



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Social work reform](#), HC 690

Wednesday 23 March 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- Professor Ray Jones ([SWR0006](#))
- Association of Directors of Children’s Services ([SWR0030](#))
- Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#))
- Cornwall Council ([SWR0028](#))
- The Children’s Society ([SWR0033](#))
- NSPCC ([SWR0037](#))

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair), Lucy Allan, Marion Fellows, Suella Fernandes, Catherine McKinnell, Ian Mearns, Stephen Timms, William Wragg.

Questions 1 – 56

Witnesses: **Ray Jones**, Professor of Social Work, Kingston University and St George’s, University of London, **Barbara Peacock**, Co-Chair, South East Regional Group, Association of Directors of Children’s Services, and **Councillor Roy Perry**, Chair, Children and Young People Board, Local Government Association and Leader, Hampshire County Council, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the first session of our social work reform inquiry. The purpose of this session in particular is to examine the overall approach that the Government have adopted in their reform plan and in particular the broader structural issues connected to leadership, delivery and so on related to children’s social work. We have three panellists, Ray, Barbara and Roy. Would you like to say a few words about who you are, and then we will get started? First of all, Ray.

Ray Jones: I am a social worker. I am also Social Services Director in Wiltshire in Swindon for 14 years. For two days each week, I am a research professor in London, but

for two days each week, I have been overseeing child protection improvement in different areas of England rated as inadequate by Ofsted for the last four or five years.

Barbara Peacock: I am Barbara Peacock. I am Director of Children and Adult Services in Medway Council. I am still a registered social worker. I have been a social worker for many years now. I am the Co-Chair of South East ADCS region, the incoming honorary secretary for ADCS and I am here representing ADCS.

Councillor Perry: Roy Perry; I am recently appointed chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board. I am Leader of Hampshire County Council, and before I became leader, I was the executive lead member for children's services in Hampshire.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much indeed for coming along. We have an hour to canter through our seven or eight themes and I am going to kick off with the observation that the Government's approach to this reform programme seemingly has three clear priorities. They are improving our people, systems and governance. Do you think the focus of this reform programme is correct and, if not, what would you like to see in addition to those priorities?

Ray Jones: It is an ambitious programme and it is moving at pace. Sometimes I think it is moving at a pace where there is not quite the engagement with the community of social workers or local authorities and with others and I think there are some omissions within it. There is an omission in relation to the workforce about retention and how we retain a competent workforce as much as just recruiting a competent workforce. In terms of the reality on the ground at the moment, the briefing note that you have had from the Secretary of State does not quite give the weight that it might give to the pressures within the services, which are considerable and are not totally addressed by the proposals from the Secretary of State.

I also think there are some potential unintended consequences ahead if we are not careful about destabilising what is working and losing the learning of the last 40 years about how to do children's social work and child protection well. In the rush for change, we might be forgetting some of the lessons we have learnt already.

Barbara Peacock: I would echo many of the comments that have been made by Ray. ADCS would welcome the absolute, positive attention that has been given to social work and raising its profile. We would also echo the view that sometimes in the rush and the frustration to get things done perhaps there has not been enough engagement with some of the key members of the profession or the community who have stakeholder interest in relation to social work.

One of the things that gives me some cause for concern as a director of both children and adult services is that it is not entirely clear who is leading and taking the responsibility for social work reform. There is some division and potential fragmentation between the world of children and adults and for me social work is a profession and it should come together in a more joint and stronger way.

I think there are some real concerns about governance and some questions about the reform of structural changes that may well be a distraction from the issues that we need to do in the profession. One of the really important things is that we do not want to

destabilise and cause more problems for a profession that is finding it hard to attract and retain good calibre social workers.

Q3 Chair: The contrary view was effectively expressed in a private seminar we had by a lot of people who were within the social work fraternity. They were talking about confusion, lack of structure, confusion between two chief social work officers and so on. That is a view that we will have to pursue, but you are less inclined for fundamental structural reform.

Barbara Peacock: No, I do think there is confusion between having two different principal social workers. I was saying social work is a single profession, and it is not clear where that is being led. If the focus is on social work reform and improving social work then we need to look across both the children and the adults and have a much clearer single view about the reform agenda.

Councillor Perry: LGA is broadly supportive of the Government's position, so we have no difficulty with that, and I might say as an aside we would not say that about every aspect of Government policy. On this, we certainly are, and I support broadly what the other two witnesses have said. Retention of good social workers is crucial. We should never forget the economic climate in which we are living. All of us can produce perfect systems or find it easier to produce perfect systems if there is no shortage of resources. There are serious shortages of resources so all of that has to be there.

In terms of governance, the important points of the lesson I have learned, the LGA certainly recognises partnership working is crucial, so a good children's services department is going to work closely with the police, health services and schools in their area. I look at the way the Government are doing it. The Government Departments are led by the Department for Education, but is there enough interaction between, for instance, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health? Pulling things together and recognising the children's services department on its own is not going to be the whole answer and the sole answer to good protection for children. Partnership working is a key word.

Q4 Chair: Do any of you think that early intervention in family support should be receiving more focus in this reform programme?

Ray Jones: It would be good to be able to retain it, and at the moment it has been decimated. We know from the report last week from the National Children's Bureau, The Children's Society and Action for Children that the projections over the next four years show there will be a 71% reduction in funding for that. Effectively, early intervention is family support services and it is available further downstream for children and child protection plans and so on as well, but those funding support services are being decimated at the moment.

Children's centres are closing, funding for voluntary organisations like Home-Start is being turned off, and the consequence is that we are escalating children and families into the child protection procedures and bureaucracy, because that is the only resource that we now have for those children. It is threatening for families and children, demoralising for social workers and we are overheating the child protection system.

Barbara Peacock: I would echo the view from my councillor colleague that children's social work does not operate in isolation. It operates within good, strong partnerships if it is working well. It depends whether you are looking at social work reform or you are looking at what you can do to strengthen safeguarding and wellbeing of children. If you are looking at safeguarding the wellbeing and positive outcomes for children, you have to set that in the context, that schools and education are key partners with police and health as well as a whole range of early intervention.

Councillor Perry: Prevention is clearly better than cure, so putting money into early services is important. In my council and in councils across England, there is a lot of worry that there are fewer resources available for youth work. Youth clubs, family support work and all sorts of children's services have been mentioned and that is an issue. What I think it means in local government is that the resources we have need to be targeted and focused more clearly. I have made the general point, and I do not want to keep hammering it, that more resources would always be good, but if you have limited resources use them well. The issue now, of course, is that councils have to protect their investment in child social workers and social work teams, but that does mean that there are, quite frankly, fewer resources available for those other activities that we probably would agree are good to do but they are not going to produce the immediate and clear results that perhaps we would like to see.

Chair: Thank you, Roy. Suella is going to take a look back at previous reforms and probe whether they have worked or not.

Q5 Suella Fernandes: As the Chairman said, there were the 2009 Lord Laming recommendations and that was followed by the Munro review in 2011 that made recommendations on bureaucracy and training. What is your view of how those previous reforms have embedded and been implemented?

Barbara Peacock: I would certainly want to start by saying that the creation of a director of children's services has been really positive. Having a senior role and sitting right at the heart of the council, able to work with the elected members and the leader of the council and the chief executive and hold the ring and influence the wider system to improve the outcomes for children has been really positive and I think that has made some very significant differences. One of the intentions was to have that direct accountability. Whether a director can ever be the single person held to account may be a moot point, but at least you know that there is one person who is trying to drive the system forward and always keeping children and outcomes for children in mind. I think that has been an incredibly positive move, and it has made a very significant difference for children and families.

Councillor Perry: I would agree it is a tough profession. I am an amateur so I do not have the expertise of the other two witnesses, but working closely now with social workers, I think it is a job that is going to need people of the greatest ability and calibre to take on. One can see that they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. In my authority, and I think in all good authorities, it is giving support to the social workers and recognising the professional expertise that they bring. It is obviously a job of councillors to also bring local knowledge of local situations to see that they are appreciated. In my own authority, we have demonstrated our confidence in child social workers by recently

having made our senior director of children's services the chief executive of the council, so we cannot get that role more in the centre of the council than we have done.

Ray Jones: Can I make a comment on the direction of travel up until now from all of those reform programmes, and you can go back further as well? You can go back to the 1989 Children Act, 2003 with the Laming inquiry following the death of Victoria Climbié, the 2004 Children Act, as well as the reforms in 2010, 2011 and 2012 with the reports.

The journey up until now has been about three things. One is building partnerships, the second one is about building clear accountability in governance and the third one is embedding everything locally, so that we know our local families and our local communities. That has been the journey that we have been on, and then from the Social Work Reform Board and Task Force there has also been a tremendous focus over the last four years on improving the quality of entrants to social work and their education. That has been the journey that we have been on.

The reforms at the moment have every probability of creating fragmentation rather than coherence, moving us away from a local focus and local leadership and governance, of making things more opaque that at the moment are clear in terms of who is responsible. I have a concern that we were on a journey that was very sensible but we may be side-tracking ourselves at the moment.

Q6 Suella Fernandes: Building on what you have just said, how would the other witnesses compare the new reforms to what has been previously recommended? What do the new reforms add to previous advice?

