

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [The work of Ofsted](#), HC 195

Wednesday 20 July 2016

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ian Austin; Suella Fernandes; Lucy Frazer; Catherine McKinnell; Ian Mearns; Stephen Timms; William Wragg.

Questions 111 - 159

Witnesses

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, and Eleanor Schooling, interim National Director, Social Care, Ofsted.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Michael Wilshaw and Eleanor Schooling.

Q111 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to our final session, until after the summer recess, of the Education Committee, newly strengthened with responsibilities to include further education and universities. We are feeling chirpy about our extended role, but today we are going to focus on Ofsted and children's services. It is excellent to see Sir Michael Wilshaw and Eleanor Schooling, also from Ofsted, here today. Welcome to you both.

Three-quarters of local authorities inspected have been judged as inadequate or requiring improvement. That is quite a startling revelation, so the question is this: is children's social care in crisis?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is not good enough; three quarters of local authorities not being good is certainly not good enough. We are quite clear that it has to improve. A quarter of local authorities have been judged to be inadequate where children are seriously at risk and it requires improvement. There are local authorities that are not at such risk, but nevertheless things need to improve and the quality of child protection is extremely variable in those authorities judged to be RI.

I suppose the issue for us is why it is so poor. Now that local authorities are losing much of their responsibility for education—depending on where they are of course—academisation means that they can focus much more upon the quality of children's services than ever before, so you have to ask the question: why is it going so badly wrong in so many instances? I always ask the question of Eleanor and others in the management team: what goes wrong?

It seems a very common sense thing to do for a director of children's services and the chief executive to make sure that they have enough social workers and that those who are agency workers are properly professionally developed and trained. It seems common sense to make sure that the case files are up to date. It seems common sense to make sure that the thresholds are clear and transparent to everyone and that assessment is appropriate and timely. Yet they get it wrong again and again, and the follow-up question I ask of the senior team is: what are they doing? Are they away from their local authorities too much? Are they at too many conferences or are they really getting down and finding out for themselves what is happening at the front door? That is an issue I think needs to be looked at.

Q112 **Chair:** You have been mentioned by Michael, so what are they doing that is not good enough?

Eleanor Schooling: About half of the "requires improvement" authorities are good in part and not good in other parts, so it is not always universal. For many of them it is about help and protection and that part of the system that is probably the most challenging to get right, so they are not



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always working well with their partners. Work in protecting children always involves health, the police, schools and others, and they are not always good at that. They are quite often not good at managing caseloads. If you have social workers who constantly change, it is very difficult to assess what a child and family's needs are and the churn is very high. In some local authorities we have seen caseloads of over 40. A social worker's work should be about engaging with a family, getting a family to understand what the issues are, and helping them to make the right changes so that there does not need to be any further intervention by a local authority. That is absolutely not possible if you have 40 cases to deal with.

In places that do it well we see caseloads of seven or eight. I know that this Committee has also commented on the matter of caseloads. Some time ago Eileen Munro also expressed her concern about caseloads, and one of her recommendations was that the caseloads of social workers should be a local indicator that every local authority publishes. We would suggest not only that it should be a local indicator, but that local authorities should be required to evaluate whether or not caseloads are safe and right for doing the work.

- Q113 **Chair:** We have made two recommendations in our recent report about social work. One is that we think there should be a professional body. The second is that we think social work should be unified through having one chief social worker as opposed to two. That would take in this issue about families. There is no point in having an approach for children and an approach for adults. Do you think we are right?

Eleanor Schooling: There is merit in both aspects. It is important to be able to focus on the whole family and where we have seen good social work it is because there has been a focus on the whole family and the family providing a solution for themselves, which in many cases can be done. What we would not want to see is a loss of focus on the needs of a child and, as long as any system could continue to focus on the specifics of the needs of a child, then that could work.

- Q114 **Chair:** Michael, what can Ofsted do to drive up standards in this area, particularly with local authorities?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: To carry on doing what we are doing. We have raised the bar significantly. Our social care inspection framework is now much more rigorous than ever before. Inspectors spend three weeks in a local authority with a team of about seven or eight inspectors, and we are much more rigorous than we have ever been. We look very carefully at what is happening to children, from identification all the way into care, if that is what happens. It is to carry on what we have been doing but also ensure that we say what needs to be said about the quality of leadership. At the end of the day—we say this quite clearly in this report—this is a leadership issue. It is not about money because there are local authorities that are generously funding that have been judged to be inadequate, and local authorities that have had their budgets cut that are



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doing a pretty good job. It is not about money and it is not about disadvantage either. This is about the quality of leadership, and not just of the director of children's services, but of the chief executive and the leader of the council.

