

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Child Migrants](#), HC 1026

Wednesday 22 February 2017

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); James Berry; Mr David Burrowes; Nusrat Ghani; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Naz Shah; Mr David Winnick.

Questions 1-132

Witnesses

[I](#): Lily Caprani, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF, George Gabriel, Project Lead, Safe Passage UK, Martha Mackenzie, Deputy Head of Government Relations, Save the Children, and Melanie Ward, Associate Director, Policy and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee.

[II](#): Tam Baillie, Children and Young Person's Commissioner for Scotland, Councillor Stephen Cowan, Leader of the Council, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Richard Crellin, Policy Manager, Poverty and Inequality, The Children's Society, and Councillor David Simmonds CBE, Chairman of the Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Force, Local Government Association.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lily Caprani, George Gabriel, Martha Mackenzie and Melanie Ward.

Q1 Chair: I welcome everyone to this afternoon's session on the situation of unaccompanied child refugees in Europe and the Government's decision to close the Dubs scheme. Thank you very much for coming to give us evidence. May I ask each of you to start by introducing yourselves and telling us what your or your organisation's assessment is of the position of unaccompanied minors in Europe at the moment, and what you think the consequences will be of the Government's decision to close the Dubs scheme and the ending of the fast-track Dublin scheme in France?

Lily Caprani: Hello. I am the deputy executive director of UNICEF UK. I have colleagues working in Greece, Italy and across Europe, as well as on the ground in the MENA region, who are currently meeting the humanitarian needs of many unaccompanied children. When the Dubs scheme was first announced, it was very clearly about targeting the most vulnerable children, which we thought was absolutely the right thing to do. As you would imagine, UNICEF targets the most vulnerable unaccompanied children, many of whom have been trafficked, exploited and abused and are in great need of our protection. You will have heard all the horrifying stories about children, where there is not a safe and legal route to make them safe, going missing and sometimes falling into the hands of traffickers, smugglers or others who would exploit them.

We saw what a scheme like this can achieve when an expedited process began in Calais, and we were heartened by the speed with which that finally happened, after much delay. It makes very little sense to us that this scheme would be cancelled now, when we know there are still 2,500 unaccompanied children in Greece, 10 times as many in Italy and many others across Europe. Many of those are outside the formal system. There is a formal system, of course, in Italy in Greece, but it is overwhelmed; they cannot protect the children that they currently have there. We think that the UK has a very important role to play in assisting those other Governments in making the scheme work.

It does not seem to me very likely that we have exhausted the supply of very vulnerable children who arrived in Europe even before 20 March, so it is very difficult to explain why we would suddenly cancel this scheme now. We think it should be reinstated and that the criteria applied in Calais should also be reassessed in relation to Greece and Italy.

Q2 Chair: They should be reassessed?

Lily Caprani: We shouldn't be having some of the arbitrary blanket exclusions that we saw applied in Calais, in the event that we were to look at this scheme being reinstated, and we should look at Greece and Italy and some of the vulnerabilities we are seeing there. For example, girls who have travelled from Eritrea who we know are highly vulnerable would



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have been excluded under the criteria applied in Calais. In the event that the scheme is reinstated, we think the criteria should be looked at again.

George Gabriel: My name is George Gabriel. I am a lead organiser of Citizens UK and I established Safe Passage 18 months ago. We have field staff deployed in Italy, Greece, France and here in the UK. From our perspective, it was a very poor decision to close the Dubs route. We think there is continuing urgent need across Europe, not only in the three identified countries—Greece, Italy and France—but more widely. For example, the issues in Bulgaria are particularly concerning at the moment: there are discussions of the pushback of refugee children who are being illegally returned from Bulgaria to a prior stop along their route, and obviously, the conditions there are pretty extraordinary.

From our perspective, particularly in Greece, the case for continued and rolling provision around the Dubs amendment is especially compelling. There are 2,300 unaccompanied minors in Greece. Of those 2,300, only 1,256 have spaces in any Government shelter, so just over 1,000 are street homeless. We estimate that about 48% of those 2,300 have no family link anywhere else in Europe, and so in the broadest brush strokes might be eligible for transfer under the provisions of the Dubs amendment.

We took a sample of 128 of those children in Athens over the past couple of weeks. Of 128, 64 were identified as at risk of sexual abuse, 8% had themselves been trafficked and 19% had post-traumatic stress disorder, so we are extremely concerned about the situation of those children. Clearly, there is a greater need than is to be met through the remaining places offered by the Government. We think that the idea that Sir Nicholas Winton managed to transfer 669 children essentially on his own, and that he topped the efforts of our entire country, is shameful and a mistaken choice.

The situation remains urgent. There remains a strong case for emergency provision to assist those children with no family links. We think the calibre of the consultation by which these numbers have been produced was very weak. It is now nine months out of date, and it was conducted through two letters and a series of regional events, which were conducted with the directors of adult services, rather than children's services.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services, which is UK-wide, estimated that the funding offer on which the consultation was premised met less than 50% of the total cost recovery of a child to be resettled with a local authority. It also confused the consultation on the national transfer scheme for minors across Britain with the particular provisions of section 67. For instance, in March last year there were 4,210 unaccompanied minors in Britain. We have been asking local authorities to benchmark against the 0.07% figure under the national transfer scheme. That would create 8,114 spaces. We don't have the latest figures on how many unaccompanied minors are currently in care, but that obviously shows that there is significant headroom, which we think exposes the weakness of the argument that there are only 150 spaces remaining.



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To take a handful of local authorities, Lewisham has offered 23 places for unaccompanied minors; only one of them has been filled since that offer was made. We are also aware of the real disjunction between the national transfer scheme and the devolved Administrations, particularly in Scotland and Wales. If the Dubs provision is conflated with the national transfer scheme, it denies those nations the opportunity to make the full contribution we believe they desire to make.

We also agree with our UNICEF colleagues about the need to subordinate the criteria for admission to the best interests determination around the child. The best interests assessment process includes an assessment of the child's long-term prospects should they be relocated, so we do not see any strong case for putting a nationality or age bar on the children that might be eligible, because the best interests determination already includes an assessment of the likelihood of whether they will or will not be granted asylum upon transfer.

You also mentioned the closure of the expedited Dublin process in Calais and the likely consequences of it. From our perspective, Dublin remains a failing system Europe-wide. That failure has some extreme costs to the UK taxpayer: in the past two years, security around the Calais area has cost £90 million; there was then the one-off costs of £36 million for the demolition and £2 million for a wall. It is projected to cost another £80 million over the coming three years to increase security provision around Calais. That is an extraordinary expenditure of British taxpayers' money in a neighbouring country in western Europe, when one considers that the Calais total population prior to the demolition of the Jungle was about 7,500, of whom 2,200 or so were children. We have seen that 1,350 of those children have claimed Dublin links, and the vast majority of them have subsequently been transferred.

Q3 **Chair:** Could you restate those figures?

George Gabriel: The French agencies we work with report that about 7,900 people were transferred from Calais to reception centres all across France. The total figure for children at that point of demolition was about 2,200. Of those 2,200, 750 have now been transferred to the UK under Dublin provisions and another 460 are under review by the Government on an ongoing basis—we represent many of them at Safe Passage. That means 1,350 of the population of Calais at the point of demolition were UK-bound, Dublin-eligible children.

The idea that we can find topping £200 million of taxpayers' money to commit to security in Calais, but only manage to fund a single Home Office liaison officer to work with actors on the ground to identify children who might be eligible for transfer, is unacceptable. There is a very strong argument, we believe, for investing in solving the problem by ensuring that children who are UK-bound and have a family link and a right to do so can access that right.

It remains very difficult to access Dublin provisions across France, and that picture extends Europe-wide. Dublin remains functioning almost



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exclusively on the basis of intervention by private actors. To give you an idea, 7 of 8 Dublin transfers so far from Greece to the UK were facilitated by Safe Passage—they were children we identified and cases we supported and evidenced. From Italy, of the tiny handful of cases, the majority have come through Safe Passage, and likewise from Bulgaria. In France, prior to the expedited process there were around 70 children transferred, of whom 50 were our clients and 20 were represented by UNHCR and the Calais legal centre. Essentially, without the intervention of private actors that system does not work. The result is enormous expenditure for the British taxpayer and also terrible suffering for the children involved. Four children lost their lives in the last 12 months trying to make the transfer who had a legal right to do so safely: Masud, Mohammed, Raheemullah and Samir.