Barbara Peacock: There is quite a lot of unknowns in the new reforms. While we can see some of the intention behind it, certainly from ADCS's point of view and a director's point of view, there are still so many unknowns it is a little unclear what is happening. One of the emerging issues is there is a focus on structural change and the frustration about what you do in the case of failure, what you do when an authority and services are deemed to be failing. Of course, we all do not want that to be the case and we are all impatient about finding ways out of that, but sadly there is no quick solution. Some of the things that stump you getting into a difficult place is the quality of those relationships and those partnerships, the quality and calibre of the staff you have in place. Authorities that get into difficulties may be ones where they have not invested enough in social workers or in their partnerships, or those places that have found it hard to attract staff and retain staff, so that whatever you do to invest in your staff, you are never getting that traction.

We know that good outcomes for children come when there is a relationship and through that relationship the social worker is able to effect change. Some what almost feel like kneejerk reactions when things have not gone so well can lead to perverse incentives in the system. I fully appreciate and understand the Government's desire to make sure there is no further failure in the future, and as a director or as ADCS, I would not want to see further failure, but sometimes structural change is not the answer.

One of the concerns, as has been said by Ray, is that you can potentially see fragmentation in the system. You are not clear where the accountability lies. You are not clear where the role of the elected members and where the local government input—their knowledge of local communities and their positive commitment to outcomes for local families—sits in

some of these reforms. As some of it is quite unknown, they would be some of the areas of concern that we would have.

Councillor Perry: I would say the real issue is trying to avoid being too complacent, “Everything is okay,” or defensive if there is criticism, “Oh, we’re good.” I would hope every authority would be examining itself very critically. But equally, I think we need to avoid going down the other route of what I call the football manager syndrome: because there has been a problem, sack the person at the top and everything is okay after that. I think it is clear that once an authority starts to become a failing authority, it is very difficult to get out of that situation, and I am fortunate that my authority is judged to be good, with outstanding leadership. The director and myself argue whose leadership it is that is outstanding. The real issue is it is partnership that achieves that.

I once said to a colleague in a shire area, whose authority had been judged to be failing, “Is that important?” It was not an experience I had at that stage come across, and he said, “You wait until you are found to be failing. Then you will find that everybody is on your back, none of your social workers want to stay, the good ones whistle off pretty quickly and you find it very difficult to recruit new ones.” I think that is an issue if we go too far down the route of what I call football manager syndrome.

Q7 Stephen Timms: I was a local authority leader 25 years ago, and one thing that strikes me as very different now is the increasing separation between children’s social workers on the one hand and adult social workers on the other. We have touched on this already. Do you think it is helpful to the profession to have separate strategies for children’s social workers and adult social workers?

Barbara Peacock: I feel strongly that it is not, and that is a personal view, so I am not representing ADCS in these comments. You will see up and down the country many authorities are combining the roles of directors of adult services and children’s services together and many places are trying to think about how we do better family social work. It is very clear that there are specialisms within social work just as there would be specialisms within the medical profession, but there is a core, common basic training, I would say. If we value social work as a profession I think there are things that we should do together.

In the families that we work with, some of the adults who are parents have mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, or unresolved issues because of abuse and neglect they had when they were children. At times there is an almost artificial delineation between what is work with the adults and what is work with the children. Clearly, there are specialisms. For example, in work with dementia, you are very unlikely to be working with young children in a child protection setting if you have an adult with dementia. I recognise that there will be areas of specialism just like there would be areas of specialism in adoption and fostering, but I think that as a social work profession we should try to think about the profession and not think about what I would say are artificial divides between children and adults.

Q8 Stephen Timms: I take it you would favour social work training having a generic start, so that everybody does the same thing. I think I am right that the Government seem to be favouring a model where there is a children’s specialist qualification right at the start for

those who are going on to be children's social workers. You would disagree with where the Government are heading on that, would you?

Barbara Peacock: That is my personal view as a social worker. I think a common start is a good place and then clearly there needs to be specialism. Generic training is not good enough for some of the difficult and challenging work that we have to do, but I think a common core basic is something we should hold on to as a profession.

Q9 Stephen Timms: Do either of the other witnesses have a view on this?

Councillor Perry: As far as I am aware, the LGA does not have a specific position on that and you will find some authorities that are remerging their social work departments and others that are maintaining a distinction. It would be presumptuous of me to say how the profession should train itself. It just seems to me that as you have doctors who then specialise in paediatrics and others who become geriatricians, so you would find that in social work. I think there is an issue about the overlap when teenagers grow up. You have to make sure that people appreciate the problems of younger adults as well as the very elderly.

Having said that, the worry I have is that if you do merge the departments, such are the pressures of adult social care and the huge cost pressures that it is putting on councils and departments, I fear that some of the good work that needs to be done for children's services might find itself swallowed up by the inevitable force of money that needs to be given to adult social care. If there is one problem the Government and the nation have it is that reconciliation between the huge costs of adult social care. I do not think we have that right yet and I would not like to see children having to pay for it.

Ray Jones: I used to be a social services director, so I had responsibility for adult social care and children's social care and it did give the opportunity of closing some of those gaps that Barbara was talking about just now. You need to look out for mental health issues of parents, issues of domestic violence, learning disability and drug and alcohol abuse. When you are doing that you want to make sure that the leaders of the services are aware of those issues and the impact on children and that they are not seen as something separate and over there.

But I notice a lot of innovation going on at the moment. For example, in Hampshire—and Hampshire also runs services on the Isle of Wight—they are embedding in their children's teams specialist adult workers, working with mental health, drug and alcohol and domestic violence. So people are finding ways of closing the gap.

But in relation to social work education and preparing the future community of social work, there is no consistent view within Government. There is a different view at the moment between the DfE and the Department of Health. As far as I understand it, the Department of Health is committing itself to an initial training that is general training for all social workers. The Department for Education is moving at tremendous pace away from generic training, introducing fast-track schemes that will create a new cohort of social workers who have little understanding about adults but a lot of understanding about children. What we need to understand is about families and what is going on within families for children and for adults and we are missing that opportunity if we are not careful.

Q10 Stephen Timms: Thank you. The Chairman made the point about Government Departments. You have touched already on the importance of joining up with other Government Departments in order to safeguard children effectively. Where do you think the joins are most under strain or weakest at the moment and what should the Government be doing to address that?

Councillor Perry: I have said there are a number of Departments dealing with issues. If we take something like FGM, I think it is the Home Office that is taking the lead there, but the Department of Health has important responsibilities and it does impact down on children. In the Department of Health, we see huge sums of money going into health visitors now and we think, “Wait a minute, is that really the best way to spend that sort of money?” But that is determined by CCPs rather than the local authorities. There are funds available and I think it is getting better use of those. As I said at the beginning, you have the Ministry of Justice on young people’s use of drugs and treatment of young offenders. We want to get that sorted out.

I certainly think there is an issue with CAMHS and child and adult adolescent mental health is an issue. It is Health, Education, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, and I do not think they are working well together. I have been invited to various committees and workshops in this place where it seems that one Department—I had better not name it—does not quite know what the other Department is doing. Down at ground level, if I can put it like that, in local authorities we have to join those together. I think the Government could do a better job and need to do a better job in joining the Departments together.

Q11 Stephen Timms: Do you think the LGA itself has effective dialogue with each of those Departments?

Councillor Perry: Any dialogue can always be more effective than it is and I suspect it is also rather disjointed. You will have a dialogue with one Department on one issue and another Department on another issue. Perhaps one really needs to get each of those Departments around the table with the local authorities and other people can give evidence and say, “Look, we can all help each other.”

Ray Jones: I would have thought the biggest divide at the moment is between what the Department for Education might be trying to achieve for children and families and what is happening within the DWP and the impact of that on children and families who are finding themselves in great difficulty because of what is happening in the benefit system and the consequences of that for children. Services are often taking on responsibilities in relation to income maintenance and poverty for some families that really should not be their responsibility; it is a DWP responsibility.

But at the end of the day, to be honest, I do not think most people are thinking how well Government Departments are working together in Westminster. It is how well people are working together locally. The intention needs to be given to make sure we have stable local services and local leadership working well in partnership, and if we keep churning things up as we are at the moment, we will never achieve that.

Chair: Thank you, Stephen. William, you are going to be talking about the two chief social workers.

Q12 William Wragg: Indeed, and perhaps leading on from the idea of joint working, a broad question to begin with on having two chief social workers. How successful do you think the two chief social workers have been?

Ray Jones: Do you want some history on this very quickly? It was never intended to have two chief social workers. This came out of the Social Work Reform Board and Task Force. It was a recommendation that some people, including me, were making going back to the reflections following the death of Peter Connelly in 2008-2009. The intention always was that there should be one chief social worker and, indeed, there was a recruitment for one chief social worker. When that went through to the Secretary of State at the time the candidate was not agreed and it was decided to have two chief social workers. The consequence is that the intention was to have a voice in Government that brought through the realities of social work into policymaking within Government.

We now have a divide between a chief social worker in the Department for Education, who is very energetic and able and driving a very fast agenda but with no real match across what is intended and wanted within the Department of Health. We have different voices; both are legitimate and proper voices, but I think to some extent we have lost this being a voice of social work going into Government. Certainly, from the Department for Education, it does feel to some of us on the outside a little bit at the moment as the voice of Government coming out to social work and telling social work what to do. That is reflected in the lack of engagement, I have to say, in the reforms being driven at the moment with the social work community and the evidence you have had. There are a number of statements there about a greater willingness and wish that there was an engagement with the social work community on the reforms being shaped.