Q115 Chair: We are going to move on to leadership in a moment, when Ian will start asking some questions, but I want to comment on Sir Martin Neary, who has been saying that Ofsted judgments should have more content. How do you feel about that? Do you think it is right? Eleanor, you just nodded.

Eleanor Schooling: I understand the comment that has been made about children's home judgments in particular and the fact that some children's homes feel that the single word does not describe well enough everything that they do, and that sometimes affects their ability to take new children. What we have found is that, where local authorities work well in commissioning the placements for children who are in care in children's homes, that single word is not the only indicator that is looked at; the whole report and the information in it is still the thing that is most useful, both for the children's home, whose outcomes have improved considerably since the introduction of our new framework, and those who are commissioning places for children who need them.

Q116 Ian Austin: Where senior managers are not doing their jobs properly they should be held to account, of course, but isn't it a bit simplistic to say, "What are they doing? Are they at conferences?" when there is a national crisis in the recruitment of social workers, huge pressures on staff, huge workloads, a blame culture when things go wrong, salaries have been frozen and then capped for years, and a massive number of vacancies? The number of vacancies rose from 2,700 to 4,700 in just 12 months. That is the problem, isn't it?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Why is it the case that some local authorities in very disadvantaged areas with real recruitment problems do very well? They do very well because the leadership understand that they are always going to have agency staff there. They put a lot of emphasis on being absolutely proactive on recruitment, making sure that retention is as important as recruitment, training and professionally developing people and giving the social workers confidence that they know what is happening on the ground.

Q117 Ian Austin: What is the relationship if local authorities are branded as inadequate and failing? How much more difficult does it make it then to recruit social workers on the ground?

Eleanor Schooling: That varies according to how the leadership takes on the improvement that is needed. Where there are strong leaders and managers who understand that there has to be a whole package and it is not simply about forcing compliance on everybody who is working in the place, then very quickly we can see that the changes that are needed are made. That has been seen in places like Kingston upon Thames, where



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they were partnered with another authority that supported them. There was not then a flood-out of staff and they understood together what they needed to do. It is very much down to what the leaders do at that point in time, although sometimes it can cause tension.

Q118 **Chair:** Ian is going to ask a bit more about that in a moment. I have one more question, which is about the issue of focus. Michael, you have been very successful at looking at secondary schools in particular but education as well. Do you think that Ofsted needs to drill down also on social work?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: When I first joined Ofsted, I was ambivalent about whether the remit was too large and we covered too much. After four and a half years at Ofsted, I am more convinced than ever that social care should be part of our inspection remit. These are children, after all, and we comment and we inspect on a standard for all children, including the most vulnerable. If you look at the youngsters in care and their outcomes, it is important that when we go into a school we look at the outcomes for looked-after children. The 300,000 children who are subject to child protection orders go to school and it is important that they do well. It is often their only opportunity to get out of the difficult family circumstances that they are in and achieve, so I am more convinced than ever that social care should be part of our responsibility.

Q119 **Chair:** How do we make sure that it is up there in the public's eye as a key challenge for Ofsted?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We try to do as much as we possibly can to keep it in the public eye by talking about what we are doing. When opportunities arise to be public about a particular issue—as I have been on Birmingham, for example—we do it.

Q120 **Ian Mearns:** Before I get to leadership, one question comes to my mind, Sir Michael. If you, as HMCI, are partly responsible and can take some credit for the ongoing improvement in our school service, are you equally responsible for the position of children's services as we find them in the country at the moment?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Improvement is incremental in schools and incremental in social services. As I have said, we have toughened up our inspection regime. I think it was too lax a few years ago and I think there has been a bit of catch-up. I am sure in a few years' time—I am sure Eleanor will say this as well—we will see significant improvement.

Q121 **Ian Mearns:** One thing before getting to leadership—because I have spoken to many leaders in social services—is that you have said it is not about money but, as far as money is concerned, it is not an improving landscape.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: No.



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Ian Mearns: In a nutshell, in my own local authority, if the Government's proposals for its budget go on as they are meant to go on, by 2020 if we cut 100% of all of our services—sweeping the roads, emptying bins, tidying up the parks, libraries the lot—we will still have to make significant cuts in adult social care and in children's services to balance the budget. Although you are saying money is not the question, it is not an improving landscape.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I come back to the response I made a few moments ago, that we are seeing local authorities where funding has been substantially cut that are doing a good job because leaders know what is happening, give confidence to people who are on the ground and ensure that the system works well. It is also a big responsibility for chief executives to say that this is one of the most important responsibilities for the council and to ensure that budgets are there.

