



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The EU Sub-Committee on Home Affairs

Inquiry on

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN THE EU

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Questions 47 - 68

WEDNESDAY 13 APRIL 2016

10.30 am

Witnesses: Councillor Paul Watkins, Dr Paul Chadwick and Andrew Ireland

Inspector Roger Bull and Mr Kenny Dron

Members present

Baroness Prashar (Chairman)
 Lord Condon
 Lord Cormack
 Lord Faulkner of Worcester
 Lord Jay of Ewelme
 Baroness Massey of Darwen
 Lord Morris of Handsworth
 Baroness Pinnock
 Lord Soley
 Lord Wasserman

Examination of Witnesses

Councillor Paul Watkins, Dover District Council and LGA's Asylum, Refugee and Migration Group, **Dr Paul Chadwick**, Head of Looked After Children and Resources, Croydon Borough Council, and **Andrew Ireland**, Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, Kent County Council

Q47 The Chairman: Good morning. May I welcome all of you to this Select Committee and thank you warmly for your time this morning? This is a public session, and it will be webcast. You will be sent a transcript of it in a couple of days' time, and if you wish to change anything or send us any additional information, please feel free to do so. It would be helpful if you could start by introducing yourselves and saying a bit about what you do.

Mr Andrew Ireland: Good morning, everybody. My name is Andrew Ireland. I am the corporate director for social care, health and well-being at Kent County Council, which means, among other things, that I am the statutory director of children's services for the council. I have been in that position for four years. I must apologise for my voice this morning; it is a bit fragile.

Dr Paul Chadwick: Apologies, too. I am also suffering. It must be a social care thing. I hope we are not too infectious.

Good morning. Nice to meet you. My name is Paul Chadwick. I am the head of looked-after children for Croydon council, which means in effect that I have a far more operational role than a strategic role, which I hope will be of use in the discussions today. Croydon has a unique profile, because we care for 850 looked-after children, the largest population of looked-after children in London, but the majority of our children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Councillor Paul Watkins: I am Paul Watkins. I am the leader of Dover District Council. I am also the chairman of the south-east strategic partnership, and I sit on the LGA asylum and migration task force.

Q48 The Chairman: Thank you very much. Perhaps we can start with a fairly basic question. What is the role of local authorities in addressing the needs of unaccompanied minors in the UK?

Mr Andrew Ireland: The first and most important point is to recognise that an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child who comes to the local authority becomes a looked-after child, so they are in the care system. Our statutory responsibilities are in effect the same as for any other child in care, including our duty to place them in appropriate accommodation, to supervise those placements, to review and to plan while acting in the child's or young person's best interests. There are of course additional overlays in respect of an individual's claim for asylum and how that legal process works alongside it, and of course we will attempt to make inquiries and follow up leads as to whether the child or young person has any family connections in the country with whom they would be better placed. Formally, if that is established and they are linked in with their family member, they cease to be an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person and become accompanied.

The Chairman: Do you wish to add anything?

Dr Paul Chadwick: I would add nothing to that other than that, in line with the EU directive, the principle of treating the young person as a child, first and foremost, is, as Andrew said, underpinned by our responsibilities under the Children Act. So it dovetails nicely in practice.

The Chairman: Do you feel that you are sufficiently supported to fulfil your role and to guarantee the basic needs of unaccompanied children?

Dr Paul Chadwick: The provisions in the Act allow us to provide for an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in exactly the same way as for a child who is indigenous to the UK. No distinction is made either in law or in practice. Our practice is very consistent, particularly among the gateway authorities of Kent, Hillingdon and Croydon, in that we come to this very much on the basis of the principle that we are dealing with a young person, and we apply the Act in full. I think that is a very clear approach.

The resources element has been debated elsewhere, and I know that Andrew has taken part in that debate elsewhere, as to whether we have adequate resourcing to implement that provision, particularly those of us who are faced with a very great proportion of the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK. There is disagreement as to whether the resourcing, particularly the funding, is adequate to do that, but I defer to Andrew on that.

Councillor Paul Watkins: It is also fair to say that this is not new for local authorities; we have been doing this now for a number of years. What is new is the numbers of asylum-seeking children that are coming forward and the pressures that are being placed on local authorities, which have to cope with those pressures. Even at the ports of entry, the reception areas are having to be dealt with differently and upgraded, and the workings with the partnership agencies are particularly relevant to these things.

Mr Andrew Ireland: The numbers issue is very pertinent. Looking simply at the financial support that we receive from central government per child, I agree that it is by and large sufficient to provide for the care of a child under 18. The position is different for young people over 18 for whom we have responsibilities under the care-leaving legislation. I will come back to that point in a moment.

The issue for the gateway authorities in particular becomes one of sufficiency, because it is the receiving authority's responsibility. My own authority, which has the Port of Dover, the Channel Tunnel and one or two other potential points of arrival, has seen a net increase of over 500 under-18s in the last year. That places enormous pressure on our ability to provide suitable accommodation and placements for those young people, certainly to provide them locally within the bounds of the county, and we have not been able to do that. We have fulfilled our statutory duty and have taken all those young people into care, and we have negotiated with a few authorities for them to take responsibility for some of them. Despite that, we have a net increase of 500, so we are having to place young people, and sometimes very young children, in placements that are suitable but outside the boundaries of the County of Kent. That creates significant problems and impacts on our ability to monitor and supervise those placements effectively, and it potentially creates issues in the authorities where we are placing them, which have been in London in particular for obvious reasons of geography and because of the first point that I made.

The past 12 months have been extremely difficult, and Kent County Council has campaigned for a national dispersal system because this is a national problem, not a problem that should disproportionately impact on a few local authorities.

The Chairman: Is this under consideration, or just something that you are recommending?

Mr Andrew Ireland: My understanding is that it is under active consideration, and there is some provision in the Immigration Bill for this, but it is not in place as we speak, and my concern, going into April with 830 unaccompanied 18 year-olds under my responsibility, is that we are at the beginning of the season when the number of arrivals traditionally starts to increase. This time last year when we were in this position, Kent had about 350, which was a

significant increase on the year before. As I say, we now have 830, and if we see a significant increase in arrivals without a national scheme in place, it will place a huge burden on one particular local authority, albeit one of the largest local authorities.

Councillor Paul Watkins: Can I just add to the geographical picture? There is a change in this. The east of England is now starting to suffer some of the same problems because of the ports on the eastern side. There appears to be a switch from the Calais area to Dunkirk and Zeebrugge, and the east of England has seen a 50% increase in the number of children on its patch in the past nine months. There are perceptible numbers appearing through Harwich and other areas.

The Chairman: And this is something that the Local Government Association is monitoring?

Councillor Paul Watkins: Indeed, through its regional migration networks and partnerships.

Mr Andrew Ireland: Of course, if young people are in lorries coming through the port or the tunnel and they are not detected at that point, it is the authority where they finally make themselves known—somewhere just off the M1 or wherever—that picks up that responsibility. In my discussions with other local authorities about their ability to provide support and assistance to Kent, which some have, the picture I am picking up is that everybody is seeing an increase, particularly, as Mr Watkins said, on the eastern side of the country.

Q49 Lord Cormack: You talk about other local authorities. Are you satisfied with the degree of co-operation and co-ordination between local authorities? Is there the same sort of united spirit that one saw, for instance, at the time of the floods in the north of England, where it was very impressive how local authorities co-operated together even though the problem might not have been on their specific doorsteps? Are you happy?

Mr Andrew Ireland: No, to be honest. I wrote under Section 28 of the Children Act back in July asking for assistance. We received some assistance from a small number of local authorities—including Dr Chadwick's local authority, I hasten to add—but a concerted national response is lacking. I think that is why there is now a view that a national scheme of some sort is required, and we are waiting anxiously for that to be implemented.

Lord Cormack: One that is specifically designated to ensure that this happens?

Mr Andrew Ireland: We have had extensive discussions with the Minister. I think he is very supportive of that position.

Councillor Paul Watkins: That is probably quite relevant. Certainly the Immigration Minister is aware of this issue, and it appears that the message is, "Do it voluntarily or we will help you".

