in schools?

Sir Martin Narey: Yes, is the short answer to that. I was very interested in that part of your report. I have asked a few people about that. I am going to further probe it. I have to say again from—it is an early stage—I have been very struck by the fact that I met one provider last week, a small private sector provider, but with homes that are rated consistently good or outstanding, who never ever involve the police. They simply make it a very important issue for the staff and management that they simply do not do it. They deal with things themselves, they use a restorative justice approach to deal with sanctions. I was at a home yesterday where they had a whole array of sanctions to deal with ill-discipline, and although they occasionally involved the police, they very, very rarely did so.

So I need to examine why it appears that some homes in some areas seem to involve the police very quickly. It may be that some police forces have a different attitude as well. I have heard of one home provider that essentially pays for a police officer to act as a constant

liaison point, so there is a great deal of informal resolution of issues. It will certainly be part of my report, but I do not yet quite know what the answer is.

Ian Mearns: I have heard of where police have been involved, not to arrest children and criminalise them, but explain to youngsters in a controlled setting what the consequences of their actions could be if they were outside the setting that they are in.

Q35 Chair: One of the organisations that might be interested, in connection with Ian's line of questioning, is the Youth Justice Board. Lord McNally, as Chair, is concerned about some of the issues related to agency co-operation and certainly within the context of children in care. I think he would be interested to have a dialogue with you.

Sir Martin Narey: I had lunch with Lord McNally—who I admire a great deal—relatively recently and I am meeting his chief executive next Wednesday to discover some of those aspects.

Chair: Excellent. We have already touched upon the issue of planning and locality but Lucy Allan wants to probe you further.

Q36 Lucy Allan: Thank you, Sir Martin, and I am very impressed with the amount of work that you have managed to achieve in the short period of time. One other question just in terms of who you will be or may have already spoken to: will you be talking to Who Cares Trust?

Sir Martin Narey: That is one of the pieces of evidence that I have read. I had a very helpful e-mail exchange with Natasha Finlayson yesterday and I have a date in the diary very imminently. I did not agree with everything in their evidence, but I thought it was a very thoughtful and helpful piece, and I will be following that up.

Q37 Lucy Allan: You have been very positive about the role of children's homes and certainly we, as a Committee, went to visit an excellent children's home in Trafford just last week. You have also shown a lot of sympathy for the challenges local authorities face. I have previously also been a councillor with involvement in this area. Would you agree with me, however, that there is real disparity in quality of what local authorities are doing in this particular area?

Sir Martin Narey: There certainly seems to be. I have not heard the statistics yet but on care generally there does not seem to be much correlation between investment and outcomes from what some of the DfE data are saying. Local authorities have very different levels of numbers of children in care. While you have to be careful not to generalise, because one does not know the circumstances of a particular locality, it is quite clear to me that some local authorities seem to do much better than others, not least in terms of acting as a corporate parent for children, whether they are in their homes or outside the area.

Q38 Lucy Allan: Just on the staying put—you mentioned it a little bit earlier in your evidence—and I absolutely agree that the cost issue that you raised is a critical factor, however at the age of 18, some of these young people are simply not ready to go into the world unsupported. Rather than just continuing in care, there are various other mechanisms

such as supported accommodation. Is that something you will be considering in part of your review?

Sir Martin Narey: Yes, it will. I have been told by some witnesses that there are some local authorities that give little or no support to children leaving care. Whenever I asked those witnesses—as I have done at a couple of interviews—to identify such authorities it is rather more difficult. I find it hard to believe that authorities would not be making reasonable provision for children leaving care but I will certainly have a look at that.

I have certainly seen instances where it is done rather well. At the same time, when I was at Barnardo's, we did a little bit of that work and I am always aware that sometimes the work we did broke down. Sometimes the ambitions of a young person run ahead of their abilities: they want to flat, they are excited by a flat, you get them somewhere quite nice but a few weeks into that provision, not least because of loneliness sometimes after someone who has led a life with lots of other people around them, arrangements collapse.

But I will be looking at that. In looking at staying put, if I am comforted by one thing, it is that the proportion of children who might want to stay in a children's home is probably quite low. Most children would prefer to get proper assistance to make that journey into adulthood.

Q39 Lucy Allan: One of the other points that you made very clearly was the quality of care, that children are seen as a priority over and above locality. I come from an area in the West Midlands where we have a number of children's homes located in very rural contexts where young people will frequently go missing and we have had sexual exploitation of these young people—this is in the Telford area—very recently. I am just wondering, even though they are receiving excellent quality of care if they are running away to areas where they feel more comfortable or they are absconding, can we not be looking at balancing this? Because quality, yes, but if the children are not staying within that context there is a serious issue there.