Eleanor Schooling: Can I add to that? In the most successful authorities what people have been doing is looking at where they are to shift investment from one part of the system to another. Some of them have looked at making sure that fewer children come into the care of the local authority, because that is a very expensive option. By investing further in preventive services and earlier help for children in need, they have found they have been able to work with families, as Alan was referring to earlier, and avoid the very costly exercise of bringing a child into care. We have also found that once children do come into care, when that is really necessary, then often that is a very good option for them.

Q122 **Ian Mearns:** Given the financial landscape that I have outlined from my own local authority—it has not done too badly, by the way, in its own children's social care rating by Ofsted—where it is really facing a cliff edge, isn't it over simplistic to say that it is all down to leadership?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Without wanting to repeat the answer again and again, we have seen examples of local authorities where budgets have been cut that are doing a good job. This is about senior officers but also middle-ranking officers getting close to social workers and giving them the confidence to do their job well.

Q123 **Ian Mearns:** Are you confident that there is an ongoing supply of good leaders to spread around the country to make sure that good practice from one local authority can be shared with another?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Like schools, that is the big challenge for our system: to make sure that we have enough good leaders coming through the system to lead one of the most difficult parts of public service.

Q124 **Ian Mearns:** Can you give us an insight into where you think the next round of good leaders are going to come from?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Eleanor, you are closer than I am.



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Eleanor Schooling: Some of the good leaders are there already and they are working in partnership with other local authorities, such as Essex. They have taken on partnership work with authorities where things are not going so well. They provide very good analysis plus coaching and just working alongside people, so that leaders in the places that are not so good are able to develop.

There is also a whole cadre of practice leaders where the DfE has its particular initiatives, where I think there are future leaders who will be able to develop through the system.

Q125 **Ian Mearns:** Going back to your earlier point about having social workers managing 40 cases, isn't that purely a resource issue?

Eleanor Schooling: That is a resource issue, but I go back to the point about avoiding children coming into care unnecessarily. One child in care could pay for two social workers, so there are not very many children that you need to avoid bringing into care before you suddenly can rebalance the work for the social workers.

Q126 **Ian Mearns:** What is required to improve leadership in local authorities, and whose responsibility is it to ensure and monitor this?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think ADCS—the Association of Directors of Children's Services—has a big responsibility, and not only to represent directors of children's services and senior officers in social care, but to lead training. It is the responsibility of the Department for Education and the chief social worker to make sure that training and professional development is of a high quality.

One of the things that we are concerned about at Ofsted is the number of underperforming directors of children's services who leave after a poor judgment and find their way into other local authorities. That has to be monitored by the Department.

Q127 **Ian Mearns:** Yes, there is a bit of a merry-go-round that goes on out there and I think that is regrettable.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The analogy I was using was with schools. Where you see a really good school—an outstanding school, even in the toughest area—you see a very proactive leader who knows what is happening in the classroom and gets involved with teachers and students at a granular level. We need the same in children's social care. It seems to me this is now their fundamental responsibility, now that schools are moving much more into academies.

Q128 **Ian Mearns:** ADCS is a membership organisation of social services leaders for children. Does it have the resources to do the sort of job that you have outlined?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is up to them to get those resources, either from Government or from their own members. Eleanor, you would know about the professional relevance I suppose.



Eleanor Schooling: It is also down to local and political leadership in local authorities to be looking at how leaders are developed and how the leadership qualities are promoted and developed right the way through the workforce. If you look at places that we have inspected, such as Leeds, right from the top in Leeds there is a very strong focus on a child-friendly city. The local politicians make sure that everything that is necessary to be done—which does not always cost money—is done in order to develop both the staff as leaders of their own work and the middle managers and the senior leaders to get it right.

There are other places that we have inspected, such as Hertfordshire, where they have listened very carefully to what the staff have told them about leadership and about what their managers do and don't do. They discovered that the middle managers were the ones who probably needed the most development, so they set up a leadership academy. Social workers now report that they feel much better supported and that the work and the throughput of the work is going much better. I think it needs to happen all the way through the system.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: If you compare a large local authority, such as Essex, which received a good judgment, and a large local authority such as Birmingham, the big difference is the quality of leadership at all levels. Talk to social workers, as our inspectors do in Birmingham, and they feel that senior officers and middle-ranking officers do not know what is happening on the ground and feel unsupported in a way that they felt supported in Essex.