Dr Paul Chadwick: There is a difference between the experiences of London and Kent that is worth raising. For some years now, Croydon has operated what is called a pan-London rota, whereby the other boroughs of London voluntarily take unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged over 16 from Croydon. In effect, we use the voluntary mechanism that has been agreed by all London boroughs to move children across London, which alleviates the pressures on Croydon, although not significantly because in fact around 70% or more of young people who claim asylum do so at an age below 16. The referral mechanism does not impact a very large number of our 450-plus unaccompanied asylum seekers, but it does mean that children aged 16 are moving around London on a voluntary basis. It points very much to the kind of agreement that can be achieved by local authorities working together.

Councillor Paul Watkins: I would just make the point that this is relevant not just to asylum-seeking children but to the whole of the asylum situation. The Home Office is canvassing local authorities asking them if they will take asylum families into their areas when they have not previously done so. There are hot spots around the country where local authorities have voluntarily undertaken to do so, and the pressures are now so great that it needs to be spread even more. The issue that Lord Cormack raised as to whether it will be voluntary could apply to the general asylum situation. There are three or four different systems that are confusing local authorities over this. You have general asylum, unaccompanied children, and the Syrian situation, which they are being asked to pick up on, and there could be a fourth system whereby there could be 3,000 unaccompanied minors coming into the system as well. We are not sure whether that is a different system. So local authorities have some confusion about what they are being asked to take.

The Chairman: There are different categories.

Councillor Paul Watkins: Indeed, and different rates of remuneration.

Q50 The Chairman: Can I pursue another issue? Obviously the pressure of numbers is there, but that must have an impact on care, schooling, medical care, access to legal procedures and all that. There is a knock-on effect on all those issues. What about tracing the unaccompanied minors' relatives, and reunification procedures?

Mr Andrew Ireland: You are absolutely right: the impact goes beyond the simple provision of care, as it does when local authorities place their own children in care in another authority's area. It has an impact on schooling and particularly on the more specialist health services for children. Again, volume and numbers have a massive impact. Our experience is that because the dominant age group coming through up to now has been 16 and 17 year-old young men, and being able to access college places and English as a second language education has been

difficult, there have been issues and concerns about the ability of these young men to be gainfully occupied during the day, given that there are restrictions on them as asylum seekers. That presents one of the challenges to their overall management. Getting younger children into schools is less of an issue, other than in certain hot spots, as Councillor Watkins says. In Kent, those hot spots are the same as for other local authority placements, because we have just shy of 1,400 children from other local authorities around the country who are placed in Kent. We have three very considerable cohorts of children in care. The net impact of all that is significant, and our own placement policies have to reflect the geographical spread of those young people and the impact on some specific schools of the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on their rolls.

The issue of health services is really important. There is work to be done to ensure that initial health screening is available in a timely fashion, given the volume. The cohorts that come through the ports and the tunnel have self-evidently come largely through Calais, and many of them will have been living in very difficult circumstances in Calais for a while. The largest nationality that made up the increase in our cohort was Eritrean. They will have travelled across the Mediterranean and up, and many of them have given horrendous stories of things that happened to them in Libya. Many bears the scars, literally, of their journey.

The whole issue of post-traumatic stress disorder, which will extend into adult health services as well, is something that we are still very much learning about. It is not always evident immediately and may well become more evident later on in their adult lives. We need to be very mindful of that and of the experiences of individuals that have got them into this position. But the cohorts of young people who come through the major gateways are quite different. I am sure that Dr Chadwick's experience is different in many ways.

Dr Paul Chadwick: Just to supplement what Andrew said, the profile in London is different from that of Kent. Over half of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Croydon and the London authorities are Albanian. So the experience is different from that of Kent, and our cohort will be younger. That means, for instance, that we face less difficulty than Kent in placing children in school, because they are a younger group. The difficulties for schools tend to be in age assessments. Additionally, schools are concerned about the possible sexual exploitation of pupils by adults who claim to be children and who are placed in school. That is a very real concern in the light of some of the incidents that have occurred in some foster placements nationally. So there is a different profile, but as a dynamic we work with very similar issues.

On the issues of trauma and health which Andrew alluded to, I could not agree more about the initial health screening being so vital. Also, as a corollary to that, our aim in Croydon is to place every child in foster care on their day of arrival. We believe that a foster carer is best placed to care for a child. Having an adult who immediately assumes care for you and who is able to provide a family environment can mitigate against some of the worst experiences that the young person has endured as part of their process of arrival in the UK.

The Chairman: We need to move on.

Q51 Lord Jay of Ewelme: Thank you very much. You have forcefully answered some of the questions that I was going to ask. To carry on with the funding point for a moment, can you briefly explain the present system of funding between local authorities, and tell us what you see as the likely timetable for changing to a better and more acceptable system, and what resistance there is to that, if any? Is it a question of timing, or are people saying, “No, we don’t want to change, because for some reason or another the present system suits us”?

Mr Andrew Ireland: The basic system is that the local authority receives a standard rate of payment per child and expects that to be sufficient to place and to manage the basic care of that child. In recognition of some of the volume issues, we have received additional support in the significant additional numbers of staff who we have had to take on in order to manage these issues, and in recognition of the fact that our basic model for old or young people is a brief period in a reception centre and then placement. This time last year we had one, and we had to escalate that up to three. Now we have been able to de-escalate that down to two. We have also been able to have constructive conversations with the Home Office on those issues. The greater difficulty is in respect of those over 18 for whom the local authority has responsibility under the care-leaving legislation. It has been more difficult over the years to persuade central government that that is legitimate expenditure and that it requires the same level of support. Without getting too technical—I am at risk of embarrassing myself—there are various different categories of over-18 as regards their eligibility for such services, and if you then overlay where their asylum claim has reached and whether the individual has any leave to remain or is declared “appeal rights exhausted” and should be leaving the country, that gets us into quite difficult territory as to where our responsibility as a childcare agency rests in respect of people who no longer have a right to be in the country but who are still here. There have been issues in respect of the apparently competing demands of the immigration legislation and the childcare legislation in respect of over-18s.

Those discussions have been going on for as long as I have been involved, and probably before. However, we are all seeing an increasing number of young people who are in that

category. Kent has just shy of 500, so it is a very significant issue for us. We have made progress on that over the years, but as we sit here today we do not have the grant position for the current year. It has not been available to us, so we do not know what financial regime we are operating under right now. I hope that will be available in the near future, but literally as we speak we are still waiting.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: Is the resistance to moving to a more sensible system quickly a financial one from central government, a dilatoriness in getting on with it, or is it that other people are saying, “No, we don’t want to move to this system because it benefits us”? What is the block?

Mr Andrew Ireland: The argument that we have had with central government about the principle that this is a national issue that needs a national solution is one. The practicalities of it remain, and the essential principle of whether any such scheme is voluntary or compulsory in some way is probably the greatest sticking point at this juncture.

Councillor Paul Watkins: To conclude, the other issue is that there are differential rates around the country. If you can settle on a standard grant, unless a local authority is compelled to take unaccompanied minors there may be more resistance because the costs of accommodation in certain areas are obviously higher than in others, so that needs to be factored into any solution.

Q52 Lord Soley: I want to ask you about the funding available for training staff and the treatment of youngsters who have been in conflict zones and who have had extreme experiences of violence. It does not have to be just for the health screening bit, but health screening might pick up some of the psychological problems. If it does not, in any event there is a need for training of the people who deal with that child, because, as you have already indicated, if you do not spot that and deal with it, not only is it a big problem for that child but it will be a much bigger problem for society as a whole later on. The short question is: what funding do you have for training staff and treating youngsters who have experienced extreme violence in conflict zones?

Dr Paul Chadwick: Croydon is commissioning a specialist child and adolescent health service for our looked-after children, which will be inclusive of our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In that team, there is clinical expertise in working with post-traumatic stress disorder and experience in the clinical team of working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. I cannot comment on the funding basis for that because it is with our health commissioners, but clearly we can provide that service. If the health commissioners were here in the room, one of the points they would make, which they have made to me frequently, is

that the best way to work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, as with any child who has experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, is to work on many levels, not just on the clinical level. The very first thing that you need is a very stable home environment for that young person. They need love and nurture in their own home environment before the clinicians can achieve any lasting, real-term effect. That is why I have put a great deal of effort into ensuring that our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are in foster placement: so that they have that environment in which the clinicians can then engage.

We also have school-based work with the third sector. We find that many of our young people are more at ease in a non-clinical setting but in a peer group where a clinician is present.