Barbara Peacock: I have similar views. I welcome the idea of having a chief social worker and you can see and feel that, even though we have two of them, it has been very welcome that the word “social worker” and the profession is higher on the agenda. But it is not clear at this point where the leadership on social work sits. It does seem to be going off in two different directions and ADCS would welcome a greater collaboration with the chief social worker for children.

Councillor Perry: It would be presumptuous of me, as I said, to comment on the profession. From the experience of any councillor, it is a tough job they are doing and for the most part a good job they are doing. I think in this country there are certain professions that we tend to denigrate: an engineer is a good one, but in most of the world an engineer is something that gets huge respect. Not in England, and I think much the same is true of social workers when, in fact, the task they are doing is extremely difficult and extremely complex. Good people do it well. We should all do our best to endorse anything that can be done to enhance the status of that profession.

Q13 William Wragg: Just going back to what Professor Jones said, you are on record as calling them spokespersons for central government. Can you expand on that and is it necessarily a problem?

Ray Jones: I think there is a dual role and you have to face both ways if you are the chief social worker, don't you? You have to be the voice of social work coming into Government, based on your experience and wisdom of knowing what social work is about.

Secondly, you do have to take out to the social work community the views of Government, and in your own right as a professional, you have to be challenging about some of the things that you think need to be different. So you have to be able to face in both directions. Getting that balance right is very difficult. It is getting very difficult and we do see it being played in different ways by the chief social worker in the Department for Education compared to the chief social worker in the Department for Health.

It does feel to me that the pace of the change being demanded from the DfE at the moment is such that it is not engaging with the social work profession, nor with local authorities, nor with the leaders of children's social care within local authorities. There is a feeling of being done to. Secondly, there is a feeling that sometimes some of the wisdom and experience that others have is not being tapped into.

Q14 William Wragg: Perhaps just expanding on that a bit more, anything to add at all, Barbara?

Barbara Peacock: No, nothing.

Q15 William Wragg: Going back then to what Professor Jones was saying, Isabelle Trowler is on record saying that she was not a voice of the profession. With the closure of the College of Social Work, how can we ensure that the voice of social work is heard within Government? How would you suggest that is done?

Ray Jones: The closure of the College of Social Work is an example of what I was saying just now. It closed because the funding it might have thought it was going to get to develop an accreditation programme for social workers was instead awarded by the DfE to KPMG and a number of other organisations. That undermined the financial viability in the business plan of the College of Social Work. It had only been in place for three years and was still developing, with considerable Government investment that has now been wasted. The ambition that many of us have had for 20-plus years of having a College of Social Work like the Royal Colleges has now been negated.

That leaves the British Association of Social Workers as a membership organisation for social work, and I have to say that it has been in its history somewhat confused about what it should be. There has been a view from some social workers that they should not be a profession because that is elitist and taking us away from our service users. That is not a view I share, but that goes back to the 1970s. More recently, there has been a view that this is the voice of frontline practitioners and not of managers. That is not a view I share either, but I do have hopes and aspirations that the British Association of Social Workers will become a stronger and more coherent voice. Certainly, the membership is increasing, so I think that has to be where we look towards seeing a voice for social work in the future. The chief social workers are not the voice for social work, but they should be a voice for social work going into Government, based on their wisdom.

Barbara Peacock: I think it is very disappointing about the College of Social Work. That came directly out of the previous reforms and the recommendations of it. While it might not have been perfect and it had a difficult birth, and not necessarily an easy start, these are hard things to get going—a new college representing a diverse profession—and it is disappointing we did not give it enough time to get embedded. It leaves a very significant gap.

ADCS is one way of presenting a voice of social work into central government and I would say that is an important role, but it is not just the voice of the profession. I think we are left with a gap with the close of the College of Social Work, and we need to think very carefully about the proposed new regulatory body that is within some of the social work reforms. It is pleasing to see that is intended to cover both children and adult social work, but is that going to be another voice into Government? We need to think about that as we move to that new regulatory body being established.

Councillor Perry: I am following up on what the two other witnesses said. Please do not be looking for quick fixes. You are dealing with a very difficult, very complex problem that has been around, I guess, since human beings have been around. England, by the way, is far from the worst performer in looking after its children. We compare very favourably with many other countries. Having said that, as I said a moment ago, there is no room for complacency and every need to keep the pressure up to get it improved, but don't think you are going to do that in six months. That certainly is not going to happen.

Q16 Chair: Can we go on to the role of the practice leaders? First of all, Ray, what do you think they would contribute towards addressing some of the problems that we have been talking about thus far?

Ray Jones: There are practice leaders at the moment and they are called directors of children's services. Following the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, it is very clear that there ought to be clear accountability by—well, Lord Laming talked about the directors of social services because that is what they were at the time, but then directors of children's services in terms of the practice. Then more recently, and following the recommendations of the Social Work Reform Board and Task Force, we have had principal social workers—you will be meeting one, I think, this morning, Marion—and they have been given that practice leadership role as well. So we have senior managers as practice leaders, and then we have senior professionals as practice leaders; we have it already.

Picking up what Roy was saying just now, the principal social worker role as a practice leader, professional lead within children's services, is relatively recent. I think it is about two or three years old at the most. Already, we are churning that up and about to invent something else. We do need to calm ourselves down a bit and get a return on what we are changing, rather than changing it so frequently. I don't know what the new practice leaders would be compared to what we already have.

Q17 Chair: Roy, from your experience at Hampshire, how do you see this role evolving? Would you have thought of it yourselves as a council having been sort of thrust upon you?

Councillor Perry: We tend to not like anything being thrust upon us; we prefer to engage in the dialogue and sort out a good solution. We have been fortunate in that we have an extremely good, very experienced director of children's service, such that he was called to Haringey to sort out the situation after the problems there. He has been asked to help on the Isle of Wight and we are trying to sort out the problems there, and now I am told being asked to go down to Torbay to sort out the problems there. I am saying, "Fine, we want to do what we can, but Hampshire children first, just remember that." But what I detect from

him and what I have learnt from him and, indeed, his systems is that you need good workers who fully understand the needs of the profession and the needs of the children they are serving, but at the same time recognise the broader problems of an authority and the broader issues an authority has to address. We had such confidence in him that he can now be the director, so he is not a guy who has just being fluffy and saying, “You have to look after the children.” He has been able to give a hard administrative edge and I think that is what is important. You have someone who can marry together the needs of the profession, the needs of the children and the workings of social work, but at the same time make sure that that factors well into the development of the organisation and the efficient and economic running of that organisation. If a practice leader can achieve that, fine. I think we have a perfectly reasonable system that is working well in our experience in Hampshire.

Q18 Chair: Barbara, in the evidence you have submitted to our Committee already, the ADCS has criticised the lack of clarity about the practice leader. What are your concerns and what do you think the Government could do to improve this clarity, a definition of the role if you like?

Barbara Peacock: ADCS remains very confused about what is the role of practice leader. Is it the role that is to replace principal social workers? So is it somebody down in practice? When you read some of the words, it almost reads like is it a sort of mini director of children’s services? I think the confusion about where the role sits, the span of control of the role, is not helpful. One of the things I am quite concerned about is if this is meant to be the most senior role that is leading children’s services in the broader sense, the wording is intermittent between children’s social work and children’s social care, but many places are bringing together some of the work around early help, early intervention as well as the children’s social work services. So you are trying to get a wraparound through that whole child approach and partnership approach and some of the words on practice leaders do not talk about that but talk about the social work and social care staffing. In many ways, it is almost like a backward role; it is making social work more isolated.

One of things that leaves me with concern is some of you may have read the work from the virtual college about signatures of failure: what are the issues that lead social work services and local authorities to be deemed inadequate when they start to not meet the requirements for running a good service. One of the key features in a signature of failure was isolation. When the children’s social work services become isolated from the core of the council and from the senior leaders, everybody’s eye is off the ball; nobody is thinking about the child, the family and the community. For me, one of the dangers I read in that practice lead is that it almost takes the social work bit of the service out into splendid isolation, and therein lies a real danger for us all. I think much more needs to be understood around the practice leader role and its intention about where it should sit.

The other issue about local authorities being free to determine what is right for them in terms of their structural arrangements is that any posts at second tier are member appointments. I think members and local authorities should be free to make the right sort of structural arrangements for them. That does not seem to feature in any of the writing I have seen about the practice leader role.

Q19 Chair: So the question is: what does the principal social worker do, and think about this other role, in the context of structural organisation within any normal department?

Barbara Peacock: My principal social worker does not understand it.

Ray Jones: The practice leader role?

Barbara Peacock: The practice leader role, yes.

Q20 Chair: Ray, looking from your vantage point?

Ray Jones: The principal social worker role was intended to do two things. One was to promote good practice and, secondly, to report back into the council as a senior professional on what was happening at the frontline, not just at the frontline in terms of children's social work services—to pick up what Barbara was saying—but across all those agencies working with children. The intention was that it would develop practice in terms of social work and with others and, secondly, it would report back into the council publicly and to the local safeguarding board for children about what was happening at the frontline.

The focus of the principal social worker role was on the frontline practice, the quality and development of that practice and improving it, but also looking to report on and audit it. That is a crucial role and you need a senior professional who is well experienced with the expertise and competence to do that. We are now building that cohort of people. We are two years into this—Marion will be able to correct us later about the timescale, but I think it is two years, three at most—and to undermine that at this point in time does not seem a sensible thing to be doing, especially because you have directors of children's services who have the statutory responsibility overall for leadership of not just children's social services but what is happening for children in their local area across the other partners as well.