Q129 **Chair:** It is interesting that you should use Essex as an example, because I visited Essex last week. I went to the county council and met some of the leaders and some of the politicians as well. I was impressed with genuine interest in what was happening in Essex. I was also interested in the political leadership because so often when we are discussing local authorities we go straight into the officers without taking into account that there is a political structure there to hold officers to account. How far do you go in testing that structure for effectiveness and efficiency?

Eleanor Schooling: In our inspection judgments on leadership, management and governance, we always look at how the scrutiny and challenge of the work is carried out by local politicians. It is very easy to see all the way through to the work with looked-after children or children in need. We can look at their files and you can see the impact of that kind of scrutiny and whether issues that are problematic have been tackled, challenged and then acted upon.

Chair: We are going to go to Suella to talk about the management of Ofsted.

Q130 **Suella Fernandes:** Under the single inspection framework there has been considerable delay in the completion of the current cycle of inspections. Do you not think that that is putting young people at risk in areas that have not been inspected?



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Sir Michael Wilshaw: Eleanor will add to what I am going to say. We know that there has been a delay but we have changed the framework. As I said, our framework for inspection has been toughened up and strengthened and inspectors spend a great deal more time in a local authority than ever before. That has meant some delay in the system, but we are catching up now, aren't we?

Eleanor Schooling: We are.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The Department knows what our plans are for that.

Eleanor Schooling: Yes. We are on track to finish by December 2017. We have always targeted anywhere that we have been concerned about, so where concerns arise we make it a priority to go to visit that local authority. We have a very good intelligence system now that tells us many more alerts than we used to have before. Were we to be really concerned about a place that we had already inspected, for example, we still have the ability to go and do an inspection if that is necessary.

Q131 **Suella Fernandes:** What is your target for completing that now then?

Eleanor Schooling: December 2017.

Q132 **Suella Fernandes:** Okay, because your original target was November 2016 and then that was moved to December 2017. Why hasn't Ofsted yet—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Can I also add that there has been a shortfall in a number of HMI that we have in social care? We have made up that shortfall now. We were not happy with the quality of applications that were coming forward, but we now have good-quality people serving as HMI and our numbers have been made up.

Eleanor Schooling: We have recruited five this summer and another nine for September, and there are another 70 people who are interested in coming to work for us, so I feel that the tide has turned on that.

Q133 **Suella Fernandes:** Why hasn't Ofsted yet appointed a permanent director of social care?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Eleanor has been appointed. She is doing a terrific job. I see no reason why my successor will not appoint her as the permanent national director.

Q134 **Suella Fernandes:** We recently recommended that Ofsted be split into two separate sections, with one as an inspectorate for social care. Have you had any discussions about taking that forward?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think I have already responded to the Chair's question on that one. Having looked at it over a number of years, I think it would not make sense to split it because so many children who are vulnerable are in the school system. We need to know how they are



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getting on. In fact, they need to do better than youngsters from mainstream provision, so I would be unhappy if it was split.

The key to it, though, Ms Fernandes, is this: I come from a schools background, as you know. It has been a steep learning curve for me. It is important that Ofsted has good leadership at the top of social care, to make sure that senior managers are well supported, the frameworks change appropriately and we hold local authorities to account with sufficient rigour. We now have that. It has not necessarily been the case in the past that we have had that, but we have it now.

Chair: Lucy, you are in charge now, and you want to discuss social workers.

Q135 **Lucy Allan:** It seems to me that Ofsted should be about driving improvement. Very often in practice it is about forming a judgment and sometimes it is interpreted as a blame and shame kind of culture, which will have a negative impact on morale. Could you respond to that assertion and also whether you feel—both of you—that Ofsted should in fact be more supportive in its overriding goal of driving improvement rather than simply critiquing and blaming?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I have a very clear view of that one. Our job is to inspect and make a judgment and then do as much as we can, following that judgment, to help those schools to improve through recommendations, key issues and keeping close to the institution.

If you look at what has happened in schools, although I have said quite publicly, and I have said to the Committee, that I think our system is still not good enough—it is still mediocre in too many aspects—compared with where it was 20 years ago, or even five years ago, it is a much better system now. The “requires improvement” judgment, which replaced “satisfactory”, has galvanised change and improvement in the system. Children are now getting a much better deal in schools than ever before and Ofsted has been a key driver for that.

The same is true in social care, where we have toughened up our frameworks and employed much higher quality HMI. Local authorities know that they will be held much more rigorously to account, and that is leading to improvement. In the same way that we are seeing incremental improvement in schools, we will see incremental improvement over the years in social care.