Lord Soley: To pick up one issue, I fully understand that a loving environment et cetera is crucial, but is it not also crucial for the person, be it a foster parent or a social worker, to be able to understand the underlying issues that the young people have dealt with? It is fairly easy for those to be suppressed and not dealt with. That is why I ask about funding for training. I am not sure how a foster parent would deal with that extreme experience other than to give love and care, which might not be enough for dealing with the underlying violence, which then comes out in other ways.

Dr Paul Chadwick: I absolutely agree with you. This comes back to the point that Andrew and Paul made earlier that because we are gateway authorities we have built up a tremendous experience, but that experience is shared nationally. At the same time, the expertise that we have built up—Andrew talked about the need to recruit more social workers to work specifically with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children—has not been fully recognised in the financial resourcing to us from central government. We have these areas of expertise, and we would certainly welcome sharing that expertise with any local authority that requested that from us.

Q53 Baroness Massey of Darwen: I have two questions, one about guidelines and best practice and one specifically for Kent County Council on its written evidence, and I will ask them in order. First, do your local authorities have any guidelines or best practice to inform assistance on unaccompanied minors, particularly with regard to age, gender and cultural perspectives? Also, a bit more specifically, like Lord Soley I am really concerned about mental health issues here. All the things we hear about children's mental health services suggest that they are not fulfilling their potential. What is going on there? Also, like Lord Soley, I am interested about induction training not only on health and education but on what life will be like in a different country. Is there that kind of induction in relation to boys and girls? Also, is there any conflict between potentially staying in this country and an authority

or whoever trying to trace a family? As you know, under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to family life is one of the things that is stressed. Is there any conflict there?

Dr Paul Chadwick: Again, I would say that Croydon's experience will be different from Kent's, but I will answer the question about induction first and return later to the question about mental health issues. Because, as I say, more than 50% of young people making an application for asylum in Croydon are from Albania, there is a migratory history to this pattern, so the young people who are arriving arrive with expectations of life in the UK; they will have shared in Albania their expectations of life here and will normally have a legal representative waiting for them here—an adult who can speak for them—on their arrival. That will be very different from Kent's experience. In the same way, our experience of migration is that it is largely Albanian males. One in 10 of our young people are female, so nine in 10 of them will be male and usually claiming the age of 14 to 15. Again, that experience is different from Kent's.

On the question of induction, I still hold to the point that the very best way of integrating anyone into local society is through a family environment. That is why we heavily promote the use of fostering in Croydon. It calls for a great deal of resource and application in a very difficult market—for want of a better word—which Andrew has already described, in which a number of authorities are trying to gain placements from the independent sector providers. It is an enormous financial commitment on our part and it takes a great deal of work, but we believe that it is the very best way of integrating anyone. Normally when we make a match with foster carers it is on the understanding that that they will have experience, normally with an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and usually with a child from that particular country or region. Because of Croydon's diversity profile, there are usually also local community organisations and support groups which that young person can access. Again, our experience is different. In terms of London's situation, Croydon has a unique experience that will be different from the experience in Kent, where I would say that we are talking about different pressures.

Mr Andrew Ireland: I will add just a little to that. It is quite difficult to generalise. Young people come with different experiences and different expectations. We are constantly surprised by the numbers of young people who arrive in Dover who know the name of the reception centre in Ashford and who expect that that is where they are headed for. A lot goes back into the means by which they got here, who was involved and the expectations that have been built up. For us, again, we receive very few girls; they are probably an even smaller proportion than the proportion that Dr Chadwick has provided. We place all girls in foster

care, and if those young women have been on the same journey and been in the camps in Calais for any length of time, what may have happened to them is cause for some concern. So we are predominantly talking about boys and young men.

For the reason Councillor Watkins set out right at the beginning—that this is not a new issue; it is the numbers that are new—there are foster carers and schools in Kent that have built up quite a significant body of expertise and experience in dealing with them. In a sense, the massive increase in numbers last year meant that, in proportion terms, we could not tap into that to the extent that we would ordinarily have been able to do. That also applies to mental health services. Your point about child and adolescent mental health services and their overall effectiveness and the level of resource for all children is a very good one, and in Kent we are undergoing a major recommissioning of our services, along with the health commissioners, which includes particular services for children in care, and within that as a subset in particular a facility for this group of young people. We just need to be mindful of the fact that, given the age at which they arrive, some of that will not emerge until they are into adult services rather than children's and mental health services.

The issue about expectation is very relevant indeed. Some of the work that we have done and are doing is very much about some of the norms and expectations of the society in which they will be living, moving and being educated and, if they are successful in their claim, working—of them and of all of us—and it is really important to do this work with some of these young people. In some instances—they are in a minority, but the consequences can be significant—their expectations and attitudes in respect of women are a significant issue that we need to do specific work on with some of them to address.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Is anything happening already?

Mr Andrew Ireland: Yes, that work is starting, but we need to make it much more systematic. It needs to be part of a national scheme and one of the issues that any receiving authority needs to be mindful of when it comes to the cohort of young people who may be coming in, particularly in interpreting that in their own local context and some of the issues that exist already in some towns and cities.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Briefly, what about the issue of tracing the families? Does this concern you or the children? How does it balance out?

Mr Andrew Ireland: I would not want to overstate the number of occasions when that can happen. In our cohort it is very much in a minority of instances where there is any suggestion that there might be family members here. That usually comes from the young person themselves or from any documentation they may have with them. Sometimes definitions can

be loose; we are not necessarily talking about a nuclear family in the way we might understand that in the European context. But we have managed to reunite some young people with relatives who are able and happy to take on their care. By and large, that has proved to be a very happy outcome.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: This is a supplementary question for Kent County Council. In your written evidence you talk about distinctions between unaccompanied children who are asylum seekers and those who are economic migrants, as well as between children aged under and over 16. Do you routinely draw distinctions between unaccompanied children? How do you do that, and what are the implications for the care the children receive?

Mr Andrew Ireland: There are none, really, because the governing legislation and principles about their care once they are here are the Children Act, so I come back to the point I made at the very beginning that they are children in care, and the issue becomes much more part of the assessment of their asylum claim and, in a sense, our slight expectation of how successful their claim might ultimately be and therefore the period of time for which we might expect to provide care or support services for them post-18. As a matter of care and our statutory responsibility for them, that is not a relevant distinction at all.

Dr Paul Chadwick: May I follow up on that briefly? I absolutely agree with Andrew, but I also think that in recognising that there is no difference at all in the treatment or quality of care that a young person receives, and by accepting that there may be an economic basis to their arrival in the UK, the possibility of engaging proactively with the countries of origin opens up. With Albania, for instance, recognising, as we do, that there is additionally a financial reason for the young person's arrival in the UK has enabled us to work very actively with the state authorities in Albania to try to put the education, employment and training opportunities in place in Albania that might enable these young people to contribute to their home communities, which, after all, is what they want and which they will inevitably return to at some stage. We are aware of the financial disadvantage between being in effect a looked-after young person in the UK and being a young person in training or even in employment in the country of origin. Recognising that opens up opportunities for us to be creative in our response.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Councillor Paul Watkins: Just to add to that last point, the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration was part of a grouping that undertook to offer training and so on so that those asylum seekers and children could return to their country of origin with a trade.

The Chairman: Lord Faulkner, your question has partly been answered.

Q54 Lord Faulkner of Worcester: It has. Going back briefly to the question of co-operation between local authorities, do you meet on a formal basis, with an agenda, and produce minutes of meetings? Can you point to any particular outcomes as a result of this co-operation?

Councillor Paul Watkins: Nationally there is obviously the migration partnership task group for the LGA. Each of the English regions, and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, meet and exchange information on the national picture. We meet Ministers and Home Office officials regularly to identify different trends, both regionally and nationally. On a regional basis—the old English regions—there are regional migration partnerships. In terms of the political input, I am the only politician in the south-east partnership; the rest are practitioners from different groupings. Some of your next group of witnesses will be part of those partnerships, or their colleagues—health or local authority groupings. Then we have subdivisions of sub-regions where we take the information back and have regular meetings to find out what the intelligence is. There is a whole feeder system that comes into the system right the way through from local to national.

Baroness Pinnock: Briefly on that point, how many upper-tier LAs are positive about accepting unaccompanied minors?

Councillor Paul Watkins: It is mixed.

Baroness Pinnock: How mixed is mixed? Are the majority part of the process of accepting unaccompanied minors, or is it the other way round?