We have it sorted in one sense. It does not mean we do it well all the time, but we have top management leadership, we have a senior counsellor as a portfolio holder for children in that accountability as well and we have a professional lead in the principal social worker. We have the infrastructure in place. Where it works well, it does it really well; where it does not work well then we can make it better; but why churn it up at the moment?

Q21 Chair: Roy, what are your thoughts from Hampshire?

Councillor Perry: I think that point made about the role of the lead member is a very important one and in fact we have a former Member of this House as our lead member for children's services. I know when I had that role it was a very personal responsibility and I think it is one that any sensible person would take very seriously indeed. All local authorities will have select committees, scrutiny committees that give them an opportunity to not only deal with the major strategies of the council but also to look in some depth and some detail at how the authority is dealing with the issues that are coming before it, to the ability of members to be able to question professional workers and not just one person, not just the director, but other people below the top level, so that they have a feel for how the department and the professionals are reacting and to be able to give some input into their

presence there. That certainly is a role that could be useful. Again, I do not particularly want to say what should be the status, what should be the nomenclature that will be used, but it is the ability of councils to get below the surface and find out what is really happening and make sure that the professionals are aware of what members can bring in a democratic element to it.

Q22 Chair: On the assumption that you all agree that there is room for improvement in the leadership of social work—and I do not think anyone has contradicted that—what else do you think the Government should be doing to bring about that improvement?

Barbara Peacock: I think there is definitely something about raising the status of the profession and I can see some really positive things that the Government have been doing about that. That is definitely to be welcomed. But none of this is a quick overnight fix. We have to stick at it. I think that there are some issues about our training of social workers. I must say personally I don't necessarily agree with the narrative that training for social workers is not good enough at the moment. I have some absolutely excellent newly qualified social workers coming out, but I do agree that there probably is not consistency across the patch. There needs to be more investment in continuing professional development. If we look at the investment that has gone into the teaching profession, not just for attracting high-calibre teachers but the support for middle leaders and the support for head teachers and leaders of authority chains, we need the same sort of investment in at all levels of the career around social work.

Q23 Chair: Does anyone have anything to add to that?

Ray Jones: What makes for good social work is good partnership working locally, all those people who know families; a stable and experienced workforce who are challenged as well as supported by their managers with the judgments that they are making; where top leadership stay close to their front line and where there is the capacity to spend time with families, finding out what is happening and building relationships with children and parents. It is hard to do that when there has been a 70% increase in workloads over the last six years in relation to child protection because people are closing work down quickly to take new work on.

The second consequence is that we have an unstable workforce at the moment. It is very stressful, very heavily focused on risk management and risk assessing for child protection, and the consequence of that is we have high turnover. Our workforce is now skewed towards a lot of newly qualified social workers coming in because experienced workers have been doing it for a time and are getting out. A number of authorities are very heavily dependent on social workers who are agency interim workers—the worse I have found where I have been spending time is 60%—who come and go and have no knowledge of the local communities, of families or of their partners in local agencies.

We know how to do child protection and we know how to do good social work. The context in which it is being delivered at the moment is very difficult. Then we have Ofsted who come in and say—

Chair: We are going to come on to Ofsted in a moment.

Ray Jones: Okay, I could not wait to get there.

Q24 Chair: Can I just stop you there at Ofsted, because Catherine has some good questions about Ofsted? Roy, do you have anything to add to my question?

Councillor Perry: One thing I would say observing is if a child social worker or a department fails, it is pretty obvious. We all know that there is a failure here. When it succeeds, that is less obvious to define. In fact, I suppose success is defined by you do not notice anything. The children are all well; they are doing everything happily; and you are not going to get any headlines. If you contrast that with education, if kids fail we know all about that; if they succeed we read about it in the paper, they go off to Oxford or wherever.

Chair: Very good point.

Councillor Perry: So this is a difficulty that the profession has. I have tried, and I am trying this morning and all the time, to recognise the problem that social workers face and to give praise where praise is deserved, which is what we should do, anything any of us can do to raise the status and to retain good people in the profession. There really is an issue. You can often recruit young graduates ready to come in bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but after five or six years of constantly being pilloried, of facing some of the most difficult problems our society, all over the country, can deliver, that is very taxing. I think we certainly should be concentrating on ways of retaining good people.

Q25 Catherine McKinnell: On to Ofsted, if you take Ofsted's view, local authority children's services seem to have regressed significantly in the last few years. It would be interesting if you could comment on that. Do you agree with it, and why do you think it is that so many local authorities are performing so badly?

Barbara Peacock: I will start here, as everyone was looking at me. I will start with some comments and I am sure my colleagues will want to add some more. I think it is important that there is external regulation. That is really positive and holds us all to account and it is important that it is done with proportionality. ADCS have been very clear that we think that the judgments that are made from Ofsted are unhelpful and they perpetuate a negative culture about what local authorities children's services do and do not deliver. But that is not about being complacent. I think that there is not complacency in the vast majority of places. I would say that to some extent the regulator has now become slightly more anxious and its desire to make sure it uncovers every stone there is to be uncovered leads it to be exceedingly cautious in its decision-making and the breadth of the framework gets wider and wider, even within the same framework. As the next new public issue comes into the play, the inspectors then add it into what they are looking for when they inspect. Even within this framework, those who were inspected at the start of the framework were inspected through a slightly different lens than those who are being inspected now. So it is an exceedingly difficult and challenging regime at the moment.

We have had comments previously, we need to be mindful—again, I am not being complacent. We are not complacent about failure and we are not saying that there is not a need to change but how come, if England is one of the safest places in terms of child protection, we now have a narrative that says that the majority of authorities are not good enough?

Ray Jones: It wasn't always like this. My description of Ofsted is it is now a hit and run inspectorate. It comes in; it hits you; and then it goes away.

Ian Mearns: A drive-by inspectorate?

Ray Jones: I will try and remember that one. Even those authorities who have been rated as good have found it a very bruising experience, partly because when you get your Ofsted report, all the bad news is at the front. If you are the local media, you read from the front and by the time you get to page 5 you start picking up the good news, even when you have a good rating. One of the challenges about Ofsted is that it comes and goes and it does not stay with you, unlike the Commission for Social Care Inspection, which was its predecessor, where I would have met with the area manager from CSCI about every two or three months and it would have kept close to my services, it would have given me a view of what was happening and would have wanted my view about it. It came and took its own view in terms of auditing and inspecting, but it was a relationship about development and improvement whereas the Ofsted relationship is about judgment.

Picking up what Barbara was saying, I do think sometimes it lacks confidence in itself, so it is unwilling to give the type of ratings that you might think you deserve when Ofsted is coming. Then one of the consequences is that the services implode. You lose confidence, other agencies lose confidence and it takes about two or three years to climb back up the cliff that you have just fallen off.

One of the things I will mention, because I cannot think where else to get this in, is the 2014 regulatory changes that, on the basis of Ofsted judgments, are allowing local authorities to lose their responsibility for children's social services; those regulatory changes that open up a marketplace now in terms of statutory children's social services and child protection. That is the most fundamental change we have seen in children's social services since going back before 1948. For the first time, child protection decisions can be taken, intrusion in families can be allowed, decisions about where children live on care orders and whether care procedures should be issued in the court can be taken outside of the public sector and local government. That is a fundamental change, a massive change, which is only going to lead to greater instability and more confused accountability. That is the journey we are on and it is not getting the attention it should get.

Councillor Perry: I think what we want Ofsted to achieve is to make the situation better, isn't it? Sometimes there is a feeling that Ofsted is possibly making the situation worse rather than better. That is not to decry the work that it is doing. That has to be inspection and there are some authorities that need to be told that they have to get their children's services in order, I would not deny that. But you do need to make it better. I am a grandfather now. I look at my little grandchildren in America, where they are, and the little boy is struggling with mathematics. You do not keep telling him, "You are a failure; you are doing it badly," if you want him to achieve something. I know we are not talking about primary school children but more serious issues, but I think we do want to encourage something that is going to improve achievement and get improvements rather than something—as my colleague said in another authority—that is going to leave you reeling after an assessment and finding it almost impossible to improve because no good staff want to go and work there, good staff that are there want to go off and work somewhere else and the local authority is left struggling. I think objective, good

assessments from Ofsted are welcome, but do it in a way that is going to build on the successes and make it better, rather than one that is going to say, “Well, we duffed them up and now we are not really too worried about what happens.” It is probably unfair on Ofsted to say that, but I think we need to worry about that.

Q26 Catherine McKinnell: Would you suggest that the way that Ofsted is going about its inspections is creating this negative climate or that perhaps an alternative approach to the Ofsted approach would be more suitable for the services that you are talking about in terms of inspection? Should the Government be considering alternatives or work to improve the current approach?

Councillor Perry: My own view is, should it just be looking at the children’s services department? If you are worried about the problems that children are facing in a community then is the health service playing its part; are the police reacting properly with the children’s services and with education; what is happening in the schools? I think you need possibly a much broader inspection rather than just one part that has a big responsibility but by no means the whole responsibility, perhaps a more general inspection of how services are interacting, government services, local authority services and the other agencies.

Q27 Catherine McKinnell: It is interesting because one of the situations at the moment is that if within six months children’s services has not deemed to have improved sufficiently then it is taken out of local authority control, potentially. There are two questions. First, do you think that six-month timetable is appropriate or realistic? That leads on to the second question: if you think that there needs to be a wider inspectorate regime then presumably if children’s services are being taken out of the local authority that sort of inspection is not appropriate in any event going forward, if that is the route that the Government are going down. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on that.