The major beneficiaries of this situation are the people traffickers operating in the area. It costs £3,000 to be supported in a single attempt from Dunkirk at the moment and £10,000 to be assured of transfer by a trafficker or smuggler. Looking at the net sums of money available closing the Dubs scheme to be in the interest of people traffickers to between £8.7 million and £20.3 million. That is on the basis of the number of children who would be eligible in Greece—48% of the 2,300—plus the 321 children who have now absconded from CAOMIEs in France. We believe it is doable—when the Home Secretary acted and created this expedited process, 750 children were transferred relatively safely and quickly—but it requires a flexible approach.

The last point I will make is that in Greece in particular, we have an 89% success rate when we support a child seeking to reunite with a family member in Britain. Where we do not intervene, the success rate is just 9%. It is very difficult for a child with an uncle in Birmingham, being supported by a social worker in downtown Athens, to evidence that family link with no support. We believe that a very simple intervention that this Government could make would be to support children through a small contract with an appropriate charity, like the Red Cross, to evidence the family links properly. We believe that to be in everyone's interests because it would save the Government money by preventing litigation costs, effect the transfer of children very speedily and take them out of the hands' of traffickers.

Martha Mackenzie: I am Martha Mackenzie, the Deputy Head of Government Relations at Save the Children. By way of context, Save the Children works right across the refugee crisis, both in the countries that refugees are fleeing from and in Europe in host and reception centres in Italy and Greece and on the Balkan route. We were also working in the Calais camp last year. We have quite a broad overview of the experiences of refugees—both what they are fleeing and what they are arriving to.

I would echo a lot of the comments from my colleagues. We are very disappointed that the Dubs scheme has closed. We would like the Dubs scheme to remain open as a safe and legal route for unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to seek sanctuary in the UK. The impact we have seen



of the closure, and of some of the confusion around what has been going on, is quite severe.

I want to come back to the confusion point specifically, because we saw that a lot in Calais last year and we are seeing it again in France. Right across Europe children do not really know what their future holds. They do not know what will happen if they go into the formal system. They do not know if their Dublin or family reunion application will be successful—often it is not, or it is delayed—so instead they are putting themselves into the hands of people traffickers and smugglers and trying to make their own way across Europe to the UK. The existence of a scheme like Dubs and a functioning family reunion system like Dublin stops children doing that. We saw that incredibly clearly during the Calais camp clearance: when there was a safe and legal route, children came forward, made themselves available to the authorities and peacefully waited for the option of being transferred, but now that it doesn't feel as though that route is available any more, we have seen children coming out of the CAOMIEs—the official centres in France—moving back to Dunkirk and Calais and taking their lives in their hands again.

Although I echo the specifics and a lot of what has been said, there is that sense that children have no idea what their rights are and what their future holds, and the biggest danger for them is people trafficking and people smuggling. That is what we are particularly concerned about. So we would like the Dublin route to remain open. We would like there to be a holistic best interests assessment so that children in whose best interests it is can continue to be transferred to the UK safely. We don't imagine that that will be huge numbers of children; we think it will be a manageable number, and the Government can periodically re-consult local authorities to see whether they have the spaces available.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. Ms Ward?

Melanie Ward: I am Melanie Ward, the associate director of policy and advocacy for the International Rescue Committee. My organisation was founded in the 1930s, at a time when people were fleeing Europe for safety elsewhere in the world, and today we work in about 40 countries providing humanitarian assistance as well as refugee resettlement and integration programmes. Currently in Europe, we are working in Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia, providing support to refugees and specific and specialised support to child refugees as well.

I think it is really important to have a clear view of the level of suffering among children who are unaccompanied and alone in Europe just now. Many are sleeping rough or are in accommodation with strange men. They are at severe risk of sex trafficking and other forms of abuse. In Serbia, for example, there are 650 unaccompanied children in need of shelter and only 65 places available to give children safe shelter. Many children are severely traumatised because of the conditions that they have fled in their home countries, and are living in filthy conditions. For example, in Serbia, there is a need for delousing programmes because children have body lice and they have to try to remove them. Also, my colleagues report children



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in shelters drawing pictures of the police violence that they have been exposed to in countries like Bulgaria and Hungary. That is what children in Europe are facing and the kind of thing that our country has a chance to do something about.

It is also really important to understand the context of the whole refugee crisis. The world is in a global displacement crisis. Sixty-five million people globally have had to flee their homes, and the only way the world can cope with that is if every country steps forward and shoulders its fair share of responsibility by providing both aid and shelter to a fair share of those people. Eighty-five per cent of refugees in the world are hosted and given shelter by developing countries, not by countries like ours. And when a country that is as capable and relatively wealthy as the UK—the fifth largest economy in the world, a country that has real expertise in child protection and real expertise among the staff at the Home Office—is seen to close the door in the face of child refugees and refuse to help, that is really noticed by other countries in the world.

I would give the example of Kenya. Just a few weeks after the EU-Turkey deal was agreed, the Kenyan Government, which hosts more than 600,000 refugees, announced that it was going to close the Dadaab refugee camp, which is the biggest refugee camp in the world. The Interior Minister of Kenya said at the time, “We will not be the first to do this. It is standard practice worldwide. For example, in Europe, rich, prosperous and democratic countries are turning away refugees from Syria, one of the worst war zones since World War II.” So when countries like ours do not meet their fair share of responsibility, that has a direct impact in other parts of the world and helps to create further instability.

The Dubs scheme was a really important and welcome part of the UK meeting its share of responsibility. We would argue that it has to stay open. As colleagues have said, assessments of what is best for individual children have to be properly done through best interests assessments and determination, and we have the capability to support countries like Greece and other places in Europe with doing that. The Dublin system is also a vital part of this. It is clearly not working properly. On average, a Dublin case takes about two years to work through at the moment.

Our country is clearly highly capable. Children are suffering in other parts of the world. There are spaces available in local authorities. I have spoken to council leaders here in London and also in Scotland who have said that they have places available for child refugees now. They are not being taken up, for whatever reason. With all of that—our capability, our skills, the fact that children are suffering—it is difficult to understand why we would not want to help these children.

Q5 Chair: Thank you very much. We are asking for a very brief answer to this question. The Government have said that one of their reasons for closing the Dubs scheme is because they think it was increasing the pull factor and the risk of children becoming involved in trafficking. The points



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that some of you have made suggest the opposite. Do you think removing the Dubs scheme means that more or fewer children will end up in the arms of people traffickers? Ms Caprani, more or fewer?

Lily Caprani: Unfortunately, I think more. I think children were arriving before the Dubs scheme and they are continuing to arrive after the Dubs scheme was closed, so there is really no evidence that the Dubs scheme was attracting the children. We are fairly convinced that there is mostly a push factor that makes children come. That is because they are fleeing conflict and violence and abuse. However, it has to be said that we all acknowledge that we are humanitarian agencies and our principle is that we help those most in need in front of us and we do no harm. If there is ever some strong evidence to suggest that this kind of scheme or any like it was doing harm by encouraging children to make dangerous journeys, we would have a problem with it too. For that reason we accepted the need for a cut-off date when we first had the scheme announced, because it dealt with that argument. It immediately assured anyone that had the fear that it may create further journeys that that would not be the case.

As I said earlier when I opened, I am pretty sure that we haven't exhausted the supply of very vulnerable children who arrived before 20 March anyway, and I know many have arrived since.

Q6 **Chair:** Mr Gabriel, could I confine you to that point, in order to bring David Burrowes in before he has to leave?

George Gabriel: I would echo the comments from UNICEF. We are talking about two different, distinct groups of children. There are children who are already in Europe, and there can be no doubt that closing a safe and legal route results in further pressures on them to enter trafficking and smuggling networks.