Q136 **Lucy Allan:** To pick up on what Sir Michael was just saying and then to move on to Eleanor, we have been talking about retention and morale. Is there not an aspect here that that is part of the problem, that people are feeling that they are being attacked by judgments?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Go to any good institution and you will see that morale is pretty good, because they feel well supported; teachers, social workers feel well supported. They know that the leader is driving that institution forward. They feel that their work is appreciated. Go to an



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underperforming institution and you will see low morale. This is about improving the system. My goodness me, in London 20 years ago morale was incredibly low because standards were incredibly low. They are better now.

Q137 **Lucy Allan:** So it is not the job of Ofsted to be supportive per se in your—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We are supportive. Look at any of our reports. We give key recommendations and we stay with the underperforming institution. Whether it is a school or a children's services department, we stay with that institution until it improves.

Q138 **Lucy Allan:** Eleanor, do you think there is any truth in this idea of "hit and run" that Ofsted is sometimes perceived as doing?

Eleanor Schooling: I think it is our job to make a judgment, both about what is not going well and what is going well. In our annual report we have identified a lot of practice that is going well so that other people and social workers and local authorities can learn from that. We also recently published our comment on practice leadership, which I know was tweeted to lots of everyday, ordinary social workers and not just to the great and the good at the top of local authorities. I do think it is our job to judge all aspects, the good and the not so good, and to make sure that people understand what good looks like.

Q139 **Lucy Allan:** Do you think naming and shaming and blame culture is healthy?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Directors of children's services are very important people. They are paid £130,000, £140,000, £150,000 a year. They are dealing with the most vulnerable children who are on next to nothing. I expect them to behave professionally and to have high expectations of their workforce.

Q140 **Ian Austin:** When I talk to local authorities, such as my own, that have been branded inadequate, they talk about their difficulties with recruitment, and not just of social workers but of senior level too. Do you know what proportion of local authorities have not had permanent long-term directors of children's services? Many of the local authorities I have talked to have relied for a long period of time on consultants, which is a huge drain on resources and without the long-term commitment to that area. Do you think that is a widespread problem?

Eleanor Schooling: The situation has not changed that much since Martin Narey's report some time ago, in which he described about one third of directors of children's services would turn over in any one year. That has been the case for many years and that turnover is for good reasons and for not so good reasons, as is turnover everywhere else. It is not something that is in any way new.

Q141 **Ian Austin:** What is the answer to such a long-term, sustained problem?



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You cannot just say, "Local authorities should be recruiting people and promoting them better, and the association should take responsibility for this". If the central issue is one of leadership, and there is a long-term systemic lack of high-quality leadership, what is the answer to that?

Eleanor Schooling: Part of the answer is about making sure that you know what kind of person you are looking for. We have seen instances when appointments have been made of people who probably do not have the most relevant experience, and without that most relevant experience it is not very easy for them to do the job well—it is not impossible, but it is sometimes more difficult. There have been instances when people from entirely different professions have been appointed and then have had great difficulty in seeing what is good and what they need to be looking for next.

There is something collectively, nationally, that we should all be doing about recognising that when directors of children's services are appointed, they ought to have a passion, a long-term interest and some knowledge about children—not necessarily being a social worker, because I myself wasn't a social worker but I was a director of children's services—and a real preparedness to be open and learn and focus on the detail as well as just sitting above and reading performance information.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: You will know Dudley very well, Mr Austin. The question has to be asked: if the children's services department has been judged to be inadequate, what responsibility does the chief executive have for that? What responsibility has the leader of the council? What responsibilities does the LSCB have? In the good local authorities we see close working relationships between all those different parts of the leadership of the council and officers and real priority being given to children's services.

Ian Austin: Without being parochial about this, as you know there has been a long-term problem in Dudley but I think, to be fair to the people who are there now, there is a greater focus and expertise on this than there has ever been.

Q142 **Lucy Allan:** To follow up on this, do you think that it leads to more children being taken into care if we have a blame culture? People are naturally motivated to protect themselves from being exposed to being named and shamed.

Eleanor Schooling: When there are big national events about children and the things that go wrong with them and there is national blame, we quite often see a surge in children being taken into care. Then that dies down again, so instinctively one might say that seems to be the case. Although that is not always the case on the ground in our inspections. Quite often, where you have people with caseloads of, say, 40 in authorities that are not so good, they are not even noticing what is happening to the children in order to take them into care. I have to give you a mixed response really.