Councillor Paul Watkins: The points of entry tend to be the ones that take the general burden of accepting them. I think Andrew has quite precisely identified where other local authorities are resistant to taking on some of these issues voluntarily. It is not a happy picture from that point of view, and the burden seems to fall on the authorities that are points of entry.

Q55 Lord Morris of Handsworth: I want to explore a little further the EU dimension to your work and all that you have said to us so far. Does current EU law, and indeed policy, have an effect on your working system to support unaccompanied minors in practice, and what future measures to increase effectiveness, if any, would you like to see introduced at the EU level?

Mr Andrew Ireland: When a child comes to us, the responsibility is clearly ours. The Children Act is the governing legislation, and other EU matters and legislation are not central to anything that we might do. Of course, because by definition the young people will not be coming from EU countries, issues about their ultimate return or whatever are not EU issues. For the cohort that comes through Kent, I am often left to wonder about the number of

countries that these young people have passed through—some of them clearly well under the age of 18, some are clearly borderline but many are not—and how not so much the immigration or nationality legislation but straightforward child protection activity in some other countries allows that to happen, so that they arrive in Dover or through the Channel Tunnel, some aged 13 and 14 and some recently as young as six. That is exceptional, I hasten to add. That is my question at times: how many other countries have they passed through to be in that position?

The Chairman: I deduce that you do not think that EU regulations impinge on what you do. You are very much guided by our legislation.

Dr Paul Chadwick: May I add to what Andrew has just said? It also raises the issue of the trafficked children who you have been discussing. In trying to meeting some of the directives, particularly on returning children to their families, there are examples of children who are in care in some EU countries because they have been abandoned by parents who are in transit to the UK and who are then claimed by their parents on arrival in the UK, but there is no documentation whatever to suggest that that is their child. When you are dealing with a very young child, a baby, the ability of the local authority to ascertain the identity of the child is limited. As Andrew mentioned, it raises questions for us about how other EU member countries are fulfilling their child protection obligations when they allow the free movement of these children where there are clearly concerns about their identity, and it is left to the UK authorities to try to resolve those when the child arrives in the UK.

Councillor Paul Watkins: It is quite interesting that you ask that question. One of my colleagues is spending three days in Brussels, starting today, picking up the subject. I think there is a seven-hour conference on this very issue.

Lord Morris of Handsworth: What, if any, documentation accompanies these children?

Dr Paul Chadwick: There is very little. If you are talking about Albanian children, for example, it is quite normal for an Albanian child to arrive with a passport or some form of ID, but a baby who has been at a camp—most of these people literally have only the clothes on their backs, so it is extremely unlikely that they will have any documentation.

Q56 Lord Wasserman: I just want to pick up Dr Chadwick's point about identity. I am very interested in the issue of identity more generally anyway, and biometrics and so on. How do you know that you are not counting the same children three or four times? They are in Croydon. They are also counted in Kent. You are claiming for them in Kent. You are claiming for the same young man in Croydon. Someone else is claiming. How do we know how many there are? What kinds of data-collection arrangements are there? Are there national

collections? Is there any biometric support along with this data collection, or is it all just anecdotal? How do you know what you are talking about?

Dr Paul Chadwick: It is an interesting question, Lord Wasserman. We know the number of physical bodies that we are actually caring for, of course.

Lord Wasserman: You know them when they are standing in front of you.

Dr Paul Chadwick: Yes, we know those young people. Do we know their IDs, their personal identification? The Croydon experience is that for many we do. They have arrived with either a passport or some form of ID. With their own account of themselves on presentation, you know as a social worker or a member of UKBA when you are listening to a compelling and coherent account of their lives back in their countries of origin and the process by which they have arrived in the UK. I think we can establish IDs. That has not been an issue for us so much. The issue when we talk about biometrics might more properly be applied to age assessment and whether there is any agreement on the use of biometrics in age assessment.

Lord Wasserman: Is there any national collection of data on these unaccompanied minors?

Mr Andrew Ireland: That might be a question for your next panel. Young people will have gone through a process at the port of entry and some rudimentary establishment of whether they are likely to be a minor. There will therefore be a national collection of data at that point. Once they come into our system and are brought into our care they are part of the database of all children for whom we have responsibility in the county. They are simply part of our client-management system. I am sure that would be the position for most local authorities, if not all. The national picture is likely to be held at central government level. However, there is movement. Some young people go missing, some return or are found, and some are not. Some may pitch up in other local authorities or other countries. I think there are some examples where they have pitched up again coming back into the country. The tracking is unquestionably difficult, but colleagues from the Home Office may be able to answer your question in more depth.

Lord Wasserman: That is fine for those who come in through the normal gateways, where there will be Home Office officials. You will not know who those are who just pitch up at your door in Ashford in Kent and who have not come that way but have come by some more indirect route, will you?

Mr Andrew Ireland: No. We have a clear arrangement and expectation that they would return to the port and start the process there. For those who appear in authorities simply because that is where the lorry emptied, and where the major processes that exist at the port of entry will not be in place, the data capture position may be a slightly more precarious.

The Chairman: I would like to finish this part of the session by 11.40 am, so I would be very grateful if you could keep your answers brief.

Q57 Lord Soley: Can you tell us the procedure you follow to determine the age of unaccompanied minors?

Dr Paul Chadwick: Very briefly, the initial age on arrival is determined by the UKBA. If, in the view of the UKBA, it is not dealing with a child but an adult, that young person would not be referred to Croydon social services. Age disputes usually arise where the young person is claiming one age—say, 16—and the UKBA believes that they are a 17 year-old or a younger child, which also happens. It is a matter of concern to us that we have younger children pretending to be older children. That is where an age assessment would usually be done. For those who have been assessed by the UKBA as being adults and passed on to the adult services, we may be asked, particularly on representation from the Refugee Council, to reconsider their age, so an age assessment would be done. Age assessments in the UK are largely social work assessments and are based on social care evidence—the presentation of the young person, their maturity levels, their understanding of the world and their country of origin—and basically begin to build the profile of that person to the extent that the professionals involved can say, “This is what we think this young person’s age is”. It is, in essence, a social care assessment, and it is a judgment call by the professionals involved, because we do not use, for example, dental assessments, which might be used with some degree of accuracy. Some UK courts may be very willing to admit dental evidence into judicial proceedings to determine age, but at the moment the age assessment process is largely a social care assessment conducted along those lines.

Lord Soley: Yes. We cannot pursue this much further now, but there is an issue in that we take a very legalistic approach to this which decides what services you get, whereas in the countries they come from it is not terribly relevant. Certainly, it is like the parenting thing—you can do genetic tests, and teeth tests for age, and so on. It is therefore perfectly possible to do it, but in a sense do you not have to be driven by the needs of that child, even if they might not be a child in the full, technical sense? They might be 18 and a half instead of 18.

Dr Paul Chadwick: Absolutely. This goes back to an earlier question about tracing family. The point of departure is always, “What is the young person claiming and what do they want?” A good many young people do not volunteer information about extended family, whether they are in the UK or elsewhere, and will not ask for any tracing. In the same way, a number of young people in age dispute cases will decline to have a dental check or test. It is a complex area, because we obviously try very much to uphold the rights of the young person

concerned and keep our focus on keeping an understanding of that person as a child and their primary presenting needs as a child. At the same time, obviously we try to build an understanding that will enable us to provide the right services for that person. If they are an adult, they need the right services, as they do if they are a child. I accept your point that the age in their country of origin may not have been important, and even the history around that may have been very hazily collected. However, in the UK it is vital to the services you receive that are age appropriate, particularly if we are talking about schools. Therefore it becomes a very important issue for us.

The Chairman: Thank you. If you want to send us any written evidence on this question about things you wish to add, that would be very helpful.

Lord Soley: I would also like to know your views in writing on the technical tests that can be done on age or indeed on paternity.

Q58 Lord Condon: When unaccompanied minors go missing from care, are there formalised procedures and guidance to be followed, do they work, and can and should they be improved?