I have a text from one boy who was in one of the children's centres and got relocated from Calais with the hope of being reunited. He says, "I didn't stay in France—I leave that place...I know dangerous, I want to go to the UK". He is talking about Dunkirk; he says he was in Calais for one year to try to transfer to family, and afterwards he went to a centre for four months. "They take some and they leave some, it's a big lie. They play game with us...our life is very dangerous, they do not think about us because they are safe."

For the specific children we engage with, I think more than 350 have now absconded from CAOMIEs since the announced closure of the expedited process and Dubs transfers from Calais. So for the specific group already in Europe, there is no doubt that there is an increased risk.

On the broader pull factor argument, I would echo the comments from UNICEF. Essentially, that is something to be taken very seriously. The option of introducing a cut-off date that is tied to the implementation window, critically—so, not one that is overly retrospective—we believe to be an adequate way to mitigate any perceived or evidenced arguments.

Q7 **Chair:** Ms Mackenzie, without Dubs—more or fewer children with



traffickers?

Martha Mackenzie: We think more children will be at risk of falling into the hands of people traffickers as a result of this closure. There is very little evidence in this particular context that a scheme like Dubs would act as a pull factor. There is evidence that safe and legal routes protect children. The question we should be asking ourselves is what intervention is most likely to make children safe. We have evidence that a route to safety is that intervention, so that is what we should pursue.

Q8 **Chair:** Ms Ward?

Melanie Ward: More children will end up in the hands of smugglers. They are already here. They are looking for a solution and some kind of safety and, unfortunately, if smugglers are the only people who seem like they might be able to offer them that, that is who the children will have no option but to turn to.

Q9 **Mr Burrowes:** Are we premature in saying that Dubs has closed and it is the end of Dubs? I have not seen any change to the law in Parliament and the Home Secretary herself has said that the Dubs scheme is not closed and it is open to vulnerable children across Europe. Is it not the case that what we have at the moment is a time lock on Dubs children, and how far open the door is, rather than it being closed? The issue or challenge is whether that time lock can be changed or how wide it should be open. Does anyone want to comment on that? You talk about it being closed, but it is important not to talk about it being closed when essentially it is not.

Martha Mackenzie: I think what's been a little bit challenging about some of the recent reporting is that we have had a few mixed messages.

When we heard that it might be a pull factor, that seemed to be the Government saying that they were closing it because they felt it was a pull factor, but actually from the Immigration Minister's original statement we got the sense that this was the cohort for that original consultation that they had to do with local authorities, but that it did not spell the end of Dubs.

It would be useful to get some clarity as to whether Dubs is actually ending because the Government think it is a pull factor or whether it might be open. We would strongly urge the Government to leave it open and to carry on consulting with local authorities, precisely because it provides that safe and legal route.

If you were to do a holistic, best interest assessment—so, you continually assess children and make this as an option if it was in their best interests—then the small number of vulnerable children who had come to the UK under the scheme would not be capped by local authority numbers or by an artificial cut-off date.

Q10 **Mr Burrowes:** Is your call-out that it was not in Parliament or law but that it was from the previous Prime Minister to take off the 20 March time lock? Is your call to local authorities, as well as Government, in relation

to the capacity issue of numbers?

George Gabriel: I think the time lock we are referring to is not 20 March. The time lock we are referring to is ending the transfers with the financial year, which is what we have understood from Government to be the intention: 150 further transfers and no further consultation to evaluate existing capacity.

We certainly would encourage the Government to re-consult on a rolling basis according to the need identified on the ground, as measured and balanced by the best interests determination. We certainly will all continue to play a part in encouraging local authorities to make all local space available. For Citizens UK we have 90 different local welcome groups across the country who are recruiting foster carers, trying to identify homes that people could be moved into.

- Q11 **Mr Burrowes:** Just two final questions. Do you have the facts or figures of the local authorities' places that have been offered? You mentioned you are in contact with different local authorities. Do you have any data on the places now being offered by local authorities that may be different from what the Government said about the number of places being offered?

George Gabriel: Yes, we have some.

- Q12 **Mr Burrowes:** If you have, by all means send us a note. People have said there are mixed messages about what France does or does not want. Yesterday President Hollande said: "I call on the UK to shoulder its responsibilities concerning adolescents today in France currently who have families across the Channel. We have made efforts to shelter and welcome them."

Do you think that is factual and all true? What is your response? You can take two issues. First, that the UK needs to shoulder its responsibilities for family-related children. The other issue is France making efforts to shelter and welcome them. I make the point in the context of what has happened since the closure of the Calais camp and whether there is a need related to those who are at reception centres and the like.

George Gabriel: From our perspective, the UK certainly does need to do more. We have seen the one window where the UK authorities operated Dublin on a flexible basis, through the CAOMIEs process as it was established: 750-plus children were transferred in a matter of two or three months. Previously, clients we have supported have had to wait over a year for transfer. So, flexibility in that approach clearly means that it resolves issues much more rapidly and children's best interests are protected. We urge the UK to continue to offer flexibility in interpreting Dublin rules.

On the efforts of the French authorities, the creation of the CAOMIEs were a major step forward. Essentially, relocating children from the disastrous humanitarian context in Calais into a safe, stable environment was a critical intervention. We believe that if the UK Government engaged the French, offering a continued flexible approach, there might be provision for



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a number of those CAOMIEs to remain open in perpetuity as a referral point away from the north of France, where we are all concerned to avoid a regathering of people. We would not be seeing things as we are now, which is 120 children in Dunkirk and more than 100 children, the majority of whom are Dublin-eligible, gathering in Calais again.

So, from the French side we would like to see a continued basis of safe spaces for children who can be referred anywhere from France who present as Dublin-eligible. The counter offer from the UK that would make that viable would be continued flexibility in approach, because the UK can operate in an incredibly bureaucratic and restrictive fashion when it comes to Dublin implementation.

One of our clients was an 11-month-old baby separated from its mother. It took us eight weeks to get the child reunited with its mother who was here in Britain. The child was still breast-feeding. When we asked the UK to issue a laissez-passer paper to let the child transfer, they insisted that the child should follow the line and letter of the Dublin protocol; they were genuinely insisting that an 11-month-old baby should claim asylum in France prior to them considering any kind of take-charge transfer request. That inflexibility is inimical to everyone's interests. It also undermines French confidence in investing significant resources in helping children to get to the stage of issuing a take charge request.

Q13 Naz Shah: You talked about the Dublin regulation. The Home Office has now said that it will review some of the cases of some children who are still in France with family connections in the UK, under the accelerated Dublin process. How many children might benefit from that review, and what new criteria do you expect to be applied to their cases?

Martha Mackenzie: I don't think we necessarily have exact numbers, but some of the additional criteria and what we saw that worked quite well with the original transfer from Calais was just a bit more flexibility around using some of the discretionary clauses. For example, it might be that you have a cousin or another family member who would be able to house a child, or who it would be in the best interests of the child to be with, and we would ask for that to come into play as well. What happened in Calais was this expedited system, where more of the claims were heard in the UK, as opposed to being heard in France.

We would like to see those sorts of things considered in Italy and Greece as well. It is taking an incredibly long time for Dublin cases in Italy and Greece. While we understand the need for children to be in the system, that is actually not working. There are lots of things the Government could look at, such as a similar system to the one that happened in Calais or, as George mentioned in his introduction, getting some specialists out there to Italy and Greece to help children with their cases and really taking on that family tracing and identification. There are a lot of things we would like to see the Government do to improve that Dublin process. That is one of the clearest safe and legal routes to come to the UK, and it is very much within those children's rights to be here.



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George Gabriel: Just to expand on that if I may, we believe there are just upwards of 460 children who are in the CAOMIEs and who were rejected for family reunion and who are likely to have their cases reconsidered. As Martha said, one of the critical interventions is essentially supporting those children to evidence their family links. I mentioned earlier the discrepancy in acceptance rates in Greece. Where we support a case, there is an 89% success rate; where we don't, it is just 9%. We looked at the 11 children who were put forward for transfer without our intervention. We looked at their cases and the rejection letters that were given to them, and they included things like spelling mistakes. Essentially, a child claims a family link, a social worker and a lawyer work with them, a take-charge request is issued to the UK, and the UK then investigates. Someone in the Home Office calls the family member and essentially seeks to verify the information in the take charge request that has come over.