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Sir Michael Wilshaw: When we do inspect children's services we are not only looking at the numbers that have been taken into care and the thresholds that are being applied; we are looking at the quality of family intervention and family support—it is a two-pronged process. In fact, in reports that I look at, more local authorities are criticised for not working with families than are for taking children into care or not taking children into care.

Lucy Allan: That is comforting.

Chair: Catherine, we are going to move on to agency co-operation connected with safeguarding.

Q143 **Catherine McKinnell:** You mentioned in your reply to the previous questions about the local safeguarding children boards. The 2013-14 annual report raised serious concerns—three quarters were less than good. Have you seen much improvement since then?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is now a separate judgment, and I insisted that it was a separate judgment under leadership in our report. You are quite right, Ms McKinnell, that we have been very critical of the leadership of the LSCBs, the working arrangements that they have and some of the individual partners in those boards not pulling their weight effectively and not being held to account by the chief executive and the DCS. I think it needs radical review. I don't know what Eleanor thinks, but in the time that I have been at Ofsted I have urged the Department to rethink the role of LSCBs.

Q144 **Catherine McKinnell:** Would it be your view that there has not been a significant amount of change since your initial assessment in 2013-14 to date?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I suppose the bottom line here is that there is a lack of clarity about what their role and function is. In a school the governing board holds the head teacher to account—it is very clear. It is very unclear what the role and function of the LSCB is. Does it hold the local authority to account or not? The Department has to be absolutely clear that the LSCB does hold the senior officers to account. It has not been clear on that. As a result, it is a bit of a talking shop.

Eleanor Schooling: That is right, and where all of the senior partners are held to account you then end up with very strong multiagency working, which is what is needed when you are tackling issues such as CSE. What we have seen is that the focus on CSE in particular has focused everybody's mind, including safeguarding boards, and we have seen a considerable improvement in practice right across the country. Children are coming to the notice of local authorities. They know who they are. To a greater or lesser extent they are working much more successfully with some of those children. Where there is a strong focus then those safeguarding boards can often be very effective.



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Sir Michael Wilshaw: When I talk to senior HMI in social care, they are more concerned about the involvement of the police on those LSCBs than any other agencies, and they are critical, of course, in addressing the issue of CSE—child sexual exploitation. I think this is a major issue. How effective are the representatives on the safeguarding board? How effective are the police representatives on the safeguarding board? How rigorously are they held to account by the chair of the LSCB? How well do they work with senior officers from the local authority?

Q145 **Catherine McKinnell:** What do we do about getting clear answers to those questions?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We comment on the effectiveness of the safeguarding boards in our reports, and, as I say, it is up to the Department and Government to clarify the role of safeguarding boards and, in particular, ensure that the chair holds the police authority to account.

Q146 **Catherine McKinnell:** Do you think the Wood review will help to achieve that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I don't know really.

Eleanor Schooling: I think it is possible because some of the suggestions in that review are that local authorities make their own arrangements, which might mean that they can share arrangements across a number of authorities. That is already happening in some instances where you have a good strong local safeguarding board and they can do that for a region, which works better than having one for every single local authority, which is a very huge demand on the system for both human capacity and financial capacity. So I think there are some opportunities there.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: One of the critical parts of an inspection for the lead HMI who inspects a local authority is the interview with the senior police officer responsible for child sexual exploitation. If that is not effective then we will immediately fail that local authority and refer it to the local constabulary.

Q147 **Ian Mearns:** If you are suggesting that safeguarding boards cover more than one local authority area, what would you suggest is the optimum population they would cover, or would it depend on local conditions?

Eleanor Schooling: I think it depends very much on local conditions, because it is the same as local authorities overall. We see very large local authorities, such as Essex, with very large populations that are very successful because they get their structure right so that there is consistency across all the different area offices. I don't think it is about size so much as the configuration of other things such as health and the police, so that you get the right organisation.

Q148 **Ian Mearns:** Greater Manchester should have one in that case?



Eleanor Schooling: It could be.

Chair: Thank you. William, over to you for new structures.

Q149 **William Wragg:** Sir Michael, the Government have announced reforms that will take place where underperforming children's services will be taken out of local authority control. What evidence does Ofsted have that this will lead to improvement?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The picture is mixed at the moment. We were talking about this shortly before coming in. There are some independent trusts that are doing well. Doncaster is one, for example, but Slough isn't doing particularly well. As you know, Birmingham has set up a voluntary independent trust. We will wait and see what happens there. I am pretty sceptical about whether that will work. If Birmingham has anything to do with it, it won't go well. We wait to see whether these trusts work, but at the moment the picture is pretty mixed.