Mr Andrew Ireland: In Kent, we use the same sets of processes for unaccompanied asylum-seeker children who go missing as we do for all looked-after children who go missing. Obviously, we notify the police, follow up any particular leads, carry out return interviews when young people return, and follow all those key processes. Again, that is based on the fact that they are a child in care, and we would use the same procedures. Clearly, there are occasions where there are particular concerns and anxieties about the risk that some may go missing, and that is very linked to the risk of trafficking. We are particularly mindful in instances where the indicators of risk are that much higher to place them in situations where we can try to mitigate very quickly the risk particularly of their going missing. Some go missing within days or even hours of going through the formal process, and then they are away. We frequently do not see those young people again. Those who get into the system and go missing may be the ones who are more likely to come back, because they go off for much the same reasons that other young people might.

Lord Condon: It has been suggested by some people that there is a graded response to these sorts of children and that the people who get the best response are the kids who are not in care, that those in care get a less responsive response from the authorities, and that unaccompanied minors get the worst response of all in that process. Is that a fair criticism, and should the systems be improved?

Mr Andrew Ireland: I would not say that that is our experience. I can only speak for Kent, and I do not recognise that description at all from our experience.

Councillor Paul Watkins: There is a recognition that the first 48 hours are relevant. I think that local authorities are aware of that, and that is pushed out as part of the national information. As for the dangers of trafficking, there are great concerns over those 48 hours, which certainly gets discussed at the migration partnerships.

Dr Paul Chadwick: There is an excellent mechanism in place, and I share Andrew's and Paul's view that there is certainly no distinction in the way young people who go missing are treated. However, more importantly, the national referral mechanism for trafficked children is excellent. We have around 70 children at the moment in our looked-after population who have been through that referral mechanism and have been identified as trafficked children. Alongside the social care infrastructure, which as you know includes statutory reviews, there are specific reviews of their status as possibly trafficked children. That involves police and partners from the UKBA. Nationally, when a looked-after child goes missing, whether they are an unaccompanied minor or a local child, we follow exactly the same procedures bar one thing: for the unaccompanied child, the Home Office is notified immediately as well as the local police.

Lord Condon: So you have no recommendations for change on that area.

Dr Paul Chadwick: It seems to be effective, from my experience.

Mr Andrew Ireland: I will, if I may, send detailed procedures of this in writing. I think it would be helpful.

The Chairman: As I say, you can send us any other changes that you would like to make.

Mr Andrew Ireland: If Kent police were sitting here, they would clearly say, for all the reasons I have indicated about the numbers of children in care who are resident in the county, that dealing with very high numbers of young people going missing represents a significant drain on their resources.

Lord Cormack: When you reply to that—I do not want an answer now—could you reflect on whether there is a case for using a tagging system for these poor children? We use it in this country for people who are on parole, and so on, and I wondered if you would reflect on that and reply on that point. However, I wanted to ask you a specific question. We talked about the importance of foster parents. Do you think there is a case for a statutory guardianship scheme? Would that assist you in the very important work you seek to do, and would you like us to recommend that when we come to make our recommendations to Parliament and the Government?

Dr Paul Chadwick: Very briefly, from my perspective, the guardianship already exists in the form of special guardianship orders, which a foster carer can, off their own bat, make to the

court after they have cared for the young person for a period of time. The local authority can also make that application. It can be a form of additional security for some young people, but of course it raises issues in the judicial process because of parental rights and views. So personally I have no opinion about the guardianship proposal. I do not know whether Andrew does.

Mr Andrew Ireland: I recognise that this might crop up, and I agree about the status quo. There is a bigger question about the arrival into the country of 16 and 17 year-old young men in particular, who have obviously had to demonstrate huge resourcefulness beyond their years in many cases to have survived the process of getting here, and whether childcare legislation is necessarily the most appropriate response to that. Thinking about that issue, I wondered whether a statutory guardianship system might have a role to play in how we reframe the whole way in which we might respond to young people of that age as they arrive here.

Councillor Paul Watkins: I think that the LGA would like to have some clarity on the roles of social workers and guardians.

The Chairman: On behalf of everybody, thank you very much indeed. I am very glad that your throats have held up, because you have given us very full answers.

Examination of Witnesses

Inspector Roger Bull, Staff Office to Chief Constable Mike Veale as National Policing Lead for Missing Persons, Wiltshire Police, and **Mr Kenny Dron**, National Crime Agency

Q59 The Chairman: Good morning, and apologies for having kept you waiting. We are very grateful for your time. As you heard earlier, the rules of engagement are that this is a public session. It is webcast live and will eventually appear on the parliamentary website. You will be sent a transcript of the evidence, and if there are any corrections you would like to make, you can do so. If you wish to add any supplementary evidence, it would be very gratefully received. Can we begin with you introducing yourselves, please?

Mr Kenny Dron: Good morning. My name is Kenny Dron. I am a senior manager with the National Crime Agency. My current role is head of the UK Liaison Bureau at Europol in The Hague. I hope I can help the Committee to understand how the NCA supports the police through access to information and intelligence systems internationally, and also perhaps how the NCA is leading the Government's task force to tackle organised immigration crime and the gangs that lie behind that.

Inspector Roger Bull: Good morning. My name is Inspector Roger Bull. I am from the Wiltshire police. My current role is staff officer to Chief Constable Mike Veale, who is the national policing lead for missing persons. I am here today to answer the Committee's questions on operational policing. My specialist area is missing persons, particularly missing children.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Perhaps I can start by asking you to describe the circumstances in which you come into contact with unaccompanied minors.

Inspector Roger Bull: We come into contact with unaccompanied minors in much the same way as we come into contact with anyone else. The first situation may be one of enforcement, for example in the case of a minor who is a typical lorry drop, as we would call it, and clandestine entry has been made into the UK. A lorry will stop because the driver hears noises in the back or because the driver has to rest because of tachograph regulations, and the people who have been concealed in the back of the lorry exit the lorry and the police are called in order to take them into detention. Having dealt with people in those circumstances, both out in the field and when they are brought into custody units, it is quite clear that we have a role in trying to reassure them that they are now safe. Very often they will come from countries and cultures where the relationship between the police and members of the public is not what is in the UK. We try to ensure that they feel as safe as they can, albeit within the confines of a police custody unit. Beyond that, we will encounter them in a safeguarding environment where, for example, they have been placed in accommodation and sometimes joint visits are undertaken. In Kent, for example, there is very close working between the local police and social care to undertake joint safeguarding visits to the children in their foster placements, children's homes or supported accommodation. Then there is day-to-day interaction, when police are out on patrol and come across children in the normal course of their duties. Finally, there are further enforcement situations in which they will either be the perpetrators or the victims of crime or be involved in anti-social behaviour. Interesting work is being done in various parts of the country on children involved in crime. Why they are committing crime? Is it because they want to, because they have to, or because they have been made to commit crime? Work is being undertaken to look at the unnecessary criminalisation of children who are in fact victims themselves.

The Chairman: At what stage do you become aware that they are unaccompanied minors?

Inspector Roger Bull: That is very interesting. The lack of ability to communicate effectively may cause officers on patrol to make further inquiries as to the status of the child. Are they already in the social care system or have they just arrived in the country? There are so many

different ways in which we will come into contact with them. Identifying them has to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Q60 Lord Wasserman: That is what I wanted to ask you about, Inspector: the identity of these people. Is there a national register of these people? Do you collect this information, and do we have any biometric applications? You take a kid and he does not speak the language, or he speaks it badly, and you do not know whether he is an unaccompanied minor from some other country or from just down the road. What are the arrangements for data collection on unaccompanied minors? Is there such a national arrangement?

Inspector Roger Bull: In day-to-day policing, we would not seek to capture data on a person's nationality or immigration status. That is perhaps for other agencies. In my own specialist area of missing children—missing migrants generally but specifically children—it is fair to say that there is a lack of data. Again, as the police service, we record what we are required to record. There has been no national requirement to record missing persons' status, whether they are a refugee or an asylum seeker—even their country of origin. We then get into issues of definition. What do we mean by the broad term “migrant”? Are they an EU national or a non-EU national? Are they in this country lawfully or unlawfully? As a consequence, we are very concerned about what is very much an emerging issue.

Mr Veale has sent a request to all police forces to give us data on missing migrants in the UK in the broadest sense, going back over five years. It has to be said that that is quite a labour-intensive job, particularly for larger forces, which have not been collecting this data. When they are dealing with tens of thousands of missing persons cases each year, that is a huge data trawl that we are asking for. We have responses from about 50% of forces at the moment, so I am afraid it is too early to give the Committee definite information, but we recognise that there is a need to collect this data, because that will help the police service to allocate resources; it will enable the National Crime Agency, which is tasked with the analysis of those data; and it will also assist our colleagues in academia to provide us with some meaningful research.