The reasons given for rejection we came across were: slight variations in spelling around the child's name, which is being translated from either Pashto, Arabic, Farsi or Dari; slight variations in name formulation, which is obviously flexible; and differences in the given date of birth—most of these children won't have fixed date of births and birth certificates. That explains the huge discrepancy. Essentially, when a charity like ours is able to work with that child to support them to fully evidence their link, they get through. The same picture holds for France. We have taken 30 cases of children who were rejected through that CAOMIE process in France. What we have seen of the rejection basis is four-word reasons for rejections given in a spreadsheet to the directors of these children's centres. Can you imagine being a director of a children's centre in France, and being responsible for the care of 50 children who you are worried are going to abscond, and you are given four words to justify their rejection?

- Q14 **Chair:** Do those children actually receive written rejections? In Dunkirk on Monday, I spoke to a 13-year-old and a 14-year-old who had both been rejected for Dublin applications. Both said they had had nothing in writing at all and just an oral decision from someone at the centre, so they did not even know why it was that they had been rejected.

George Gabriel: No written reason for rejection is given. What we have seen from centre managers who have been supporting our work is, as I mentioned, Excel sheets that list the child's name, date of birth and claimed link, and as little as four words on why they were rejected. I think it is very important not to throw out the baby with the bathwater here, talking about children, which is that the flexible approach applied had enormous upsides. It built the confidence of the French authorities to invest in a serious programme of evacuation, essentially, and assessment and transfer. Clearly, there is further work to be done around appeal and access to justice for children who are denied transfer because of the inflexible approach. It is very important that, while we are rightly critical of the lack of access to justice for those children—hence they re-present in Dunkirk and Calais—we don't lose sight of the fact that 750 made it safely. That is 10 times the number that had been transferred in the entire existence of the Dublin III regulation between France and Britain.



Q15 Naz Shah: Can I just ask for a clarification? You talked about some of the decisions being reviewed. My understanding was that there was no appeals system in relation to the Dubs process. Is there an appeals system or is there not? How are you managing to get the decisions reviewed?

George Gabriel: With Dubs, you are right, there is currently no formal appeal process that we have encountered in France. We supported various legal challenges on behalf of a cohort of 30 children who we believed were eligible under the spirit of the Dubs amendment, but there is no formal access to an appeal. From our perspective, that needs to be emphasised and built in to the best interests determination. In Greece, there is a very strong position, where a large number of agencies, including colleagues around this table, participate in a best interests panel that essentially provides a very expert opinion to Government on whether it is in the interests of that child to transfer. If the Government reject that, there should be a pretty substantial explanation given to that best interests panel to review it.

Q16 Naz Shah: With that legal challenge that you mounted for those 30 children, what happened to them?

George Gabriel: Four of them were transferred and the rest were rejected against the French criteria that had been published. We encouraged the lawyers to give the children negative advice to encourage them just to claim asylum in France, because we were extremely worried about the state of their mental health.

Q17 Naz Shah: Finally, you talked about mental health, but what other issues have arisen? You have talked about representing people and checking legal challenge. You have talked about mental health issues. What other issues have arisen as a result of not having an appeals process?

George Gabriel: For Dubs children?

Naz Shah: Yes, with the Dubs amendment.

Martha Mackenzie: I think a lot of it comes back to that sense of children taking their lives back into their own hands. What we saw quite clearly during the Calais camp clearance was that children went very peacefully to the CAOMIEs. They stayed there because they recognised that it might provide a route to the UK and to joining loved ones. When they have not had that access to the UK or have not got a clear reason why they did not have that access, they have absconded from the CAOMIEs and moved back to the camps in Dunkirk and Calais. They are trying to make their own way to the UK. We have seen cases with young children arriving on the backs of lorries, taking very dangerous routes to get here. It is that sense that without any clear information—we want to labour the point right across the piece that it is not only about the existence of schemes, but about staying in touch with children and giving them clear information about the outcome of decisions—they just move on or they do not trust authorities or they make dangerous choices. As much as possible, even if they cannot be transferred under the scheme, we need

them to be given a clear reason why and they need to understand their options going forward.

Melanie Ward: Can I just give a little more detail on some of the points that were made about the capacity that exists in Greece to make any of this function? Greece is an interesting example, because the Home Office offered a significant number of staff to go out to Greece to support, particularly with Dubs, Dublin and other parts of the problems that Greece is currently experiencing.

Some 57 Home Office staff have been deployed to the Greek islands to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, but only one member of Home Office staff was deployed to Athens to look at how support could be provided around Dubs and Dublin. The Home Office initially offered more staff than that. We would say that one of the useful things that the Home Office could do to make Dubs possible from Greece, Italy and elsewhere in the Balkans and to speed up the Dublin process would be to offer to deploy a taskforce of staff to go there. That could include interpreters and child protection specialists as well as caseworkers. I know that a number of local authorities are keen to offer social workers to go out as well to help with the best interests assessments and the determination processes too. That is something practical that we could do.

Q18 **Chair:** What was the original commitment that the Home Office made to provide resources and support?

Melanie Ward: They made a couple of different offers. They originally offered 75 staff, and 57 were taken up, but they then offered a further buffer over the winter months to help, and that was not taken up.

Q19 **Chair:** How much of that was specifically to deal with Dubs and Dublin? I remember in January last year, they were offering particular help to deal with fast-tracking Dublin cases—it was before Dubs was in place—in Greece.

Melanie Ward: I don't know the number specifically for that; I only know the overall numbers and what was actually taken up. That is not well connected into any of the Greek systems and there is work to do there, but it could easily be resolved with just a little bit of effort and discussion.

Martha Mackenzie: I would just say very quickly that the panel that has been established in Greece to carry out the best interests assessment, or determination, which Save the Children sits on, is actually a very welcome model. It has been very collaborative. It includes local authorities, and NGOs and charities that have been working across Greece. If we could see a similar panel system carrying out very thorough best interests determinations for all Dubs cases across Europe, that would be very welcome. If the scheme does continue beyond this 150, we would really encourage that to be the mechanism. That is working well, and they deserve some credit for that.

Lily Caprani: On the point about capacity, it is my understanding that there is one Home Office-funded person working in Greece and one in



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Italy. There is clearly not the capacity whatever to do a good job. Not only that, but when other agencies on the ground, such as UNICEF and my colleagues here, are faced with doing the best thing for thousands of children whose best interests may be served in any part of Europe, not just in the UK, there is a complete absence of clarity and continuity about this scheme that makes it really quite difficult for anyone to prioritise working with the UK scheme. Our colleagues in Italy have said, “We’d happily go and identify those children and do a lot of that ground work for the UK Government, but right now, how could we possibly do that? We have no clarity or continuity whatever, let alone the capacity in UK-funded roles here.”

We need absolute clarity on whether the Dubs scheme is open and what the criteria are likely to be, assurances that capacity will be continuous and sustained, and additional capacity. It would not be huge amounts of money, and huge amounts of children are not likely to be relocated in the grand scheme of things, but in the absence of even that capacity and clarity, it is not surprising that the agencies on the ground and other Governments have raised an eyebrow as to whether this scheme is of any use to them at all at the moment. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: We have a Division—slightly earlier than we expected—so we will go and vote and then return.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: We have colleagues who are still walking back from the Division, but as we are already quorate, we may get going.

Q20 **Mr Winnick:** Ms Mackenzie, when you were speaking earlier, you said that the Dubs scheme should remain open—a sentiment that I know is shared by many in the House. Could you explain precisely what you mean? As you know, no number was given in the amendment, because the Government very much opposed at the time. When you say the scheme should remain open, what exactly do you mean?

Martha Mackenzie: What we would like to see is the continuation of a scheme like Dubs. It doesn’t have to be exactly the Dubs scheme, but it is quite important that it provides that safe and legal route for children who don’t have family members elsewhere in Europe or in the UK. We don’t think it is going to be huge numbers of children. We don’t think there is going to be an influx, if it remained open. If you carry out an individual best interest assessment for each child refugee and find out which children would be best served by being in the UK, it will be quite a small number of children. By leaving the scheme open rather than setting specific numbers that ultimately lead to restrictive criteria, you can have a full and thorough best interest assessment and accept that the UK will regularly re-consult with local authorities to make some space available for these children. It is essentially a bilateral relocation scheme within Europe, which we would



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strongly commend to the Government as the way forward and a way to keep children safe.