Sir Martin Narey: I would be interested in learning more about the experience in the Telford homes you mentioned. Some people have argued to me that the potential to go missing is greater when a child is nearer home. If someone in London can get on a Tube and go home they may be likely to do that more frequently than if their journeys are rather more difficult from somewhere that is rural. Certainly some rural locations can offer a bit of protection and stability to a child, but I accept entirely it is something I need to look at.

I have been told—again I need to establish it—of some instances where some care homes would like much greater flexibility before they have to notify the police that someone is genuinely missing rather than having disappeared, as my children used to, for half an hour at a time. There is a need to give homes a little bit of discretion. Some children that appear in “going missing” statistics have not been missing in a way that I suspect would concern members of the Committee or myself.

Q40 Ian Mearns: As the Chairman and Lucy have mentioned, we visited Trafford just over a week ago and we heard from staff at a residential home there who believed that core training did not provide them with the tools they needed to help with children who have complex needs and/or complex behavioural problems. Do you think training for residential staff needs to be strengthened beyond a level 3 diploma?

Sir Martin Narey: I had a look for the first time earlier this week in preparing for this Committee at the content of the level 3 diploma. In terms of the content I was rather impressed. I thought it was relevant, contrary to what I had been told by some people that it was very generic training. It seemed to me to be quite dedicated training. In terms of a curriculum I thought it was quite impressive.

I have been told however that sometimes the extent to which it is properly supervised and the standard to which it is conducted might be a problem. One provider said to me that although he pays staff more once they get the level 3, he does not think that getting the level 3 makes them better at their job. But I have had other views that have been much more positive.

As one gets older one has to be careful not to try to return to the past, but I am also aware that there used to be a diploma in residential care, which the University of Newcastle and one or two other universities used to provide. I would like to explore whether, in addition to the level 3, that sort of further development might be made available to some staff. I certainly think that, if it did nothing else, it would do something about improving the status of what is vital work, but work within the social work profession that perhaps does not get the recognition it deserves.

Q41 Ian Mearns: That kind of highlights as well: is there a need for a more structured type of ongoing CPD for people in those settings?

Sir Martin Narey: Again from limited visits, I have heard quite a lot of evidence of quite a lot of CPD. I have also heard from someone who I have spent quite a lot of time with and take a lot of advice from, and I have been persuaded of his view that some of his very, very best staff come in with no qualifications or experience at all and over time learning on the job, build up stunningly good relationships with some very difficult children. He may not be right, but he is someone who is very concerned about the possibility of us extending further the qualification requirements for residential care workers, and whether you might exclude late entrants to the working life who might be very good at that.

When I was at Barnardo's in family support work, I thought some of my most effective staff were typically mothers whose children were in their teens, who parented themselves, had a lot of experience, and their ability sometimes to work with young mothers who were struggling was very, very impressive when set against a very young social worker who might be formidably bright and have a good degree, but had little or no childcare experience themselves.

I do not want to recommend anything that would rule out some of the people you meet in residential care, who may not have many qualifications but seem to be extremely effective.

Q42 Ian Mearns: If they are extremely effective members of staff, in order to give them some sort of kudos, do we need to therefore accredit their previous experience?

Sir Martin Narey: Yes, I think so and I am certainly not suggesting we should not have the level 3. I think your question was asking whether we should go further than that and I am not sure about that yet, but I am certainly going to probe that. There are a number of staff who I have met who would like to go further if they could, and they would like to do

more than continuing professional training. They would like to be able to get a qualification that gave them the recognition of being experts in their particular area.

Q43 Ian Mearns: The next question I was going to ask you, and we have strayed into it, is that in many European countries residential care is typically a graduate profession and so you are not suggesting yet, or you do not know yet, whether we should be straying into that area?

Sir Martin Narey: I would be very surprised if I made that recommendation. Over the years and particularly recently, I have been very impressed with some of the staff I have met who are not graduates and are unlikely to be graduates. I was at a home yesterday and listening to a handover meeting between three staff, all of whom had the level 3 qualification, I thought their knowledge of the children was commendable. I am not sure that if we had an all graduate workforce whether it would improve matters so significantly as to justify that huge investment.

Q44 Chair: Overall what do you think your review is going to achieve?