The point that I want to get across to the Committee is that the issue of missing migrant children and missing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is really a microcosm of the issue of missing children generally. The challenges that we face with unaccompanied minors when they go missing are virtually the same as those with children from the UK. We are seeking to create a national register to give us that organisational memory for the police service. Colleagues from Kent spoke earlier about cross-border placements, where children are placed out of their county area. There is the inherent danger that we double-count; if a

child is from area A and goes missing five times, moves to area B and goes missing five times, that will appear on the police systems at the moment as two children and 10 episodes. We need that national database, a national register, to give us that organisational memory, so that when children are placed in different parts of the country that history will automatically go with them.

Lord Wasserman: Right. That specialist sub-group is very interesting.

Q61 Lord Faulkner of Worcester: How well equipped do you think law enforcement officers are—I include customs officers and border guards in that—in dealing with unaccompanied minors? Do you think that they receive adequate training?

Inspector Roger Bull: I cannot speak for UK Visas and Immigration and the UK Border Force. Once again, this is very much an emerging issue for policing, and training in the areas of vulnerability generally is improving. There is the inherent danger of siloing the training, concentrating on something or just delivering training on one particular issue. People will concentrate on that issue and not necessarily see connections with other areas of vulnerability. An example would be concentrating on domestic abuse. The officers may go in and just focus on domestic abuse and miss the child neglect in the household, so the training needs to be delivered with a broader approach. The College of Policing is developing wider vulnerability training, but this topic is also included in such areas as the specialist training for detectives who go into public protection and child protection areas. It is dealt with in training for custody staff, for general patrol duties and for officers who are going into CRD as part of that wider public protection module.

I am afraid that at times there is also an issue of training being delivered in a broad-brush approach. We deliver the same training to all our cops throughout the country. That needs to be rather more targeted. There is limited training time, so do operational control officers in Cumbria—I pick that for no other reason than that it is a long way away from here—need the same level of training on this issue as officers in Kent, Lincolnshire, Suffolk or Norfolk do? The answer is that clearly they do not.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Do you accept, though, that there is, certainly in some forces, what has been described to us as a culture of disbelief when it comes to unaccompanied minors and the assumption that they are offenders and not victims?

Inspector Roger Bull: I really cannot comment on people's attitudes and behaviours, but we certainly expect sufficient awareness to be delivered to their staff to ensure that those cultures do not exist. Anyone in the police service who comes into contact with people who have

risked their life to come to this country cannot help but be affected by the accounts given by those people.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: We have had some alarming written evidence that supports what I have just said.

Q62 Lord Morris of Handsworth: In your view, is there sufficient co-operation between law enforcement authorities and other national bodies and individuals responsible for responding to the needs of unaccompanied minors?

Inspector Roger Bull: It is fair to say that there is always scope for improvement. Again, this is very much an emerging area of focus for the police service. In my world, I liaise closely with the National Crime Agency and its CEOP command, which is responsible for the UK Missing Persons Bureau, which provides expert national advice. We liaise closely with our colleagues in central government; we are working with them at the moment on a refreshed cross-government strategy for missing persons, and we also liaise closely with the voluntary sector—with charities such as Missing People, ECPAT UK, Barnardo's, and so on. So, yes, there is co-operation. Could it be better? Certainly.

Mr Kenny Dron: There is also an increasing understanding in policing of the tools that are available through the National Crime Agency for working overseas and exchanging information, especially with our EU partners. We have seen evidence of that in the National Crime Agency.

Inspector Roger Bull: I can give your Lordships an example. Last year we were approached by UK Visas and Immigration regarding a number of children who were missing from their system. They all happened to be of Somali heritage, and we were able to work with the National Crime Agency, UK Visas and Immigration, and three police forces where they were believed to be. Through a lot of hard work we were able to locate all 20 of them. There were clearly concerns about their safeguarding or the potential for their being involved in criminality. I am happy to report that all the children were safely found both in this country and overseas and that there was no evidence of safeguarding risk or of criminality. So there is interagency co-operation at the moment.

Q63 Lord Condon: Good morning. Can I return to the issue of unaccompanied minors who go missing from care, either for a short period of time or who just disappear off the radar? You will have heard me ask a question to the last group of witnesses, and there was a fairly supportive response from them. A lot of the evidence that we have received, written and from field workers, still suggests that the police service, as regards unaccompanied minors, focuses primarily on the immigration control issues to the detriment of the child protection issues.

You gave us some reassurance that that is not the case, but in order to reassure us about this issue can you be more specific on, for example, the percentage of children who are returned, or anything that would give us more comfort in this area?

Inspector Roger Bull: There is no rich picture of data at the moment, and we clearly need to correct that. On the procedures, or how we go about things, as I mentioned earlier we treat missing migrant children, unaccompanied minors, as a microcosm of wider missing children issues.

Lord Condon: The audit trail may be exactly the same; I am a long time from the police service. The fact that there is the same paper trail, or now an electronic audit trail, in relation to children may be fine, but, as regards the operational response, is a call that an unaccompanied minor has gone missing from such and such a reception centre genuinely treated with the same urgency and importance as a kid who has gone missing on the way home from school or a mum who has reported a child she is worried about?

Inspector Roger Bull: I listened earlier when you spoke of almost a continuum of concern. It is fair to say that HMIC recently carried out an inspection on missing and absent children. One of the concerns that it raised was one of culture, particularly in relation to children who go missing regularly, who tend to be looked-after children, and missing migrant children would be incorporated into that. There can almost be what I suppose you could describe as compassion fatigue when you go looking for the same child over and over again. I might come on to that later. Are there cultural challenges in the police service, such as complacency? Yes, I believe there are. It would be wrong of me to disagree with my colleagues in HMIC in that connection. That attitude is not particularly specific to missing migrant children; it is a culture that surrounds looked-after children because of the frequency with which they go missing.

Lord Condon: What can be done to make the situation better and to give the wider community more confidence in this area? Is it purely data, so that you will be able to say, "This year we recovered or found 75% of missing or unaccompanied minors within three days"? Would a data response give society a better feel of this, or are there other measures that we should recommend that would help this situation?

Inspector Roger Bull: We need to go further back in the process than that. Too often, going missing is seen as the problem in itself. Going missing is not the problem; it is a symptom or an indicator of an underlying problem. We talk about push and pull factors. Push factors are the things that drive children away from their home environment, which can be abuse, neglect, or over-strict parenting. Then, conversely, we talk about pull factors; the things that

drag children away from their home environment. That can be anything, from peer pressure, such as your teenage friends encouraging you to stay out a little bit later—all of us probably pushed the boundaries with curfews that our parents imposed, because that is part of growing up—going into rather more pernicious areas of grooming and the work that traffickers undertake with children. We need to prevent those reasons for children going missing. The police response is a response to something going wrong somewhere else. We need to spend far more time and spread the risk and the response to reports of children and migrant children going missing.

At a recent all-party parliamentary group chaired by Ann Coffey, my boss mentioned that in our control room we have a mental health triage facility. There is a mental health professional on hand in the evenings, and when someone with mental health challenges phones us, we have access to their service and to their professional advice. We do not have that same facility with our colleagues in social care, because a critical part of this whole process is that we need information. We gather information from the person who called us, and we need to have as much information about that missing child as we can.

The subject of biometrics has been touched on. There have been too many cases where we do not even have a photograph, because those who are responsible for that child cannot provide us with a photograph. Looking for a missing child is, at the best of times, rather like looking for a needle in a haystack. At least generally we know what the needle looks like, but too often we do not. There is a reluctance on the part of some of our partners to take basic biometric information and to provide us with it.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: Sorry, what do you mean by partners?

Inspector Roger Bull: Partners particularly in social care. There are improved relations with our partners in border control so that we can get that biometric information from them if that is where we need to get it from. However, the more information we have, the better. I am sorry if I am talking too much, but the subject of cross-border placements was raised earlier. I have a great deal of sympathy for our colleagues in social care, because they have the very difficult task of trying to find safe placements for these very vulnerable children, both their own children and those who come into the country.