Councillor Perry: Well, I will kick off. Six months clearly is not sufficient. I have spoken with our director who has been helping on the Isle of Wight. Of the three authorities that were subjected to this, it was only on the Isle of Wight the local authority was called in to help and it is only on the Isle of Wight where they have at least improved their category, still require improvement, and that is after two years of very close working and co-operative working with the councillors and the officers on the Isle of Wight. There are not quick fixes. Six months, to be quite categoric, is simply unrealistic.

Barbara Peacock: I would say, as a practitioner and director, that six months is just unrealistic. I do think that there is an assessment, though, that needs to be made as to whether the authority is accepting and understanding the reasons for failure, because if the authority accepts that there are issues that need to be fixed, then the system can wrap around it and help and support it to move forward. I think the real challenge is if you have an authority that is in denial and cannot see what the issue areas are. That is when there are some serious problems that need to be addressed. I would see that as an absolute exception rather than a norm.

Ray Jones: We have the means to do it. The means is people like me. I have spent, say, two days a week for the last four years in authorities that have been rated as inadequate by Ofsted, the Isle of Wight being one of them, but Devon, Sandwell, Salford and Torbay.

The reality in every one of those places is that they were in difficulty and they got into even more difficulty as a consequence of their Ofsted judgment. They imploded and it took about nine months to get any control back at all. It then took about another 18 months to get back to a stable workforce, control the workload and managers, often new managers coming in, who knew what was going on. My view is that six months is crazy. You will go in and find things have got worse, because they will have done, and some of the processes at the moment are demanding that authorities lose control. We have had two councils—Doncaster and Slough—to date where that has been required. Both of them have been reinspected by Ofsted and found not to be improved, but it does not surprise me because they spent their time reorganising, rather than finding out what was going on at their frontline and getting it back into control. My view is that even when authorities are in trouble, we know how to make it better, but at the moment we are introducing arrangements that distract us from doing that.

Q28 Catherine McKinnell: All of this change is taking place against a backdrop of quite significant reductions in local authority funding. Obviously, some parts of the country are affected more by the central grant changes than others and similarly by the business rate devolution than others. Have you noticed any particular challenges in the ability of local authorities to deliver improved children's services, taken in that context?

Barbara Peacock: I feel I need to represent a clear view that there is not always a direct correlation between what you spend and the quality of the service that you provide.

Ian Mearns: So if you spend nothing, you can provide a good service?

Barbara Peacock: No, but you can spend a lot of money and still deliver a bad service. We need to be realistic that you can't always equate spending money on things with you are going to deliver a good service. However, we know that the families that we work with in the social work service have a range of complexities and a number of challenges in their lives. As we see a reduction in services, we are seeing increased stress on families. We are all seeing increased numbers of asylum seekers, no recourse to public funds, homelessness, issues around poor-quality private rented housing. That is leaving some families moving quite a lot, so their family and their support networks become more unstable. That makes it more challenging to wrap around and get them the help and support that is needed. We are beginning to see some consequences of reductions in the wider set of services that might wrap around and support more vulnerable children and adults.

Ray Jones: There are two major research studies on this that have just been published, and they show that, in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation, the workloads are such now that authorities are closing work down very quickly because they cannot contain it all and then it is bouncing back again. In the areas that have less socioeconomic deprivation, they are able to contain the work more. The consequence is that in some of those areas we are intruding more into families, because we have the capacity to do so, than we are in the areas of low socioeconomic deprivation.

Chair: Good point. Lucy, you have two questions, both of them are quite important, but we do need shortish answers because we are running out of time.

Q29 Lucy Allan: We have talked about the vilification of the profession and this fear of failure that is being brought on by Ofsted. Barbara, to what extent do you feel that the profession is becoming defensive and then, as a result, making more referrals of children into the child protection system?

Barbara Peacock: That certainly happens when an authority gets an inadequate judgment. Having worked in an authority where that has been the case, the volume of referrals that come in really escalates. I think some of our partners, and the good partners that we work with, are really concerned about children. Some of them, because they have less resource to do some of the wraparound they would have done in the past, are seeking to refer it in because in many ways social workers act as a backstop. If you do not know where else to go and you are worried about a child, you pass it in to social services to support that child. We are seeing the stress in the system and more referrals coming through.

Q30 Lucy Allan: Would it help if there were acceptance that mistakes can be made in the social work profession, as they can in any profession, and perhaps a more openness of culture? Do you think that would help?

Barbara Peacock: Absolutely. The more we can be open and the more we can be open about our learning the better it is for everybody.

Ray Jones: Even a narrative of mistakes is not helpful, and if you are dealing with families with a complexity, you will not always have all the information that will become available later when something terrible happens. You will have made the best judgment you can at that point in time and you will not always get those judgments right. They are not mistakes; we were doing the best job that we could with what we knew at that point in time. I am not pointing directly at you because it comes through in the Secretary of State's statement as well about failure, mistakes, error. We are doing a very difficult job out there in very difficult circumstances, and they are not mistakes; they are not errors. It is just that you cannot anticipate the future for all children living in difficult circumstances.

Chair: I have to stop it there but thank you very much indeed, all three of you, for such comprehensive and full answers. We have gone over a bit on time, but we think it has been valuable, so thank you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Marion Russell**, Principal Child and Families Social Worker, Cornwall Council, **Dr Sam Royston**, Director of Research and Policy, The Children's Society, **Peter Watt**, National Services Director, NSPCC, and **Paul Moffat**, Chief Executive, Doncaster Independent Children's Trust, gave evidence.

Q31 Chair: Good morning and welcome to our inquiry. You know that we are basically looking at the Government reform programme and seeing if it is sufficient in terms of structure, people and outputs and so on, so I am not going to repeat that in any detail. I would like you to briefly say what you are representing and what you do, and then we will get straight on with the questions. Paul, would you like to start?

Paul Moffat: I am Paul Moffat. I am the Chief Executive of Doncaster Children's Services Trust. If I may, there was a factual inaccuracy in what was said in the last round of witness evidence, so I am wondering if I will get a chance to clarify that inaccuracy?

Chair: Yes, you will get a chance to clarify it. I will let you do that.

Dr Royston: I am Sam Royston. I am Director of Policy and Research at The Children's Society, which is a national children's charity.

Marion Russell: I am Marion Russell. I am Principal Child and Family Social Worker for Cornwall. I am here representing Cornwall and our written submission, but I was also the first principal child and family social worker appointed in England and helped set up and chaired the national network until July of last year.

Chair: Congratulations on all of that.

Peter Watt: I am Peter Watt. I am the National Services Director at the NSPCC.

Q32 Chair: Paul, would you like to make your clarification?

Paul Moffat: Just in response to Professor Jones's comment about Ofsted's findings at the recent inspection of Doncaster, they did find improvement. They did not change the overall judgment, but looked-after services were all "requires improvement" or "good". Even help and protection they described as improving compared to where it had been previously, and there was confidence in the leadership and the management going forward. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much. Straight on with Ian, who is going to ask a few questions about who should run the services.

Q33 Ian Mearns: If you were in the room—and I know a number of you were—our last panel was heavily dominated by people from a local authority background, as am I by the way. Who should run statutory children's services and to what extent should we be looking at new models of service delivery?

Dr Royston: As a charity provider, that may be targeted at Peter and me. The first thing is that The Children's Society very strongly approves of innovation in children's social work. We think reform is absolutely crucial, perhaps now more than ever. But one of the challenges is that there is a particular need for innovation to be delivered in the context of developing better practice, rather than in the context of burning platforms where change is necessary. There can be real risks in reforming and particularly in changing the delivery of statutory children's services in response to reductions in funding for social care. That presents real risks.

I think the voluntary sector has an absolutely crucial role to play in the reform of social care services. In taking on additional statutory responsibilities, or responsibilities for the delivery of statutory services, there are some risks to additional delivery from the voluntary sector. In particular, we are very proud of our independent role and our ability to act as a critical friend to local authorities, and there could be some risks in the voluntary sector taking on a wider role with regard to that. In addition, a key part of what we do is providing independent advocacy to children directly, and in the context of the voluntary sector taking on more roles for the delivery of statutory children's services, there would be a big question about would the voluntary sector be able to continue to do that? If so, how would that work? There are some real questions there.

Peter Watt: I would agree with that. The first thing to say from the NSPCC's perspective is that if a local authority is failing—and I am sure we will talk a bit more about that later on—it is failing children and families who are very vulnerable and it is absolutely right that the Government take a stance and says, “We are not willing to tolerate that.” Asking some questions about what happens if a local authority does not improve in sufficient speed such that families are safer is absolutely the right question. From the NSPCC's perspective, we would agree with Sam. We have been providing to and with local authorities almost since we were formed. The key thing we bring to the table is, first of all, independence and challenge, in the way that Sam described, and the second thing is innovation. We have the ability to innovate in terms of what works and develop evidence-based approaches that will be helpful to the local authority we are working with directly and to the wider sector as well. That is a unique place where we would want to be. From the NSPCC's perspective, I do not think we would want to take on delivering the totality of statutory services in the local area, but we would want to continue to work as a partner delivering aspects of what a local authority delivers.