- Q21 **Mr Winnick:** To play the devil's advocate—I emphasise that I sit on the Opposition Benches—the Government would say that what you have replied to my question would mean in effect that it would be open-ended for a long time to come. There would be no limit on the children who could come to the United Kingdom because there is a humanitarian crisis, to say the least, in Syria and Iraq, and where would be the end?

Martha Mackenzie: We do understand some of the pull factor arguments, which is why, as Lily said, the original cut-off date for eligibility was set at 20 March. One thing we might suggest is that although we would like that cut-off date to be extended, because Dubs has taken a long time to get up and running, you would still maintain a cut-off date like that; and that would stop, as you have said, this being an open-ended scheme.

- Q22 **Mr Winnick:** So there would be a cut-off date?

Martha Mackenzie: There would be a cut-off date in terms of eligibility for the scheme. It would be quite a small number of children. The last couple of years have shown us that the number of spontaneous arrivals in the UK has carried on. There are a lot of children who continue to make their way here—unaccompanied child refugees who are granted refugee status when they arrive—but they do that through dangerous and illegal means. By setting up something like this, rather than it being an influx, it would be a controlled systematic way for children to reach the UK during what is, as you have said, a major humanitarian crisis.

- Q23 **Mr Winnick:** I am going to put a question that I have heard from various people, certainly outside the Commons. It is not my view. If it was, I would say so, whether it was popular or not. When the comparison is made with what happened when children were taken in, like Lord Dubs himself, people have said they were children in every possible sense. The age range is different here. It would be most unusual, to say the least, if the age range of the children we are discussing was the same as nearly 80 years ago. How could they be such in the camps and so on? What is the response of the four of you to the fact that they are teenagers? They are almost certainly, although some would deny it, under 18. I don't think anyone has suggested otherwise. Nevertheless, they are not children in the sense that people speak about children.

Lily Caprani: I will be very clear. We say a child is a child until their 18th birthday. That is enshrined in UN principles. If they are 15, 16 or 17, they are still just as vulnerable, perhaps more vulnerable, to exploitation. Often for the teenage boys, they have been at the greatest risk of being recruited in their country of origin. They are at huge risk, which is why they flee, or their parents want them out of harm's way as soon as possible. We heard some really awful things said when teenagers started to arrive in the UK from Calais. First, none of us is advocating that adults be treated as children. We agree there must be a cut-off date, which is at 18, but. Whether someone is 10, 12, 14 or 16—I have a 16-year-old son—



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and I don't think I would like him to be living on his own in a refugee camp and falling prey to people traffickers. They are just as vulnerable and in need of protection, no matter what their age is. We have to be very clear about that. The criteria applied in France, where we saw an arbitrary cut-off of 12, was something we vehemently disagreed with. It goes against all of our principles. We are a country that respects children's rights and we have ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child. It is absolutely clear that that means 18 years old as an adult.

- Q24 Mr Winnick:** Presumably that is the view of the rest of you. The last point I want to make is about the appeals system. Mr Gabriel, you spoke strongly about the fact that there is no formal system, as we know, and there is no way in which it is easy to challenge a decision where a particular person or child is not allowed in. Do you think that a formal system is practical? A formal system with appeal would mean someone representing the Home Office coming along to argue against, an adjudicator and so on and so forth. Do you think that any of that is practical?

George Gabriel: It varies. It depends what scheme we are talking about. Under the Dubs provision, having formal ability to challenge and redress will increase confidence across the board in precisely the questions you were raising earlier with some of the controversy over things like age assessment. The more there is an opportunity for both sides to be properly heard and impartially adjudicated, the more confidence the scheme can inspire in the public. With the Dubs scheme there is a natural space for that process to be developed such that it remains quick and comparatively light by incorporating some kind of appeal stage into the best-interests system and infrastructure. Should there be a best-interests assessment that says, "Yes, the child should be transferred", and still the Home Office were to come back and say, "No"—I cannot imagine that scenario being very likely—having the opportunity for both sides to be properly heard by an independent body of child protection specialists seems like a relatively robust check, even if it is not a full formal legal proceeding.

- Q25 Mr Winnick:** Have you made representations along those lines, that there should be a different system—there's no system at the moment—in order to challenge a decision?

George Gabriel: Certainly, but with respect to France, because obviously there has not been any implementation in Greece or Italy. In France, we had some very questionable criteria applied, and we had no overarching best-interests infrastructure sat around it. Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and other sites might be an opportunity to strengthen the Dubs provision so that it builds public confidence in the ability to help child refugees such that it genuinely and fully respects their best interests. In Calais, that was where we had to bring challenges on behalf of these 30 children, because they were being excluded for reasons that we considered to be arbitrary and against their best interests.

- Q26 Tim Loughton:** The people traffickers whom we spoke about earlier,



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what do we do about them? It seems that no one is getting prosecuted, they are as bold in their trade as ever and they seem to be getting people across the Channel with a degree of success. Who should be doing more, and what?

Lily Caprani: There is one way to destroy the business model and that is to provide safe and legal routes to children. They turn to people traffickers when they have no other option. For obvious reasons there are many ways to prevent children being vulnerable to an interest in paying smugglers or in trafficking—which is often what happens after smuggling becomes unaffordable from countries of origin—which is to do with investing our development assistance money, which we do very well in this country, to prevent children being in that position in the first place. Once children have arrived in Europe, we know, they will only turn to traffickers when there is no system working for them and when they have lost faith and hope, have been let down, do not feel able to trust the advice they are getting or do not have any advice whatever. George made a very strong point earlier on. The cancellation of the Dubs scheme is a good win for people traffickers—there is money to be made, because children will try to get to their families or to places of safety one way or another.

There is one other obvious way to do this. The Dublin criteria at the moment, which is about family reunion, have a very broad definition of “family”, whereas the UK immigration rules outside the Dublin system are much more restrictive. So if you are coming from outside Europe and you want to join a family member in the UK, currently your best option is probably to try to get to Europe, to get into the Dublin system, in order to reach a family member, rather than to make an application from your country of origin. One thing that the Government could consider is to look at their own immigration rules and saying, “Actually, is there more we could do to prevent them having to make that journey with a trafficker?”

George Gabriel: I would echo both points. We represented three Syrian orphans, all under the age of 12, who were living in Sadad, by Homs. Their parents had been killed and they were living in the bombed-out house of their family. They applied for family reunion to reunite with their uncle, who lives in Winchester, and their grandmother, who were their sole surviving relatives. They fit under that discretionary bracket of family reunion that Lily was describing. They were rejected, sadly, and at that point the family sought legal advice and we came into contact with them. It was only with the intervention of some great support from people like Mr Burrowes that we managed to secure their transfer.

Q27 **Tim Loughton:** So they came directly from Syria to Winchester?

George Gabriel: Yes. So we had to get them out of Syria, in order for their transfer.

Q28 **Tim Loughton:** So the trick is to make that work better, and without all the rigmarole that you, Mr Burrowes and everyone else had to go through?



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Lily Caprani: Let's be clear. In most cases, they wouldn't have had that support and the vast majority never will get it. In all likelihood, they'd have either had to stay there and risk their lives or find some other, illegal route, and it would probably have involved them paying a lot of money to a smuggler.

Q29 **Tim Loughton:** So the principle of the scheme that the British Government have favoured of taking families and children from the region directly—we can say it should be a bigger scheme, and that it should be speeded up or whatever—surely is the right principle, rather than mopping up after people have taken these exceedingly dangerous journeys. Why was it then that, in the case of the Aegean, after the EU did a deal with Turkey, all of a sudden those flotillas of highly dangerous boats coming across—all at the hands of people traffickers, just about—dried up almost instantaneously?