Q150 **Ian Mearns:** Would you suggest that it is too early to go for that sort of wholesale reform of the system?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It depends on the quality. As a trust, they have to do the same thing as the local authority. If leadership—

Ian Mearns: Only better.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Only better, yes. If the leadership is not good, the quality of people serving on the trust is variable and they don't address the key issues, then it will not do well.

Q151 **William Wragg:** Just related to that, what impact would these reforms have on Ofsted's role?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Eleanor, do you want to talk about this? We hold them to account but the local authority as well.

Eleanor Schooling: We will hold them to account in exactly the same way that we hold a local authority to account. At the moment the local authority still has all of the authority and responsibility in the end. We are working with the Department on any changes. If they are structural changes, such as across Greater Manchester and places like that, then we would not want to duplicate our inspection and we will have to see whether there needs to be amendments to the way that we work in order to inspect the appropriate place.

Q152 **William Wragg:** In your professional opinion, Eleanor, do you think that six months is enough time to expect significant improvements from a poorly performing authority? Is six months enough?

Eleanor Schooling: In six months it is possible to see whether there has been sufficient determination, and sufficient thought about what needs to happen next in order to see whether they are beginning to be on the road. Nobody is expecting the whole thing to have completely turned around in six months—that would be unrealistic—but I think that you can



see the green shoots. If you look at the places that have improved quickly, they were certainly in a much better place by the time six months were up.

Q153 William Wragg: Are there any examples that really stand out where within six months they have at least changed direction?

Eleanor Schooling: I think in Kingston upon Thames they had changed direction within six months, and when we went back two years later they were good. That is a very rapid and solid improvement, so we do know it can be done. Kingston upon Thames is a similar size and population to Slough, and in terms of deprivation it is not that far away, but it was something to do with the determination of the people involved that meant that it happened in good time.

The person who worked with Kingston upon Thames is currently the commissioner in Sunderland, and we are optimistic about the work that is going on there too.

Q154 William Wragg: Would you also admit that it is possible that local authorities that are keeping children's services in-house are themselves also capable of that improvement before moving on to the independent trust model?

Eleanor Schooling: We have seen examples where local authorities themselves have done it, so it is not about the particular structure. As Sir Michael has said, it is about the determination and the quality of the leaders, who are then doing the work and focusing in enough good time and being serious enough about it.

Chair: Thank you. Lucy, over to you for the future of inspection.

Q155 Lucy Frazer: Ofsted has recently announced consultations on its plans for new inspection frameworks. What benefits do you think that will bring?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Eleanor will fill in the detail, but you know we have changed the inspection frameworks for schools. For good schools there is now a short inspection and if inspectors see a good school remaining good they spend only a short amount of time in that institution. If they see decline then a full team goes in for a full section 5. The same principle will be applied to social care. We will go into a local authority and do a short inspection. If there are worrying things going on when we inspect then the full SIF will apply.

Eleanor Schooling: The other benefit is that we will have the consistency of the current framework, so everything that is in the framework at the moment about what "good" looks like remains. The work that was done those years ago to define what "good" looks like is still accepted by everybody. There will be stability and consistency on that but, as Sir Michael has said, many authorities that are already good, and from our data and from other information appear to be good still, should not have seven inspectors for three to four weeks. It should be



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possible to do it with three inspectors, maybe four inspectors, over a period of a week or two, and it will vary. That is one thing that will be less of a burden. That means that we can then inspect more frequently.

The other thing that we have consulted on is that we are going to make visits in between our inspections. Where there is an indication from our data that maybe something is not going as well, we want to catch people before they fall. Going back to the whole issue of naming, shaming and blaming, if you can catch people before they fall then maybe there will not be so much naming and shaming and having to point out when things have gone wrong. A result of that visit will be a letter outlining to the authority what they need to do to return to a "good" status.

We will also use those visits where we have seen that things are going well, because we will then be able to describe in the letter what is going well, which is encouraging because the local authority can continue to do that. All that information can be shared among other people too because, as I said earlier, it is very important that we do set out what "good" looks like for other local authorities.