Paul Moffat: There are some excellent local authorities providing excellent children's services. I have worked for over 27 years in local authorities, and I was a director of children's services in one authority, one of only four in the country that achieved “outstanding” under the last inspection framework. We should recognise and celebrate that, but there are authorities that get into repeated failures, where there has been consistent failure and poor leadership over a number of years. Just repeating the same structures and the same models, in my view, is not necessarily the right way forward. There is a lot of expertise in the independent sector and in the private sector, and we should be looking at different models going forward that might act as a catalyst in a local area to bring about significant change. There is not one size fits all. We should look at the local need, the local context, and then determine what is the right model.

Marion Russell: Cornwall comes from a situation where we were in intervention. We had a very poor Ofsted report in 2009 and in 2011 and we have been in intervention. But what worked for us was absolutely clear leadership, but clear leadership that was local and with a commitment to Cornwall. That is what made all the difference. Having interim leaders and different people coming in did not work. We then had a leadership that had a clear strategic plan and that had the motivation and passion to bring everybody on board and stuck with Cornwall through what it had to do. I was here for the previous panel and listened to my colleagues there, and I would reiterate that in many authorities the structure and the people are already there. If you have a lead member who is committed to children, a director who has those skills and abilities and the other pieces are in place, then you can

work towards that improvement. Restructuring, changing systems, creating more churn takes the eye off the ball and takes the focus away from what you are doing with children. Absolutely, that can be done in partnership with other colleagues who have that expertise, but it is not about separating it; it is bringing it all back together.

Q34 Ian Mearns: What we have seen though, for instance, the Government's experience with schools is experiments have then led to wholesale change across the whole system, which is now being enacted. Do you think an academy-style system would be appropriate for children's social care?

Marion Russell: Anything that adds a level of separation and takes governance and accountability away carries more risk. The people who have the governance and the accountability for what happens with children should hold that and that should be within the local authority.

Q35 Ian Mearns: Using the educational analogy again, in and around London, the Government have found it less difficult to get academy sponsorship, but outside in the provinces that has become more difficult. Do you think there are people out there who are ready and willing to take over the responsibility of being sponsors for an academy-style children's services?

Paul Moffat: From my experience, I have not had a plethora of people knocking at my door to talk about sponsoring the trust. However, we have to think imaginatively about what we mean by sponsorship. I would agree with the comment earlier that this is about local accountability. You do not want a fragmented service and there is a risk that if you have too many providers you end up with the focus moving away from the child and it becomes about commissioning and structures rather than outcomes for children. But there is an opportunity there to think more creatively if there is going to be an acadamisation of social care. We have to think about who we want in the tent working with us on that. It has to be people that have a clear common purpose, a clear vision about what they want for children, and not be driven by profit or by finance.

Q36 Ian Mearns: Directly to the people from the voluntary sector, would your organisations want to take over the children's service of Birmingham, for instance? You shook your head very quickly there, Sam, by the way.

Dr Royston: Maybe Birmingham is an interesting example. But we have no plans to knock on the door around running statutory children's services at this point in time. As I say, I think that what each individual provider does is a question that it is going to have to address. The big questions for the voluntary sector are: first, are we the most appropriate kind of organisation to be delivering that kind of service; secondly, can we maintain that independent role, that critical friend role; can we continue to provide independent advocacy for children? Would our taking on responsibilities like that be putting children's needs at the heart of what we are doing?

Q37 Ian Mearns: Before I bring Peter in, you raise an interesting question. Would you like to continue to be a critical friend to G4S running children's services in Birmingham?

Dr Royston: What we are clear about is that we do not think that a for-profit company should be running statutory children's services. We do not think that that it is right that the profit motive be the core driver of that. We welcome the changes to some of the original discussions about a year and a half ago on this that were a bit less clear about the role of for-profit organisations.

Peter Watt: We would not want to take on the running of the services in an area, be it in Birmingham or anywhere else. But there is a flipside to this as well, in two parts. One is that I do not think we should make the assumption that all of the best knowledge and skills about what works for children and families in a particular area sit within the local authority, because that is not always the case. That is why the role of the voluntary sector comes in. We have a particular set of skills and expertise that would be enormously helpful. Sometimes, these structural discussions almost become, "Put the walls around the local authority and then everyone else keep away because we know what's best." I do not think that is true.

The second thing is that the NSPCC's research is really clear on this, that for every one child that is known by statutory services in some shape or form, there are eight children who are being maltreated who are not known to the system. If we are going to genuinely create a system that protects all those children who are being maltreated, it will require not just local authority statutory services being excellent. It will require community services, communities, families, churches, institutions and so on also to play their role. That is an important consideration when we are talking about what works for children and vulnerable children and families; that it is not just statutory services now and it can't be going forward.

Q38 Ian Mearns: Paul, do you think the model in Doncaster can be extended to all underperforming local authorities? How far have the trust structures helped you in your bid to secure improvement? One last little question is: do you think it is realistic for the Government to expect local authorities, or any other provider, to turn services around in six months if they are inadequate?

Paul Moffat: We just need to clarify that point. There is not an expectation that authorities turn a poor performing authority around within six months. There is an expectation that there is a clear action plan and there is confidence in the leadership and management, which I think is what Barbara alluded to earlier. That is the expectation; it is not expected that you go from "inadequate" to "requires improvement" within six months. Ofsted would say that, as would the Department for Education. The expectation with regard to the trust is that, within nine months, we clearly demonstrated that all of our looked-after services had gone from "inadequate" to at least "requires improvement" or "good", if you just apply the Ofsted judgments.

What is important to think about from Doncaster's perspective is the morale of the staff. We had a very demoralised, partially demonised staff, and within a relatively short period of time we turned that around. We could have just said, "Right, we are going to get rid of all of those staff and start again," but the timescales that were set for the contract is that we had to be in a much stronger position within 18 months. Starting with a new workforce and getting to that point would have just compounded the challenges that we already faced. What we did do, however, was invested a huge amount of time in practice

improvement. We had good practitioners from the voluntary sector, from the statutory sector, sitting alongside what had previously been underperforming staff.

Q39 Chair: Can I ask a question? Do you think the model is transferrable to other areas where—

Paul Moffat: I was getting to that. In Doncaster, you can clearly see evidence of improvement and that has been found by Ofsted, by Department for Education officials who come in and by external regulators as well, so we have seen those improvements. As a model, I think it is working well within Doncaster and the evidence stacks up to support that. It is a model that could be applied elsewhere but I do not think it is a panacea; it is not something that could be applied in 152 authorities. It goes back to what I said in the beginning: it depends on the local need, the history and the repeated failure. We have a new organisation. It has acted as a catalyst with partners, brought in new staff and retained the good staff, and that has been something that has worked for us.

Chair: Excellent. Can we keep our answers a bit tighter because we are running up to deadlines here?

Q40 Marion Fellows: You will recognise I am another Marion from Scotland. Here we go. I want to talk about multiagency partnerships. Do you think the Government's strategy for social work reform places enough emphasis on this?

Marion Russell: I think there is a confusion in the titles. It is a strategy for social work reform, so we are talking about reforming social work and what we want social workers to be able to do. Can I add to what Paul was saying in terms of the components about what Doncaster has done to improve the workforce of social workers? Those components are what Cornwall has done, what Essex has done and what other authorities have done if we are looking at social workers. But if we are looking at the wider care and protection of children, we do need to look at the other agencies, other professions.

We have heard this morning about the Munro review of child protection. It is very much about a systemic approach and the systems that work with children. If we take a more recent burning issue of child sexual exploitation, there is no way that child sexual exploitation can be tackled—if that is the right word—just by social workers. You absolutely need to have police and health in there, and education; children are going to school and they are seen every day. If we are looking genuinely at the welfare and wellbeing of children we have to look across the board, but there is a confusion there if we are talking about social work reform and then what other agencies should do. That is perhaps some of the lack of clarity in the language in the reforms that was referred to earlier.

Dr Royston: Just to address the kind of wider issue of reform of children's social care, the effect of multiagency working is obviously absolutely crucial and a particularly important example of that is local safeguarding children boards of course. The Children's Society is represented on around 15 local safeguarding children boards across the country. One of the things in particular that needs to be addressed is the resourcing of multiagency working. We very much hope that Alan Wood's review of local safeguarding children boards will address this in some detail. Last year, The Children's Society produced a short analysis of funding for local safeguarding children boards and what was notable was that,

while funding varied depending on the number of children within a local area, there was no indication, no significance about the number of children in need or the level of deprivation within a local area to be linked to the amount of funding for local safeguarding children boards. At the same time, funding levels were vastly different between areas, from one area that was about 81 pence per child up to another that was £6.95 per child. There needs to be a close look at the funding of local safeguarding children boards and what we can do to address that.

Chair: That is a good answer to your second question already so move on to third.

Q41 Marion Fellows: Yes, I was. Peter, this is really for you. The NSPCC is involved in work to improve the quality of serious case reviews. What do you think can be done to make sure that local authorities learn from failures from poor agency co-operation?

Peter Watt: Can I answer that and then a very quick answer to the first question as well?

Marion Fellows: Yes.

Peter Watt: In terms of serious case reviews, the NSPCC has done two things. We have set up something called the serious case review repository with the Association of LSCB Chairs. Essentially, we pulled together into one place for the first time all of the serious case reviews around the country, so you can come to us and they are all there. The second thing is we then produced thematic reports that are usable in supervisory meetings between social workers and so on about themes that emerge, so if there is a neglect theme that has emerged over the previous six months, we produce a bite-sized piece of learning. At a very practical level, when we talk a lot about learning from serious case reviews, it tends to be quite highfalutin, big, and feels very overwhelming. What we are trying to do with the Association of LSCB Chairs is produce bite-sized pieces of learning that can go straight into one-to-one supervisory meetings between social workers and learning is embedded in that way.