Melanie Ward: People have been coming by other routes, though. Every time a country tries to make it harder for people who are already in Europe to move around, and every time more walls are put up and more police defences are put in place, the price of the smugglers goes up, as long as the push factors remain so strong.

I refer you to something that Rory Stewart, the Department for International Development Minister, said at an event we held last night on Syrian refugees. He said it's really important that we all try to imagine what it must be like to be a Syrian who is bombed out of their home, has to flee to another country with nothing—no possessions—and ends up somewhere perhaps like Asraq camp in the Jordanian desert, where you live in a container, where you're fenced in, you have no right of movement, you can't work, and your family don't have the chance of a decent education. We should imagine what it's like to be there, year after year after year, wondering maybe whether you might one day get to go home. That's how strong the push factors are for some people.

One thing that the UK Government could do in that regard would be to lead an international effort to increase massively the resettlement places that are available to vulnerable Syrian refugees and others. It's not doing that at the moment, but there's a need. The UN estimates that there is a need for 1.19 million resettlement places worldwide, and what is actually doable is far, far from that, and Donald Trump is backing away from that and making it even less.

Until a point where there is a reasonable number of safe and legal routes for people to find protection and safety, then some people will turn to smugglers. We welcome a crackdown on smugglers, but we're not law enforcement experts; we're humanitarian agencies.

Q30 **Tim Loughton:** I don't disagree with any of that or with what the Minister has said, and those of us who have travelled to camps have seen the situation. But we have also seen places like the Zaatari camp, where, in highly difficult and challenging circumstances, people are looking after better than one might imagine. The fact is that 85% of the kids from the



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Zaatari camp are getting some form of an education, and there are schemes and charities working to recruit Syrian teachers into schools in Jordan, and other buildings can be used as schools. That's not enough—there needs to be more—but when does that become less attractive than giving God knows how much to a people trafficker in a boat that stands a very large chance of not making the journey?

That is what I'm trying to get back to. If anybody is at fault in any of this— we can complain about Governments not doing enough, or whatever—it's people who are taking advantage of that misery. And it just strikes me that none of them are being brought to book.

George Gabriel: If I may, I would echo many of the points made by the panel already. I think one specific area of enforcement we would love to see strengthened is Dunkirk. The situation in Dunkirk is an absolute scandal. Safe Passage is unable to operate openly in Dunkirk. We have to act via intermediaries, to assist children to get legal representation to get reunited with their families, because the trafficking networks are so thick there that if we act publicly the children who we are working with are at risk of reprisals, and I can't guarantee the security of my staff, and that is in northern France. So I would love this Committee to inquire—

- Q31 **Tim Loughton:** So whose responsibility is it to do something about that? When this Committee went to Calais and were taken round, we went to the camps and were pointed out where the traffickers lived—some of them actually have some quite smart houses. Everybody knows who they are. Why are they not brought to book?

George Gabriel: It is a combination of things. One specific thing this Committee could do would be to inquire of the Home Office, of the enormous sums of money we described being given to immigration enforcement in Calais, what proportion is earmarked for specific legal enforcement, targeting the trafficking networks operating in hotspots that we know are particularly active.

- Q32 **Tim Loughton:** But we don't have a locus there. That surely is down to the French authorities.

George Gabriel: But we have a very substantial bilateral relationship pertaining to immigration management around the Calais and Dunkirk areas. In the past, the UK has given, we think, a sum of a quarter of a million pounds to France Terre d'Asile to work with people who are identified as being at risk of trafficking. It would be very, very useful to understand what proportion of the money given to the French authorities to manage migratory pressures around Calais is earmarked specifically for trafficking enforcement. There is an enforcement angle of it.

I echo the points about the prevalence of push factors and the need to ultimately eliminate the need for trafficking by the creation of safe and legal routes. There are a couple of very simple ways that could be done—for example, strengthening the focus on family reunion provisions within the UK's resettlement commitment. You talked about children in Lebanon. At what point does it become a trade-off? Those with family links, and



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particularly children, are particularly vulnerable because they have a defined destination. The Dubs intervention is a very smart one, because it can focus on those who are trafficked or at particularly high risk. We must ensure that Dublin functions within Europe and that family reunion provisions operate more widely.

In Canada, they have a very well-established community sponsorship scheme. One was recently announced and created by this Government. We laud and celebrate that, but it operates in quite a restrictive fashion compared with the Canadian set-up. For a refugee family here in Britain, if the uncle in Winchester who works as a doctor were in Canada, he would have been able to raise a sum of money and, once he reached the threshold, work with the Canadian Government and UNHCR to essentially pay for the cost of the transfer of those three children. We think by either broadening the provisions within the existing resettlement strategy or developing and strengthening provisions around community sponsorship, you could take a major impetus for people to move from a region to here unsafely and illegally off the table.

- Q33 **Tim Loughton:** In fact, this Committee pushed the Home Secretary previously on allowing communities to get together and practically support Syrian families or whoever it may be.

George Gabriel: Imagine the plight of this uncle who was unable to do anything for so long.

Martha Mackenzie: I am not sure if you are hearing from the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner on this, but he travelled to Europe last year with the specific task of making recommendations around some of the policies the UK Government could implement to intercept these smugglers and traffickers. I know he has done a lot of work in this area and made a number of recommendations. It would definitely be worth hearing from him.

- Q34 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Can I take you back, Ms Ward, to what you were saying about Home Office personnel in Greece? Sometimes when we stand up in the House of Commons and demand that the Home Office does more there, they say, "Well, we've got 58 staff," or 75 and so on. You suggested that only one is involved in the Dublin process. Are the rest all involved in implementing the EU Turkey deal?

Melanie Ward: Yes.

- Q35 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. You also said at one point that the Home Office had offered more. What happened to that offer? Who turned it down and why?

Melanie Ward: I am not sure what happened. It does not seem to have been taken up, for whatever reason. Making a clear offer of a taskforce of a staff, perhaps with a very specific aim of implementing Dubs and making Dublin work more effectively would be a really positive and productive thing to do. I know from some of the council leaders—for example, the leader of Camden Council and one of your next witnesses—that there are



local authorities that would be willing to offer social workers to go and help and be part of such a taskforce.

- Q36 Stuart C. McDonald:** Ms Caprani, I suppose that if there are not the mechanisms and staff in place to do that work fairly quickly, children do not hang around at these hotspots of arrivals, and they move on and essentially are lost.

Lily Caprani: That is quite right—they go missing. We know that in Athens, a lot of the children are outside the formal system. In Italy, there are traffickers hanging around outside centres waiting for children to lose patience and leave. I echo the point that there are willing and able people in this country, as well as our staff in Greece, Italy and other parts of Europe, who want to make this scheme work and have the capacity and expertise to do so.

Going back to the question that David Burrowes asked about the UK Government's offer to other Governments and about playing our role, the need for very clear, consistent and sustained bilateral co-operation is critical. Without the Government offering its own capacity and commitment to a very clear scheme, there is no point in anyone putting in their energies and efforts on the ground and making that work. I can see why people might be confused—"Why is this not working?"—because there are lots of agencies on the ground, but there needs to be confidence that politically it will be sustained over a period of time and clarity about what that looks like. No Italian official right now understands what the Dubs scheme is or what it should do for them to help them deal with the crisis they are facing right now, even though there may be agencies willing to help.

- Q37 Stuart C. McDonald:** On the issue of Italy in particular, we heard a little about what the Home Office presence in Greece looks like. Is there any equivalent presence in Italy, and how large is it?

Lily Caprani: The same. There is one person, and they are not a new member of staff; they were already there, and they have got other jobs to do, too.

George Gabriel: To give you an impression, we have been operational in Italy for four months and have managed two transfers under Dublin. We have yet to secure a meeting, despite repeated requests, with Carl Dangerfield, who is the Home Office liaison person in Italy and in theory is responsible for ensuring a smooth Dublin and Dubs route.

- Q38 Stuart C. McDonald:** In earlier answers, you suggested that we don't need an army of Home Office officials to get this moving to a decent extent. What sort of size of taskforce would you need to make this work much better? Seven or eight, or one or two?