Sir Martin Narey: It is a bit difficult for me to say, Chair. At some point in the near future I hope I will start to scribble down a few potential recommendations, but I do not have any of those yet so I do not know. What I hope it achieves is to bring forward—building on the number of reports I have seen in the past, levels of analysis, the knowledge of the sector, the passion people feel for the subject and the care from the staff—a recognition of the work they do, which is hugely challenging and deserves greater recognition. Also a series of recommendations, perhaps small on their own, that might make the work a little bit more effective.

Q45 Chair: Your earlier call for evidence really talks about better alternatives for some children in residential care and that prompts the question: are those alternatives not residential but something else or are you looking for better residential care?

Sir Martin Narey: I would like to look for both and I hope I can identify some things which seem to work very well in residential care. I do not know whether it would be the case, but the home I visited yesterday and the informal sanctions process that they had had a theoretical framework to it and I want to look at that and see whether that is applied elsewhere.

I am quite clear that there are some children for whom residential care is the very best thing for them, and I had lots of experience at Barnardo's of seeing children who have successfully exhausted the most dedicated and caring foster carers. It was just impossible for them to cope over any long period. Again, I stress I am not there yet, I think there may be a population of children in care where we might blur the distinction between residential care and foster care. I have been very impressed with the No Wrong Door initiative in North Yorkshire. It has been particularly convenient for me because that is where I live so I have spent quite a bit of time looking at that and they have, it appears, an impressive track record of finding fostering placements for children who have previously had great resistance to fostering. They do some very imaginative things. They bring potential foster

carers to work in the residential homes for many weeks and the fostering happens only after there is a relationship between the child and that potential foster carer.

Some imaginative things like that might have the scope to make fostering a success, particularly if it is accompanied with a bit of respite care from residential care on those occasions when foster carers understandably get a bit exhausted.

Q46 Chair: Thinking in terms of the wider issues around children in care and all the various agencies that can be involved, do you think there could be more integration between those agencies, more co-operation, more natural partnership?

Sir Martin Narey: I noted the recommendation in your report. I certainly think that children's lives benefit when there is much greater exchange of information. I suspect things have improved over the years—I have not been able to follow this up—but I still hear occasional stories of a failure of communication between different authorities concerning a child. It is alleged that there is sometimes a failure of communication of one local authority to alert another local authority whenever a problematic child is being placed in their area. Of course I think improved communication would be much better for children.

Q47 Chair: You remarked earlier that there might be some examples where children should have been in residential care earlier or in a different setting, which of course suggests that decisions were not necessarily timely or correct, and that might be because of lack of co-operation, lack of communication as you say. Will you be thinking about any recommendations that bring about better communication?

Sir Martin Narey: I will look at that, whether or not I make any recommendations. If I could just qualify that comment, Chair, because I was trying to make the point that it does not necessarily follow. You hear of it and I have seen cases and worked with children in care in the past at Barnardo's, where the number of previous placements they have had is pretty scandalous. There are other cases where the local authority were probably right to keep trying. It might sometimes take four or five times but if a foster care placement does work it is worth trying. I do not want to write anything glib and chastise local authorities and say they should move immediately to residential care. They should probably always try foster care first for other than quite a small handful of children.

Q48 Chair: No, we would not disagree with that. I was simply probing the decision making in certain areas or even at the local level. You will make some recommendations that is for sure, and we look forward to hearing what they are but how will you make sure they are implemented?

Sir Martin Narey: I may ask for your help, Chair. You have much more power in getting things implemented than I do. I write reports and I disappear until I am asked to do something else.

Q49 Chair: One of the themes that has really been going through this line of questioning is that that has been a good idea, it has been on the table for a while but it still has not happened. We would want to make sure that if your recommendations are worthy, and I am sure they will be, they are implemented.

Sir Martin Narey: I would want that as well but I will try to make them implementable. I do not want to say silly things. I should say that I have been very lucky in the last few years. I have worked for two Children's Ministers in the Department of Education, first for Tim Loughton and then Edward Timpson. I think they were outstanding and I have great faith in them and Nicky Morgan. I do not doubt for one moment that Nicky Morgan and Edward Timpson want to make the whole of the care system, and particularly residential care, as good as it can possibly be. If I can find ways of doing that and they are affordable, implementable and practical I have a lot of confidence that they would follow them.

Chair: Thank you. Lucy, one last question.

Q50 Lucy Allan: Do you think that the Minister and the Secretary of State are aware of the extent of the difficulties within the care system and some of these issues that we were talking about today?