Do you mind if I answer about multiagency working as well and agree with something that Marion said? Fundamentally, social workers do not operate in a vacuum. They can only be good social workers if they are operating in a multiagency environment. At the NSPCC, we employ 450 social workers, some in our helpline, some in child line, some in our service centres around the country. Fundamentally, they could not operate unless they are able to work with the education sector, the local authority, the Department of Health and hospitals in the local area. Therefore, when we talk about the reform of social work, it is important we do not just think about statutory social work, we also think about social workers operating in a range of settings because their requirement to work in a multiagency way is the same wherever they are working.

Q42 Marion Fellows: Yes, thank you for that. On training of social workers, how do you think you can include more focus on the importance of multiagency work? I take on board what you have just said, Peter, but I am sure that is not maybe the same right across the country.

Marion Russell: That goes back to something that was said earlier on this morning about the wider training of social workers. I have worked in child and families for 30 years and most of my work has been with adults because what happens to parents affects children.

You have to be able to work with children and that is a very important part, but when you are effecting change that is with the adults. You need to understand what happens with adults and what the issues are for adults, and that takes a whole family perspective and a holistic perspective with all the other agencies as well. You need to be able to work with mental health social workers, to understand the Mental Capacity Act, to know about all the various aspects around about that, and that goes all the way through. I would very worried about narrowing down the education and training of social workers and would be advocating, and Cornwall would be advocating, for keeping it wider and more generic, so you can incorporate all of that in your understanding.

Q43 Chair: Does anyone have anything to add that, something new?

Dr Royston: I just had a comment particularly on training. For social work training, there needs to be better information about appropriate signposting and referrals and how to signpost and refer better. I used to work as a welfare rights adviser some time ago, and this is one area where social work professionals, from the experiences that I had, not only sometimes did not know a great deal about how to advise families on their entitlements and the financial support they could receive but also—perhaps in some ways more worryingly—did not always know what they did not know. Addressing when appropriately to signpost is crucial.

Chair: Thank you very much, Sam. We are going to observe a minute's silence at 11 o'clock. The whole House is doing this to mark the tragedy yesterday in Brussels, so if we can all stand for a minute in silence that would be good.

One minute's silence was observed.

Q44 Catherine McKinnell: I asked this of a previous witnesses; we have discussed this with them, so it would be interesting to hear your views. The Government cite evidence that shows apparently that there is no correlation between spending and effectiveness of children's services. Could you comment on that, whether you agree with that or whether you have any evidence to the contrary, any of you?

Marion Russell: I do believe that there is a correlation. I absolutely take what previous witnesses pointed out, where you can spend and still have bad services, but if we are talking about increased caseloads and lower numbers of social workers, we are talking about a retention crisis and social workers in any agency working with more families. If you have more work to do and less of you to do it, there is going to be a difference in the quality of the work that you do.

But another aspect that I do think is really important is workforce development. We have had evidence before that the initial training and particularly the CPD—the continued professional development—of social workers is important to make a confident and skilled workforce. But if you are an authority with a limited amount of money and a number of services to give to families then it is not unusual for that workforce development budget, the money that would be spent on the training and the continuous training and expertise of social workers, to go. My experience as chair of the network, talking to principal children and family social workers across the country, has been that while we know what we need to do, if it comes to a service here or workforce development there, that is the money that

is going to go and, therefore, you do not have the investment in the staff and improvement that you want.

Q45 Catherine McKinnell: Anyone else? Peter, you were nodding.

Peter Watt: I would agree with that. We have acknowledged that there is no direct correlation between spending loads of money and getting fantastic outcomes for children.

Ian Mearns: I am a Newcastle United supporter. I know exactly what bad investment is about there.

Peter Watt: You would be very familiar with that then. That said, also at the moment the context in which social workers are operating—as Ray referred to in the previous session—with early intervention in particular under pressure, that is creating pressure within the system because early intervention is not happening and, therefore, crises are happening and social workers are becoming busier. When you look at the overall reform, the set of reforms the Government are proposing, if you look at things like the What Works Centre and all those things, they have to be welcome because the answer has to be best evidence-based practice and those sorts of things. It is not just money; it has to be having interventions that are both efficient and impactful and proved to be impactful. I think that is all to be welcomed.

The appeal from the NSPCC to the Government on this would be that as well as having a What Works Centre about individual interventions, there is a need almost for a What Works for the overall reform agenda. When you put the total reform agenda together, how will they know, how will we know that the totality of those reforms has created a more efficient, beneficial impact to children and families around the country? How will we know that? I think that is a key question that the Government have not addressed that I think will go some way to answering the question of how do we create more for less going forward.

Paul Moffat: I think one has to be careful about making the correlation, because there are some authorities that have had significant investment with very few signs of improvement. But it is an old adage, isn't it? You get what you pay for and if you want quality frontline services, you want quality preventative services, you reduce demand on your high-cost social care services, you have to invest in that. I am nervous about those authorities that achieve well, perform well and then subsequently there is a financial hit to those, because in the long term I think that impacts on children and families. I am a bit nervous about saying there is not a correlation, but equally I am nervous about saying there is clearly a distinct correlation always.

Q46 Catherine McKinnell: We have already touched on early intervention with the previous panel. There is a significant body of evidence that shows that it does bring about savings, but in the longer term, and I think at the moment, most local authorities and children's services are facing quite short-term budget challenges, let's say. Would you like to comment on what is your experience of the ability of children's services to invest in early intervention to take a longer-term approach? If that is not happening, what would be your suggestions for how that could be better enabled?

Dr Royston: The Children's Society released a report a few weeks ago on this issue, along with Action for Children and National Children's Bureau. We raised concerns there that identifiable funding for local authorities for early intervention services has fallen from the equivalent of £3.2 billion a year in 2010—based on the figures provided in the last local government finance settlement—to less than £1 billion by 2020. We, in combination, are extremely concerned about the impact that that has on the ability of local authorities to intervene early and to spend on those services, which we know do prevent the need for more intensive statutory interventions at a later stage in the development of problems.

When we surveyed councillors about their views of what was going to happen to early intervention services in coming years, similarly the majority said that even with the business rate retention changes, spending on early intervention services was likely to fall in coming years. I think that that is a real worry and is likely to put more pressure on statutory services that have to pick up the pieces when early interventions do not happen and problems develop to become something more serious.

Q47 Catherine McKinnell: For clarification, have you produced that report on a geographical basis or are they all national figures and have you drawn any correlation? I am aware that certain parts of the country are suffering greater reductions in the grant and also rely more heavily on the grant. Is there an ability to get an evidence base from that perspective?

Dr Royston: Based on the figures that DCLG produced, we did produce the local authority funding reductions, so some information about how much individual local authorities were spending. I am afraid we have not looked at correlations between, for example, the deprivation of local areas and the reduction in funding available, but that could be something that we could have a look at.

Peter Watt: Could I make one point? When we talk about early intervention, there is a danger again. There is a box marked “early intervention” with a price against it. That is what we focus on and, of course, that is important, for the reasons we have said. There are other forms of early intervention that in a sense go unnoticed, but I go back to the stat that for every one child, the statutory agency has eight arms. Clearly, there is some support going into those eight in that sense, and I think if we are looking at a broader set of reforms around how do we keep children and families safer, we need to not forget that.

As an example, we run something called the Child Protection in Sport Unit, and it was a Newcastle story with a Saturday morning football club. They were trained by the CPSU to have safeguarding as part of their core competencies. There was a young lad who came along, was due to be kicked off the team for forgetting his football boots three weeks running—which is not unreasonable if you are playing for a football team—but because of the training they had received, the safeguarding officer in the club said, “We asked him the fundamental questions here and it turned out there was something going on at home,” and there was intervention went in. That is early intervention. It goes unseen in terms of the box marks with early intervention we tend to talk about, but I think if we are genuinely going to make a difference for more children and families going forward, we cannot ignore that. That has to be seen as part of a general set of reforms that include statutory social work, voluntary social work and the wider community.

Q48 Ian Mearns: Peter, NSPCC has expressed concerns about the narrow focus of the reform programme on statutory child protection and the worry that it will fail to drive improvements in the wider system that works alongside and supports local authorities in fulfilling their duties. Are you concerned that the reforms will prevent social workers moving between local government and the private and voluntary sector?

Peter Watt: Yes, we have some concerns. I think the first thing to say is that we are broadly supportive of the reforms. As I have said, we are broadly supportive of things like the introduction of the accreditation system, although there are caveats and questions to be asked, as we all know. But at the moment, the way that the statements of knowledge are phrased, they are absolutely phrased in such a way that if they are interpreted literally, there is a real danger that if you are a social worker in the statutory sector, you will think twice about going to work in the voluntary sector because it is going to be difficult to go back again. Likewise, if you are already in the voluntary sector, you are going to be looking to get back into the statutory sector, because otherwise you are not going to be able to progress through the system. I think that is a terrible mistake. It appears to fly slightly, to say the least, in the face of some of the things that the Prime Minister talked about before Christmas in terms of a broader set of providers within the sector.

We talked about multiagency working. I think multiagency working is something that can happen within the social work profession as well as between the social work profession and other agencies. I do not think it is a complicated thing to solve. We are very pleased that KPMG and the DfE have six weeks ago, I think it was, agreed that we can take part, with a number of other charities, in a pilot around those statements of knowledge. That is really helpful and to be hugely welcomed. The bottom line is we do want a dynamic social work profession where people can move between the voluntary and the statutory sector. It is the way that we will keep skills, knowledge and ultimately retention levels up as well.