George Gabriel: It is partly about who gets into the field and partly about who is working on it in the UK. Broadly, we are all agreed that there is clearly a need for the UK Government to contract with an appropriate charity or organisation in the UK to support families to evidence their



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family link. I can't imagine that requiring more than four or five personnel. We, on average, spend between six and 12 hours supporting a child and their family member to evidence their claim. There is a UK need of four or five posts, and then in situation it depends exactly on how it is structured. A team of four or five personnel headed to Greece to work across different regions with different best-interest panels could radically increase the number of children identified in the process.

Lily Caprani: But, critically, that still won't work unless there is a clear mandate. Chucking some money and people at it will make no difference as long as there is no clarity about the length of the scheme and the criteria to be applied, and a sustained political commitment to it. The mandate is what really matters. We know that, for example, there was funding in Calais for a long time and it wasn't making any difference because the agency contracted by the French Government did not have a clear mandate to make the system work. Once that changed, we saw progress. Yes, it does need proper resourcing, but we also need a very clear decision about what the scheme looks like in the longer term.

Melanie Ward: Can I make a couple of other points on top of that? First, if the total number of people the Home Office has offered were deployed, that could make a real difference. Concerningly, our understanding is that the one Home Office staff member on mainland Greece is due to be withdrawn and brought home quite soon, and we are not even clear whether she is going to be replaced.

Let me make one point about why it is so important to ensure that child protection specialists and social workers are part of the delegation. This goes back to the question that Mr Winnick asked earlier about the age of children, which is something that has obviously played out in the newspapers and so on. It is far more likely that children are wrongly deemed to be adults than vice versa. That is our strong experience particularly from working in the Balkans. That goes back to the fact that child protection experts and staff do not have the skills they need at the appropriate levels in some of those countries, so there is a real difference that could be made there.

Q39 **Stuart C. McDonald:** It might be that nobody can answer this question, but the other thing the Government sometimes does when we ask about what it is doing in Greece and Italy is to point to its announcement in January about £4 million being available to provide life-saving assistance and protection in Europe, including Greece and Italy, and at the over £30 million being channelled through the European Asylum Support Office. Do you have any idea about how that money has been spent and whether it is making some sort of difference?

Melanie Ward: Some of it goes to programming on the ground, and some of it goes to organisations such as ours to provide support and assistance. That is really welcome. All across this, the support that the Government provides through aid, whether it is to refugees in Europe or the Syria region, really matters and makes a massive difference. We commend that. Some of it goes to the European Asylum Support Office. I'm not sure what



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happens to it then. I'm sure you could ask about that. There is a need to have specific and clear additional resource in Greece, Italy and, I would say, some of the Balkan countries.

- Q40 **Stuart C. McDonald:** A final question for you, Ms Mackenzie. When the Dubs amendment was first tabled, it obviously had the number 3,000 in it. As I recall, that number came about because Save the Children did a calculation and it used the EU relocation key to work out what the UK's reasonable contribution to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children would be. In fact, that was based on a total of around 30,000 throughout Europe. Is that right?

Martha Mackenzie: I think it ended up being about 11% of the overall estimate of the number of children who had come into Europe that year. So it was our sense that this was our fair share, based on the size of our population relative to other European countries, of the number of children that we could quite comfortably bring into the UK. We broke that down and that was about five children per parliamentary constituency. Our view of that included unaccompanied children without family links but also those who might have family links in the UK as well. That is where the number came from in the first instance.

- Q41 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Sure. But the total number throughout Europe now has roughly trebled—we are talking about 80,000 or 90,000 unaccompanied children.

Martha Mackenzie: Since the start of the humanitarian crisis? Yes. I think we saw about 28,000 children come in through Italy last year, 90% of whom were unaccompanied, so this is not a problem that is going away.

Stuart C. McDonald: So it was a fairly modest proposal at the outset.

- Q42 **Nusrat Ghani:** I want to move on to the kind of care and services needed when children arrive in this country. Mr Gabriel, you spoke earlier on—forgive me, I did not make enough detailed notes—about what capacity you felt there was within local authorities. Unfortunately, that tends to contradict what we are told: local authorities tell us that they do not have the capacity and that they already have children in care that they need to find homes for. You said that there is capacity in local authorities and I would like to know how you calculate that figure, please.

George Gabriel: Part of it is public information available through Freedom of Information requests that were tabled, and it is partly through reports published by the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Particularly, there was a report which I can send—I do not have the exact date it was published—that announced that the funding offer around unaccompanied minors was insufficient to recoup half the costs of looking after someone. So my first point would be—

- Q43 **Nusrat Ghani:** It is not about the funding. It is about the spaces they have to home them. Have you been able to calculate how many foster places there are for them to go to?



George Gabriel: The first thing I would say is the capacity is contingent on the funding offer. Within the funding offer that is currently on the table, that is where we have the figure that 0.07% is what local authorities should be expecting and planning against. That would mean there are 8,114 spaces in the UK.

Q44 **Nusrat Ghani:** What does spaces mean? Are they homes? Are they beds? Are they parents or families?

George Gabriel: 0.07% of the total child population at a local level is what local authorities are meant to be provisioning for care—that is the target that this Government has set them to achieve. So the first thing I am doing is pointing to the inadequate funding offer. The second thing is, within the Government's own standard for what local authorities should be providing, the last figure we have—admittedly that is from March 2016—is that 4,210 children were here, which means that there is very significant headroom.

The third thing I would respond with is that we know, for instance, from our work at local level with local authorities—I know you will hear from the leader of Hammersmith and Fulham later—that a significant number have indicated that they are prepared to go further than is currently the case, but many of the places they have offered have not been taken up. Lewisham, for instance, has offered 23 places and so far it has received one child.

We also know from efforts at local level that 10,000 people signed up to express interest in fostering an unaccompanied minor through Home for Good, and a very small proportion of them have been able to access that because there is a long lead-in time for those people to get approved and because there has not been a process in most local authorities by which the specific willingness of a community to protect a refugee child has been able to have been married up with the local authority's ability to do that. Now, an increasing cohort of councils are showing that flexibility and they are making significant progress.

Q45 **Nusrat Ghani:** So there were 23 places in Lewisham, and we are going to hear from Hammersmith and Fulham.

George Gabriel: We had other specifics. Birmingham have indicated that they are willing to take 79 more children. Bristol have indicated to us that they are willing to take 10 more. I think in Hammersmith and Fulham two spaces are remaining.

Q46 **Nusrat Ghani:** So the numbers we are talking about are very few, aren't they, considering how many spaces we need? A couple of hundred spaces are available. So what can local authorities do? Moreover, what can we do to encourage people not just to come forward and say "We want to do this," but to follow the process through so that more foster places end up becoming available?

George Gabriel: I point out that if Lewisham has 22 spaces going and only 150 children are proposed to be resettled through the Dubs

programme in its entirety, that is a very significant proportion just to go to one London borough. Proportionally, we are actually finding that there are quite large volumes of capacity.

To your specific point, a huge amount could be done through the LGA and other forums to help share learning and best practice at local authority level, to help channel the interest and good will that we know exists to try to support refugee children into foster carers actually fostering unaccompanied minors. Streamlining and smoothing that process could benefit us all.

Q47 Nusrat Ghani: Do you want that process to be shortened? Do you want people to have a shorter period of being assessed before they can take care of a family or a child?

George Gabriel: It is very important that people go through all the due diligence attendant on that process, but there are certainly councils that are showing an ability to fast-track and move very quickly through that screening and the relevant checks. It is not that any of them can be set aside; it is just that they can be prioritised for specific cohorts of people in relation to specific cohorts of children.

Q48 Nusrat Ghani: What can be done to encourage other local authorities that are a little bit nervous about making these spaces available?

George Gabriel: While I think that is a broad challenge around the national transfer scheme, there is a lot of good will among local authorities specifically on the Dubs programme. The Dubs programme in some ways represents an opportunity to engage a larger number of local authorities in the national transfer scheme. Any improvement that can be made to the financial offer within the NTS would be very welcome and responded to very gratefully by local authorities.