Sir Martin Narey: I genuinely do. That is not a political statement. They both know that theirs and yours is not a party I have ever voted for, but I think they are utterly committed. I think Edward Timpson's knowledge of the care system comes from his own experience.

Q51 Lucy Allan: Sorry to interrupt, the awareness of the defects rather than commitment. I genuinely do not doubt their commitment, but their awareness of what is wrong and where the failings are?

Sir Martin Narey: Absolutely. I have learned quite a lot about the care system from Edward Timpson before he was a Minister when he chaired the all-party group. I think he is very aware of the difficulties and very realistic.

Chair: Suella is going to tie a few loose ends I think.

Q52 Suella Fernandes: Yes. Thank you for attending this morning. You were talking about your previous relationship with G4S and you felt satisfied that there is no ongoing relationship. That was severed when?

Sir Martin Narey: When I accepted Michael Gove's invitation to join the Ministry of Justice in August.

Q53 Suella Fernandes: You are comfortable that there is no conflict of interest then going forward?

Sir Martin Narey: I have to convince other people of that, but I am sometimes puzzled when people think I might have a conflict of interest with G4S for whom I worked for 15 days. No one asked whether I have a conflict of interest with Barnardo's for whom I worked for six years or the public sector, of which I was a part for 30 years. I will write

what I think is right and if that is to the disadvantage of G4S, they would not expect anything different.

Q54 Suella Fernandes: There are two cases I wanted to raise with you, one is by way of a challenge to what you have just said in relation to Rainsbrook. You reported in July 2015 that children were treated overwhelmingly well at Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre. However that was rated as inadequate by Ofsted in February of that year and then subsequently the contract has been removed from G4S. How do you explain the very different assessments?

Sir Martin Narey: First, the contract was removed despite G4S winning the tender on both price and quality. It was removed because YJB had previously determined that they would spread the contracts to try to bring in another provider.

I stick to what I wrote about Rainsbrook when I was asked by G4S to give them a view because they were stunned by getting an inadequate rating after many years of getting very good ratings, and then Michael Gove as the new Secretary of State and the Youth Justice Board, Lord McNally, asked me to go and give my view. It would have been very easy to write a report to say, “Yes, this is horrible”. I genuinely did not think it was. I thought the care of children there was very good indeed. It does not mean that things could not go wrong and it certainly does not mean that there were no problems with it. I thought there was quite a significant problem that Ofsted had not identified. I do not think children were challenged enough about their offending behaviour. There was almost too much of a sympathetic approach to explain that they had got into trouble and it wasn’t their fault, but I thought overwhelmingly it was a good and caring place.

Secure Training Centres aren’t perfect, and goodness me they should be good because they cost a lot of money, but I thought then—I have not been to Medway for many years—and believed Rainsbrook was very good. I have since discussed this with Nick Hardwick and we agree to differ on the opinions reached. But it is important to say the previous Ofsted inspectors had been to Rainsbrook only six months before that report. They had found much to praise there. I question whether it had really deteriorated to the extent it is suggested it had.

Q55 Suella Fernandes: The Ofsted report was based on gross misconduct by staff and a failure to protect young people adequately. It is quite strong findings and obviously that was influential in the ultimate decision to remove the contract.

Sir Martin Narey: I understand that. I simply disagree with that and if the Committee have not been, I would urge you to visit. I think, and it would be irrespective of who was running it, the care of children there is commendable. The education by any measure is simply outstanding. The head of the school there stands on the central yard at 8.30 am every morning, I have seen no penal institution ever do this so well, and watches every child coming out of the living accommodation. If a child does not appear to go to school she goes and gets them. The numbers of qualifications obtained by deeply troubled children are quite remarkable.

Honestly, I took Michael Gove to see it. I would urge you to go and have a look. I realise that G4S have had so many problems that they have little credibility any more but I believe that the person who manages that home, John Parker, his manager a man called Paul Cook and the staff—it does not matter who employs them—they are good and caring people and they are trying to do a very good job for the children there.

Q56 Suella Fernandes: Have you visited Medway?

Sir Martin Narey: I have not visited Medway for many years.

Q57 Suella Fernandes: No doubt you were aware of the recent investigation which has highlighted appalling behaviour?

Sir Martin Narey: Of course, yes. Appalling behaviour.

Q58 Suella Fernandes: Appalling behaviour, yes. You have a catalogue of insulting and aggressive and racist language, inmates feeling unsafe, bullying of vulnerable boys, conditioning of new staff going unchallenged by experienced staff members, and an independent report that has criticised the management of Medway. What is your assessment of G4S's management of Medway?