The final part of that is the monitoring of inadequate authorities that we have already just started. As you will probably be aware, we have published two monitoring letters already. I think those monitoring visits clarify our role much more clearly. We used to do an improvement offer and I have to say that that has sometimes been helpful and supportive and sometimes it has muddied the water. It is up to the sector to do the improvement work and it is much more helpful for us to come and give people a temperature check and say, "We think that you have improved this, this and this". We will just come for a couple of days. We will focus on children's files and on children's experiences and describe what is going well. Eventually from that we will be able to build a picture of when it will be appropriate to do the full inspection so that a place can come out of the categorisation of "inadequate". I am very aware that continually telling people that they are inadequate but not explaining why in enough detail is not as helpful as it should be for improvement.

Q156 Lucy Frazer: At the beginning of that you said it will reduce the burden. I presume by that you mean the burden on the schools that are good rather than a burden on Ofsted, because it seems like you are allocating resources according to where they are needed rather than reducing your inspections generally. Is that right? Do I have that right?

Eleanor Schooling: That is right. The amount of activity for our staff will be quite high because we will be going more frequently, monitoring and doing visits. We will need to use the resource that we have but in a different way from how we do at the moment.

Q157 Lucy Frazer: If that is the case and you are increasing the number of types of institutions that you inspect—you have said you have social care settings, local authorities, and you are introducing a multiagency targeted inspection and a SEND inspection—how are you going to cope with



capacity? We know from the answer you gave to Suella that you have already missed your targets of inspection. According to one of the pages in your report, in the last inspection period you have inspected only one third of local authorities, one third of local safeguarding children boards and a half of further education colleges with residential needs. You have a number of complaints in relation to timings of reports. If you are not giving yourself any extra capacity in terms of reducing inspections generally, how are you going to cope?

Eleanor Schooling: Our capacity has increased, as we described earlier. I have always planned on the capacity that we have been funded for and that we knew we were going to need for the current work. The current work is more demanding on our workforce than what we are proposing for the future; because of the way that SIF inspections are configured you have to have seven or eight people out for a month. That is much less flexible than the kind of things that we are going to be doing in future.

The SEND inspections are funded separately and we already have the capacity for that, so I am quite clear that we do have the capacity for all of the work that we have planned. We have been resourced for the things that we do already, such as children's homes and others, for many years. That is not going to change and we have sufficient resource for all of those regulatory inspections as well. All of those were completed on time last year.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I am determined that, just as in the school space, we have high-quality inspection in children's services. I was not convinced years ago that we had that. We have it now because we have recruited better people, we have better managers, we spend much longer in a local authority than ever before, our reports are much more detailed than ever before, and we talk to children and social workers and we really see what is happening on the frontline.

That might come at the expense of slowing down our inspections a bit, although we are doing our best, but what we must not have—this is the sort of accusation that was made against Ofsted over the Baby P affair—is that inspection is a bit of a desktop exercise. We must not have that.

Q158 **Lucy Frazer:** Coming back to burdens, you have reduced the burden on those who are performing well but you have increased it significantly on those who are not performing well. Of course you need to keep monitoring them, but is there a concern that the burden of inspection on institutions that are already struggling to cope—shown by the fact that they are “poor”—will mean that they are focusing on the inspection rather than looking after the children and the bureaucratic exercise rather than the care of the kids?

Eleanor Schooling: When we go and visit on a monitoring visit, we say to the local authority, for example, “We are going to come and look at the front door and your contacts and referrals, and we would like you to



give us the last 20 audits that you have done of your cases". I would expect every single local authority that is a good authority to be doing that already and, as part of their improvement journey, they must do it. We are asking them to show us something that they already have, so I don't believe that the burden that we are placing is any greater on those authorities that are inadequate than the burden that good authorities place on themselves, in terms of their audit and knowledge about themselves. We are asking them to do things that every good place does do already.

Q159 Lucy Frazer: Do you accept that, as they are not already doing it, they are going to have to do it and they ought to be doing it but then they will have even less time to look after the children? Of course they need to do it, but they will be spending time on the audit that they have not done.

Eleanor Schooling: I would suggest that it is very risky not to audit work and not to know what is going on within your teams. Where we have seen risky practice it is because managers do not realise that people have not visited children, that files have been sitting week after week not being attended to, or that people have made the wrong decision. I don't think there is ever a case where we would say that those things are not absolutely central to what the work is.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is a bit like the schools. Good head teachers don't worry about Ofsted; they just get on with the job. They know exactly what to do. They worry about the detail, ensure that children are doing well, ensure that staff are well monitored and so on. It is the same in children's services. A good director of children's services should not worry about Ofsted; they should just get on and do their job.

Chair: Thank you very much, Michael and Eleanor, for coming along for us today. It has been a very interesting session and highly relevant, considering what we have been talking about as a Committee for the last few weeks. Thank you very much indeed.