We have problems regarding where we place them. I will give you an example. There is one rural county in this country that has about two-thirds of the number of children's homes in the entire Metropolitan Police area, because it is a rural county with large properties that are relatively cheap, whereas properties in London are expensive. We are moving children around the country, and very often these children are moved four or five times a year. They come into

police force areas with huge vulnerabilities or we do not know that they are there, although work is under way to make sure that we do. The information that is given to carers is very often limited. There should be a full care package. Once again, there are challenges. If you have a short-term foster placement, to give all that information to that foster carer is extremely time consuming and it is very difficult for them. So when we get a call from a member of the public or the carer, very often we do not have very much information to call upon, which makes locating them difficult. There are issues around the non-availability of fingerprints and the taking of DNA.

I will mention one other thing, which is the issue of tagging raised by Lord Cormack. Quite apart from the personal liberty issues with tagging, we have the challenge that they are quite easy to remove with a pair of tin snips or something. So those people who will not remove them are probably not the ones we need to be concerned about. The ones we have concerns about, because they are still under the influence of traffickers or whoever, are likely to be the ones who will remove them anyway.

Q64 Baroness Massey of Darwen: Could I push you a bit further on the issue of co-operation to try to prevent disappearances and follow up investigations? It sounds to me as though there are various levels to this. First, at a local level, in local government we have social services, including the child protection agency, the police, the school, and the medical service. Is there an issue there about lack of co-operation and perhaps a lack of joint training or a lack of people who talk to each other at this level? Secondly, what about the cross-border agencies? How is the co-operation between them to prevent these calamities?

Inspector Roger Bull: Interagency working is greatly improving. The development of multi-agency safeguarding across the country for child protection and vulnerability matters is undoubtedly helping. That flow of information between the various organisations is critical and is improving. There is still work to be done. There still needs to be, from a policing perspective, a greater ownership of the risk involved. Again, concentrating on my specialist area of missing persons, sometimes reporting it to the police seems to be the easy option, but it then becomes the police's problem to deal with. There needs to be a joint response and a joint plan in the first place. The likelihood of this child going missing or running away needs to be considered and appropriate placements made. You are always going to have a rub between the child's personal liberty and safeguarding here. There are models elsewhere under which children are placed in what is in effect secure accommodation, particularly those at the highest risk of flight, but there needs to be shared ownership of the safeguarding of that child and multi-agency co-operation to prevent them going missing in the first place. If they have

gone missing, there needs to be joint ownership of the response to that. The police clearly have a safeguarding role for when the children are in placements, because we know that some of the placements are being targeted by some of urban street gangs—gangs who are coming out of the major cities seeking to spread their sphere of influence in drug dealing and using children for exploitation. They are either using looked-after children from their own area or recruiting in local areas. We know where the children’s homes are, and they will know where the children’s homes are. We clearly have a safeguarding role to keep an eye on these places, and the best practice is local officers engaging regularly with locations in order to try to keep those children safe.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Do these multi-agency safeguarding hubs exist all over the country?

Inspector Roger Bull: Not in every part of the country. It is very much a local decision. In some places they will not be called a MASH; they will go under another name. Best practice is that there is some form of multi-agency co-location. It is much easier to share information if you sit next to someone.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Sure. What about the cross-border issue?

Mr Kenny Dron: If we are talking from an international perspective and if inquiries need to be made, the NCA acts in support of local policing in that regard. There are much better links now between policing and the NCA in order to facilitate inquiries overseas. Later questions will deal with those types of inquiries. It is very pleasing to see that in instructions and guidance for police officers—there are now instructions to put missing persons and missing children on to the Schengen information system, for instance—which is really good to see. Likewise, if there are any indications that children may have been trafficked, that they are victims of trafficking, the police know how to call the NCA for its specialism in that regard and are very good at doing that. So that is generally good and improving, and the NCA will certainly prioritise inquiries from the police where children are involved, full stop.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: I have a quote here from Missing Children Europe, which says: “Cross border cooperation between care institutions, law enforcement agencies and networks for missing children seems to be almost non-existent”. Would you challenge that?

Mr Kenny Dron: I wonder whether that is cross-border co-operation between counties in the UK. I was referring to the international perspective. Perhaps this is for Inspector Bull to respond to.

Inspector Roger Bull: That is from the summit report published last year. It was more an observation about Europe.

Baroness Pinnock: Briefly, my understanding is that most local authorities have a safeguarding children board on which it is customary for a member of the local police service to sit. The co-operation that exists there seems to be at odds with the description that you are giving us.

Inspector Roger Bull: Every area in the country will have an LSCB. LSCBs work very much at the strategic level, and we have to ensure that the co-operation is as good and as streamlined at the tactical and operational level. I do not want to paint a picture of no co-operation; there is co-operation throughout the country. But perhaps it always needs to improve.

Q65 Lord Jay of Ewelme: I would like to follow up Baroness Massey's question a little and ask about the degree and the effectiveness of co-operation with other EU member states, particularly on identifying unaccompanied minors, tracing their movements and disrupting the human trafficking of unaccompanied minors. Effective co-operation is a two-way thing; you have to want to do it and they have to be prepared to reciprocate. How far do you feel that in the United Kingdom there is a willingness to co-operate, and to what extent is there a willingness among member states to work closely with us? Does it vary from some countries to others? How would you characterise it?

Mr Kenny Dron: Perhaps I will talk about the ways in which we exchange information from a law-enforcement perspective. There are a number of ways in which the NCA supports law enforcement in exchanging information and intelligence in this context in relation to organised crime groups and to children who are missing. I will mention three specific ways, and perhaps we can explore those as we go along. The first is the Schengen information system, which is sometimes known as SIS II, an EU-wide database that takes people and objects and circulates them as alerts throughout the member states. That appears on a member state's law enforcement system or border system, and then action is taken in that member state as per the alert or instructions. That is now well used in the UK and in the European context. There is a specific alert for missing persons, and a sub-category for missing children. That does not mean unaccompanied minors, though, and the UK has been pressing for improvement in the system of categorisation so that we can see that more clearly rather than just seeing all the missing children who are about Europe at any given time. That is something that the UK has been pressing for, and we hope to get change in that soon.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: Are you seeing a response to that, a willingness to make the sorts of changes that you would like to see, or is it a bit of a one-way street?

Mr Kenny Dron: Under the Dutch presidency, we hope that that change will take place. We have already seen a 20% increase over the last year in the amount of alerts on the Schengen information system to do with missing children, which is probably not coincidental; there has also been the migration crisis in that time. There is good, effective and increasing use of that system and good practice in the UK within local policing system.

The second group I will talk about is Europol. UK policing can make use of the Europol channel. Europol was established to facilitate and enhance investigations and intelligence regarding serious and serious organised crime in member states. The UK already makes very good use of Europol. In fact, it is one of the biggest users of it. Of all the information flows that go to and from Europol, the UK is either the recipient or the sender or is copied into 40% of all those messages. It is a huge user. I manage the UK Liaison Bureau. Some 36,000 messages pass in and out of Europol through that bureau, either for the UK or on behalf of the UK, an increasing number of which are to do with organised immigration crime and with trafficking as two separate entities.

Lord Wasserman: That is 36,000 every—

Mr Kenny Dron: Every year. That was last year. Member states can efficiently and securely exchange intelligence and information between themselves using the secure information channels that Europol provides. However, almost more importantly, we can call on the expertise and the teams in Europol to provide analytical assistance to our investigations, and we do that with other member states. We call on the newly formed European Migrant Smuggling Centre, and in fact the NCA and Immigration Enforcement have seconded officers into that centre. That centre is already providing very good results back to the UK as regards our organised immigration crime cases. That centre and Europol also have a presence in the hot spots as well, and we benefit from their presence there, getting intelligence from those hot spots back to the UK on the organised immigration crime gangs that affect this situation.

We also utilise a specialist team called Phoenix, who are specialists in human trafficking across Europe, and the UK is one of the biggest users of their services. Phoenix have been in the UK on numerous occasions, assisting UK police forces on human trafficking jobs. All this is facilitated by the UK Liaison Bureau at Europol, which is a multi-agency team led by the NCA. The police service of England and Wales, the Metropolitan Police counterterrorism police, Immigration Enforcement, Police Scotland are all represented there and are working as one unit and exchanging information with our European partners. It is a really effective way to exchange information quickly and securely, and we in the UK get a lot of benefits back from that.