Sir Martin Narey: I have not been. I have a lot of confidence. I do not know the director who has recently stepped down, although I have heard good things about him. I know his boss. I know the person who manages children's services for G4S, a man called Paul Cook. I think he is one of the most talented social workers in terms of dealing with challenging children that I have met in my career. If you were to meet him you would see that, but clearly the things that have happened at Medway were simply disgraceful and I am glad those people have been sacked.

I worked in and around prisons and young offender institutions for 23 years. I worked as a borstal house master for four years. I led the prison service for seven years. I dedicated most of my working life to getting rid of people who did those sorts of things. I have sacked innumerable numbers of prison officers. I was a hated figure by the Prison Officers Association. Occasionally, bad things like that will happen in penal institutions. As I have said on a number of occasions, and as I have said in a recent speech to the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, anybody running a penal institution for children or adults who believes that that sort of thing cannot happen in their institution is not a fit person to be in the job. You have to be aware of it every day.

The default option is abuse, as we have seen with elderly people in care as well. Certainly, at Medway, G4S failed to prevent that abuse. They let, for reasons I do not understand, a small group of people behave very, very badly and then tried to cover it up. I have to say, I have seen similar occasions in other penal institutions, including ones that were being run by me.

Q59 Suella Fernandes: What is your view on what the solution is to when things go wrong?

Sir Martin Narey: I hasten to say that I do not know what was going wrong at Medway. If I can use the Rainsbrook example, one of the reasons why I thought the Ofsted verdict was mistaken was I did not think that the YJB or Barnardo's were asleep on the job. I thought that the YJB monitor was a very talented young woman. She had a detailed knowledge of every boy there. She could talk to them about anything. She saw a lot of the boys. I thought the Barnardo's advocate was deeply involved with all the children and knew them very well. These are not people sitting in an office and look at statistical returns. These people spend all the time in the living units with the children. I felt they had a good sense of what was happening in the establishment.

For reasons that I do not understand, and I do not know who the individuals are at Medway, that clearly did not work. You need to have a very high level of monitoring. You need to make sure that children are spoken to. You need to make sure that children feel relaxed and confident that if they make complaints they can be done anonymously, there won't be retribution against them, and children will often believe there is retribution. You have to somehow get children's confidence.

I do not know the detail of the arrangements Michael Gove's made, for very proper reasons I have had no involvement in them, but the supervisory agencies he has put in to make sure that G4S's performance at Medway improves, I would be very surprised indeed if that did not involve a way of ensuring speaking to children very closely. Overall, if I go over to Rainsbrook—I have spent a lot of time doing that—I thought the children were well treated, I really did.

Chair: Okay, thank you very much, Sir Martin, for coming along today and answering our questions.

Suella Fernandes: I do have another issue. Is it all right?

Chair: One more?

Q60 Suella Fernandes: Yes. I just wanted to touch on mental health of children in care and obviously it has been catalogued, not least by Barnardo's in their written evidence to our session on mental health of children in care, that looked after children or children in residential care are more likely to have a mental health disorder, going from 45% to 72% of children compared with 10% of children who are not in care or residential settings. Is the assessment or the entitlement or accessibility to mental health services or CAMHS going to be part of your review for children in care?

Sir Martin Narey: It is, and I noted with some interest that the NSPCC report that was published this morning featured on the "Today" programme. A number of people said to me that that is a problem. For the first time, at the home I went to yesterday, I heard a home manager saying they thought the CAMHS provision was rather good. But the general story I get is that there is a great pressure on it and certainly my experience in the work I have done before for the Department of Education around children in care and the work I did at Barnardo's suggests that CAMHS services are under extreme pressure despite the NHS recently announcing that they were making it much more of a priority. It is certainly something I shall be looking at.

Suella Fernandes: There is something about the threshold, that it is too high and it is not really providing enough access to a large majority of children.

Sir Martin Narey: Yes. It may be some of that can be offset by some low level provision with the homes themselves. The most impressive home I have been to had essentially their own level of mental illness care within the home. Low level mental illness problems were being dealt with there and then as part of the children's care. That has a cost implication and I will need to make sure the commissioners know that it might be worth paying a little bit more to get that sort of therapeutic and clinical care alongside the more general care.

Q61 Chair: Thank you very much, Sir Martin, for coming in today and answering our questions so clearly.

Sir Martin Narey: Thank you very much, Chair.

Chair: When your report is issued, we would very much like it to be possible for us to see you again.

Sir Martin Narey: I would be delighted.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Sir Martin Narey: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you.