Q49 Ian Mearns: It sounds to me like you have drawn some fairly reasonable conclusions from what you are finding out there, but do you have any sort of evidence that helps back that up that we could see, for instance?

Peter Watt: I am sure we have, not in front of me, but I can take that away and we can supply that to the Committee.

Ian Mearns: If you could share that with us, that would be very useful. Thank you.

Peter Watt: Very happy to.

Q50 Ian Mearns: To other members of the panel, do you share the concerns that the NSPCC has?

Marion Russell: Linking back to some of the evidence given earlier today, I think it is the bit about social work is one profession, and it is also that divide between adults and children's social work. I am responsible for our trainee and ASYE and NQSW programmes and so on. People come into social work for vocational reasons; you do not do it for the money. You come into it for vocational reasons because you want to contribute to society. You might start as a children's social worker but find out that mental health is where you want to work. I started in addictions and moved to children and families. You need to be able to do that. You need to be able to move into the voluntary sector and you do need to be able to move back.

The retention of social workers in practice being eight years, if we are absolutely restricting and narrowing it down and narrowing what people can do, then I can only see that having an unintended consequence of making that less rather than longer. I think everybody has been clear that retention of social workers is a major issue, not recruitment. I would agree with Barbara giving evidence earlier that we can get NQSWs, and most NQSWs I come across are absolutely fantastic. It is keeping them in the job when they are experienced and able to do it later and that flexibility needs to be there.

Q51 Ian Mearns: Because of the firefighting nature of what is happening around the country, in many respects there are great pressures within the sector. Do you think there is enough time to be doing enough CPD for social workers?

Marion Russell: Is there time within what they are doing?

Ian Mearns: Yes.

Marion Russell: Yes, I think you can. We do that in Cornwall. We have a career and qualification pathway in Cornwall, but one of the things that we have done with that is we have a structure where people can advance in their career. They can get to higher levels but still stay in practice, so if you are good at what you do, you do not then go and be the manager and tell other people what to do. You still do it, but you get credited from it. People that have the confidence and ability work at a higher rate, work at a better rate and, magically, in the extra hours they do in that week, manage to put learning into it and they do that. But that is what you get when you have a trusted, respected, confident workforce, not one that is running around worrying about failing.

Paul Moffat: I would agree with that. There is a missed opportunity if we do not look at how we retain staff, but also there is a lot of expertise out there that has moved out of the profession because it is no longer what they want to do and it is not the job that they went into. It is so far away from their core principles and values of why they wanted to go into social work. I think we need to try to think about how we attract people back into the profession.

The second point I would make about the social work reforms is that assessment and accreditation is a good idea. We all want to raise the standards, but we have to do it in a way that does not scare the horses. We have just been part of the pilot that 30 staff went through and, because we have done a huge amount of investment in practice learning, they were less scared, but there were staff who have been around for some time who were worried about failure and what would happen and the consequences of that. I think a little bit more care could have been taken with regard to that.

Q52 Chair: One of the themes running through the White Paper is, of course, the attraction of innovation and how to bring about innovation, and it is suggested that we have a What Works Centre. What I would like to know is what you think that should look like and what it ought to be bringing to the table. Sam, would you like to go first, just briefly, of course?

Dr Royston: I think that there is not enough focus on the evidence base for different kinds of intervention. Drawing on some of the things that have been said previously, I think that the focus of that needs to be wider than statutory services; it needs to look at the

effectiveness of associated services like early intervention services in delivering change for children. One thing I think that there does need to be in driving this forward is the involvement of the voluntary sector and learning from practice within the voluntary sector as well as within statutory services.

Chair: Does anyone else have anything to add to that?

Paul Moffat: We have four innovation projects going at the moment and it is helping us reshape the way in which we provide frontline services. The time that it has created for staff to think about providing services in a different way has been a huge benefit and built confidence and resilience with those workers.

Q53 Chair: Among many, I suppose, but certainly Bristol University has suggested that this centre should be operating within an academic environment with expertise and so forth. Is that something you would concur with, Marion?

Marion Russell: We are absolutely agreed that we need to have research and evidence, so we need to know what works and we need to have evidence that it works. Certainly, universities are set up in a better place to do research and to provide that kind of evidence, but it has to be in the real world, so it has to be in partnership with local authorities and voluntary agencies. I completely agree that no one person can do it; this has to be complete partnership working.

I have a couple of reservations. First of all, innovations need to be sustainable. We cannot keep doing short-termism and just doing something else that works for a short period of time and then that gets binned and then something else starts. So with whatever innovations, we do need to have built-in sustainability and they need to do that systemic cultural change. They are not an add-on that happens over there, “That one did not work. We will do something else.” It is innovation with sort of roots and sustainability built into it as well.

I have another thing that I would say about innovation. It is very difficult in Cornwall to get involved in many of these things because of geography and you have to bear in mind that it is not available. We cannot get involved in Step Up because the nearest university is four hours away. You have to bear in mind that there are hard-to-reach places and places that have difficulty. The last bit that I would say about innovation is absolutely have innovation, but the money for that innovation to come to the authority or the agency to work with the families and not have partners that money goes to—the money that could be used with families.

Peter Watt: Two very quick points. I think universities would clearly need to be involved. The NSPCC has 22 innovative services we are testing and have been for the last five years. Some of those are absolutely directly with the university and they are running randomised control trials; others are slightly looser. I think university involvement is critical, but I do not think it should be rooted in a university. I would agree with Marion that the key is it has to be rooted in what works in a local area, and that means it has to be rooted in frontline practice and communities.

The very last point is a money one. Innovation costs, so I think it is right to say that with innovation and what works, you can in the long term make savings. However, running a

randomised control trial about a particular intervention—does it work or does it not?—is not a cheap thing in itself to do, so there is a cost to a What Works Centre and a cost to innovation and understanding what does work.

Q54 Chair: Somewhere in the proposals, there is this theme that innovations should prove themselves within, say, 12 months or so. Do you think that is long enough and does it not contradict the overall theme about innovation, which is a sort of continuous process?

Dr Royston: I think 12 months is very short. Building on what Marion said about feedback from social workers, for our evidence for this inquiry we did a survey of practitioners who were social work trained and the theme that came back again and again and again was, “There is too much change.” I think that innovation is important; it is crucial in an awful lot of cases, but it needs time to bed in and be understood locally and it cannot be a continuous process of change, because that is one of the drivers of problems with retention of social work staff, among everything else.

Chair: Paul, do you have any thoughts?

Paul Moffat: The only comment I would make is that, even in the short period of time we have had this funding, it has highlighted some significant issues that we brought back to the area teams to use. An example of that is the Pause project, where we have repeat proceedings taken against mums in particular where there has been more than one child removed from their care. Some of the lessons we have learnt in the short period of time, eight months, about how we approach care proceedings, how we approach working with mums, has highlighted our practice needs to shift. So even in a short period of time, it can benefit, but I fully agree 12 months is not long enough to see significant transformation.

Marion Russell: Can I just add to Paul talking about the Pause project? That is an example where we do, as a sector, learn from each other. We have learned about the Pause project in Doncaster, Southwark, Hackney and so we know about that; we know that that is a good way of practice and we are looking at how we can bring that. Certainly, we are looking at how we can bring it in Cornwall, but I know other authorities are looking at how they can bring that, too. The bit about learning from innovation and sharing knowledge and ideas isn’t new—it is what we do—but, as Peter says, that needs funding.

Q55 Chair: Last but not least, it has been mentioned that charities might be sponsors of trusts. We have gone through that discussion already in the context of Ian’s reference to academies and so on as a like model, but have either the NSPCC or your organisation, Sam, been approached or have you had any discussions about such a model?

Peter Watt: We have not been approached formally and asked, “Would you take it on?” but we have certainly been involved in discussions about what greater role we and other charities could play and our response, as I said earlier on, is we already play a role and we are happy to play a bigger role. Our key role, as Sam was saying for his organisation, is about independence, challenge and innovation. We have the space, using the charitable funds that we have, to invest in what does work in intervention. Trying to judge what is neglectful abuse and what is not is quite a difficult judgment to make for a social worker. We have a service called the Graded Care Profile that we have been running in conjunction with the university. When we produce those results, we will be able to say to the sector, “This is what works.” That is for the sector as a whole.

We would be very happy to work with numbers of local authorities on a more intensive basis, as indeed we are, for instance, in Blackpool, which is a very good example where we are working intensively, not just with the local authority, in fact, but with all the partners in an area trying to create some early intervention impacts. We would be very happy to have more relationships like that, but that is short of saying we would step in wholesale.

Dr Royston: Only to reflect what Peter said, we have started to have discussions about what the Government thoughts on sponsorship of social care trusts are. At the start of this week, we attended a round table, organised by the Secretary of State for Education, about sponsorship of social care trusts. We will be very interested to see where those conversations lead.

Q56 Chair: Does anybody have any final comments they would like to make to us that we have overlooked? Do we have everything right, Paul, because you made a correction straight off?

Paul Moffat: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for that opportunity at the beginning.

Chair: But you have had your opportunity and you did make it clear. I would like to thank all four of you for coming along today. It has been a very interesting session. I know our members are a bit diminished, but we had some timing issues earlier. We found it very useful, so thank you very much indeed.