The third way is another option for police forces in the UK to get information out and back about trafficking gangs or missing children, and it is through the network of bilateral liaison officers who the NCA has around the world. There are 150 officers placed in areas where we can achieve the greatest impact and effect against organised crime problems. Increasingly, those officers are placed as specialists against organised immigration crime. The UK has set up a task force to deal with this problem. The NCA leads on that and we now have officers established around the Mediterranean and north Africa and more officers in northern Europe, working with police and immigration partners to gather intelligence on the gangs that affect this situation.

I thought I would just outline three of the ways in which UK policing is already effectively using these channels. It is important to say that having a number of different channels might sound complicated, but it is all co-ordinated through the NCA's international department, where there are individuals who will know exactly what channel to use and who will give advice to UK policing on the appropriate channel and how to use it to best effect.

Finally, on the NCA's response to this, the NCA responds to requests to support law enforcement agencies in safeguarding and locating children, and it has done so on a number of occasions—I have some examples of where that has happened. However, the NCA itself does not record any data; we react in response to the police with regard to safeguarding or missing children, and our main emphasis is on tackling the crime gangs that smuggle these individuals.

The Chairman: Could you send us those examples by way of illustration? That would be very helpful.

Mr Kenny Dron: Yes, of course.

Q66 Lord Soley: You have answered a number of questions, so thank you very much. We are focusing on how the European Union can improve its operation as regards understanding the problems of unaccompanied children. To put that into context, I saw some more figures yesterday. Germany reckons that there are 6,000 unaccompanied children there, but that is a serious underestimate and there might be over 10,000. There were similar figures for the rest of Europe. So rather than going through some of the questions that have been asked, and answered by you already, it would be helpful to have a wish list from the National Crime Agency of what changes you would like to see to European Union co-operation with the UK and how we interact with it. I am not necessarily asking you to do that right now—the Chairman may be happy for you to put this in writing to us—but it would be helpful to know where the main choke points are in the co-operation between the UK and the EU on

unaccompanied minors and what you think could be realistically delivered if we said to the EU, “This is what needs to happen to improve the recording of and dealing with unaccompanied minors”. Does that make sense?

Mr Kenny Dron: Yes, it does. The NCA could respond on how improvements could be made to law enforcement responses and dealing with the criminal gangs that prey on these individuals and smuggle them across borders. My experience in Europol is that there has been a fantastic reaction from our policing partners in Europe generally to this. Europol and policing partners that are part of it have stepped up and increased their efforts incredibly, in a way I have never seen before, in intelligence-gathering and exchanging information on the criminal gangs behind the smuggling of these individuals.

The European Migrant Smuggling Centre in Europol has only just set down its roots. We have to see the full benefits of that as it trains staff and get staff established in the hot spots and in The Hague. But we are already seeing benefits in the UK from that increased co-operation and that investment in Europol.

Lord Soley: Some indication of how we could take the next step in improving co-operation within the EU over the borders would be very helpful.

The Chairman: We would be grateful if you could send it to us.

Mr Kenny Dron: I will send that back to the NCA.

Lord Cormack: As I have listened to evidence both today and other days, I have got the distinct impression that for all the excellent work that is clearly being done and the dedication that is obviously there, there is a real danger that the numbers will overwhelm the system. What would you say in response to that?

Mr Kenny Dron: It is hard from a law enforcement point of view to respond to the system, because there are so many different players. As Roger said earlier, local policing responds to something that has happened, but in the case of the national law enforcement agencies we are dealing with the organised crime phenomenon that is taking advantage of this migration—

Lord Cormack: And in a big way.

Mr Kenny Dron: Massively, yes. So we are seeing organised crime groups that were involved in trafficking other commodities now involved in smuggling people.

Lord Cormack: Those that are involved in Northern Ireland, for instance.

Mr Kenny Dron: I do not have any information on that. All I know is that gangs in Europe who appear in files to do with other commodities are now taking advantage of this situation. Organised crime does not care what it does as long as it makes money and has influence over people, and power. This is a fantastic opportunity for organised crime to flourish, and there is

a real challenge in how UK law enforcement agencies and our partners in Europe respond to that. With the establishment of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre and the UK's response in placing a lot more law enforcement officers throughout Europe, and so on, we are making a good start in moving against that, but it is a huge challenge.

Q67 Lord Cormack: Our main concern in this report, of course, are these unaccompanied minors. There are some tragic stories. I raised in the last session, as you probably know, the question of guardianship. As you are well aware, the EU legislation foresees setting up guardianship schemes. Do you believe that this would be of enormous benefit to this country if we had a statutory scheme? There is a scheme in Scotland but not in the rest of the UK, as we understand it. Would you like to see this?

Mr Kenny Dron: I think that is more for Inspector Bull to answer.

Inspector Roger Bull: I do not want to be all slopey-shouldered here, but that is a question of national policy, and at the police service our job is law enforcement and—

Lord Cormack: Yes, but would you be assisted in the discharge of your duties if there were such a scheme?

Inspector Roger Bull: Anything that is done to keep young people safe and to prevent the causes of them coming to the attention of the police service—going missing—would be welcome. I am not endorsing the guardianship system per se, but anything that can—

Lord Cormack: Yes, but this is something specific. It is not just anything. Our previous witnesses seemed to think that it had certain great benefits. Do you, as an experienced police officer who answers to the chief constable, who heads up this whole issue in our country, think it could help?

Inspector Roger Bull: I refer your Lordship to my earlier answer.

Lord Condon: Can I perhaps add to that? For example, if a missing child had one of these legal guardians, who would be in loco parentis in the same way as a natural parent would worry about a missing child, perhaps if there was a guardian in the system who was worried about a missing unaccompanied minor, that might just give a bit more impetus to the process of finding them again.

Inspector Roger Bull: The critical thing here is the relationship between the child and the carer, regardless of that carer's status. Earlier on, the gentleman from Croydon mentioned that the preference was to place the child in a fostering arrangement rather than in a children's home, because that placed them in a traditional family environment rather than in a system or process, which unfortunately children's homes tend to be. So, once again, anything that will

normalise the situation for that child and remove those pull factors and potentially the push factors to prevent them from running away has to be welcomed.

Q68 Baroness Pinnock: We have spoken a lot about young people going missing. We have heard concerns in some of the evidence that we have had that young people who are just about to turn 18 go missing to remain in the UK. Is that a concern that we should share, and, if so, what could be done to alter the situation that encourages them to do that?

Inspector Roger Bull: We are similarly aware, anecdotally, of that happening. I have mentioned the lack of effective data that we have on this subject. We also have challenges in the accommodation in which the children and young people—those up to 18—live. There is an issue in that we concentrate on children, but an 18 year-old is only someone who is 17 years and 366 days old. Sometimes we think that they magically transform into this fully rounded adult, which is clearly not the case. Some of the accommodation that 16, 17 and 18 year-olds are placed in is supported and semi-supported accommodation. Once again, there are immense pressures on local services, and that impacts on us, because by the time that person has received a visit from their social worker, it may be a number of days since the last time they were seen, so if we go out to look for them we are already, as the Americans say, behind the eight ball, chasing quite an old investigation. The issue is that we do not know where this supported accommodation is on all occasions. I refer you to the issue we mentioned earlier, which is that there is evidence that they are being targeted by urban street gangs for recruitment, and there is also anecdotal evidence coming out of Kent of the potential for radicalisation.

On the issue of people going missing leading up to their 18th birthday, as I understand it all the children should be in receipt of a care pathway arrangement, so that needs to be factored into the likelihood of the child going missing. We are then into the very thorny area of when a person is a missing person and when it is an immigration matter. If someone is an immigration overstayer and their whereabouts are unknown, they become a missing person, so whose jurisdiction does that fall into? There is the inherent danger of people falling between the cracks if we are not careful, and a vulnerable person is caught in the middle. Once again, I come back to the idea that we need, as we say, to upstream our response generally to overseas in order to prevent those children needing to flee their country to come here. We also need to upstream our response for children in this country and to work closely with our partners to make sure that the reasons for their flight are removed.

The question of what happens to the child when they are 18 is an immigration matter. I do not wish to appear slopey-shouldered again, Baroness Pinnock, but that is a matter for the immigration authorities rather than for UK policing.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. That brings the session to a close. We are very grateful to you for your time and for your very comprehensive answers. If you would be kind enough to send us the examples and the wish list that we requested, we would be very grateful.