One of the tensions that is described between the Dubs and Dublin routes is that the Home Office is indicating that 50 of the places that were pledged for Dubs children are now being taken by Dublin children whose family placements have broken down. Last year, 200 Dubs children and 750 or 850 Dublin children came through, so if there is a high family breakdown rate, that is a real problem. We hear from the Government about the family breakdown rate—this is anecdotal, and I would love this Committee to be able to confirm what proportion of family placements through the Dublin route break down. Our experience of Safe Passage clients—we have 70 of them—is that our breakdown rate tops at about 20%. I understand that the Home Office sees a breakdown rate of up to 40%, so double the one that we experience.

Safe Passage offers a very limited support programme to children when they arrive and are reunited with their families to try to make that family placement function, and we think it would be a very sensible investment for the Government to make a very small funding provision for local authorities to keep children with their families when they are reunited and prevent them from moving into social care at very significant cost. The central allocation of funding is £41,000; Safe Passage offers less than



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£2,000 per child to support them to stay with their families. That is the total service provision cost that we reach.

- Q49 **Nusrat Ghani:** Do you have evidence that local authorities are not putting other vulnerable children at risk by accepting these new children?

George Gabriel: I don't really have evidence to prove the counterfactual, as it were. On the point about Dublin support, I understand that in Scotland, the Scottish Government specifically provisions to prevent children who are being reunited with their families from moving into social care. Mainstreaming that would obviously make spare capacity for children in a local community who might need support and protection. Also, the provisions we have just discussed around ensuring that couples, families and individuals who want specifically to foster an unaccompanied minor are able to do so expand the broader capacity in the local area to meet the needs of existing children as well as those of unaccompanied minors.

- Q50 **Nusrat Ghani:** My final point is on people trafficking. We have talked about the power that people traffickers have and how difficult it is to prosecute them. Are you concerned that people traffickers might move over as the children come over, to continue trafficking them across the country?

George Gabriel: We certainly see that the trafficking networks are not one side of the border or the other. They function effectively by being both, so that certainly calls for stringent enforcement in the UK.

- Q51 **Nusrat Ghani:** There are concerns that they might be coming over as the children come over, so extra resources will have to be in place to try to locate them, prosecute them and keep them away from the children who have come over to this country. My concern is that the children are vulnerable, and even if they are placed in a safe place, traffickers might try to access them to continue to try to profit from them.

Martha Mackenzie: This is partly why schemes like Dubs and making Dublin work effectively are so important. When children arrive spontaneously—those who make their own way here—there is not a controlled entry and they are much more likely to disappear and fall into the hands of people who might be this side of the channel as well. If you have a controlled, managed scheme and children can come into a ready-made local authority place, that protection and support is already in place to intercept them and make sure that they are much less likely to go missing. Again, those safe and legal routes to enter the UK are critical in disrupting this model.

- Q52 **Nusrat Ghani:** But children are arriving spontaneously and unaccompanied, so how should a council prioritise if they have limited spaces? For example, there are 23 at the moment in Lewisham. How should they prioritise? Do they prioritise unaccompanied children who have arrived spontaneously or those who come over with Dubs?

George Gabriel: A council's primary obligation is obviously to the children of the people that it is elected to serve. It is very important that councils meet the needs of the community that they are elected to represent as a



first priority. The question is what a community can do beyond that. We believe that the more capacity that can be put towards planned resettlement programmes and relocation under the terms of the Dubs scheme and the Dublin regulation, the better because, as Martha has said, that cuts the smuggling out as an option. There is an existing capacity problem in Kent, and Croydon faces similar challenges, hence the need and rationale for a national transfer scheme globally. This is where a strong, clear dialogue between central Government and local authorities is essential because there are different cohorts of children who have distinct needs that must be met and addressed.

- Q53 Chair:** A couple of clarifying questions. Is there any evidence about what happened to the number of spontaneous arrivals each week or each month in the autumn, when the Dubs scheme was brought in and when the Calais camp was being cleared?

George Gabriel: I think that we have heard the same anecdotal evidence that the number plummeted. There was a significant reduction in the number of transfer requests from Kent to elsewhere across the UK under the national transfer scheme during that window, which indicates that that was probably the case. That information may be publicly available in the quarterly statistics that are out tomorrow.

Lily Caprani: I think that we will see the figures soon, but that is what we have all heard anecdotally, and what we would expect to see.

- Q54 Chair:** We were talking earlier about the review of the failed Dublin cases from Calais and the work that Citizens UK is doing with some of those children. How are those who do not have any record of why they have been turned down, or who are not in system, to have their cases reviewed? Is there a process in place that you are confident in for reviewing all those cases?

George Gabriel: For a process to have our confidence, the children would need to have access to independent advice on their rights and eligibility and would need to be supported to access that. Currently that does not exist.

- Q55 Chair:** So is it your understanding that all the cases that have been turned down as Dublin cases will be looked at again, or only those where the children themselves reapply?

George Gabriel: That is not given in any great detail in the announcement. We have heard that 460 cases will be reviewed, which matches our understanding of the total number of children who claimed Dublin eligibility and were then rejected.

Martha Mackenzie: Further to the possibility of a taskforce that Melanie raised, and which we would also support, is the idea of having a point of contact in each country to which organisations like ours could refer the cases and that those people would have a route into the Home Office. That would be quite an efficient way of making sure that when we are aware of such cases, we can raise their profile.



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- Q56 **Chair:** My sense was that whatever the process that ran up to it, once the work that was done between Britain and France in the autumn kicked in, it was quite impressive, and involved a lot co-operation. That now seems to have broken down. Is that a fair assessment?

George Gabriel: That was closed by the UK Government, who informed the French Government that they would no longer be conducting expedited transfers. We urged them to reconsider that. It is worth noting, particularly in the current context of the Brexit negotiations, that that expedited implementation of the Dublin regulation makes the UK a continent-wide leader in proactively living up to its responsibilities under Dublin III, and that is surely to our advantage.

- Q57 **Chair:** The Home Secretary said that part of the reason for closing the Dubs scheme was that the French authorities had asked us to do so because they did not want the Dubs scheme to continue. Are you aware of that being the case?

George Gabriel: As far as I am aware, the French authorities are keen for the UK to receive as many children as possible, and we were very vocal and public about that during the demolition window. Subsequent to that, it is certainly clear that the French authorities want to do everything within their power to avoid any pull factor to Calais and northern France. That is why we would counsel that the real long-term solution is to make a handover of the CAOMIE centres that were established across France permanent, so that any child that is presenting as eligible under Dublin or Dubs, if that is to be continued, can be relocated there safely, well away from trafficking interests and the key risk points and flash points around the tunnel, so that their claim can be speedily and safety assessed.

Melanie Ward: It is really important that Dubs does not only apply to France, but it should be extended to Greece, Italy and to some of the Balkan countries, such as Serbia, where conditions for children are really awful.

- Q58 **Chair:** The example somebody gave was that it costs about £3,000 at the moment to get an attempt, with a people trafficker or with smugglers, to cross the channel. Is it fair to say that the teenagers who have come back out of the system and who presumably do not have £3,000 will either make illegal attempts—jump on to the lorries or trains—on their own, or have to resort to prostitution or some other kind of gang work in order to get the money to try and make an attempt to cross?

Lily Caprani: There is a really clear continuum from smuggling to trafficking, and they are not the same thing, but they are also related to one another. Often we start with a situation where someone with money can afford to pay a smuggler; they may only be able to pay some of the way, and then they have to begin to work off their debt. Or they may become trafficked, where they are not actively choosing to pay off their debt, but they are being exploited, so that that person can make that money they would have otherwise made as a smuggler. It is not very black and white.



We know that children who have got this far probably do not have lots of money to pay smugglers. Sometimes it is a guarantor, a family member, who guarantees their passage, but very often they are essentially in debt bondage to that person. They may have to perform some kind of illegal labour. It may be sexual exploitation. It may be that they are abused for their labour—maybe working in drugs, for example, when they make it to the UK. Very often, they have somebody making promises and offering a lot of misinformation, in the absence of clear knowledge of what their actual rights are.

Q59 Chair: So there are currently still thousands of children who are alone in Europe, who arrived in Europe before last spring—before the Greece-Turkey deal was put in place—who are still at risk, either homeless or not in centres, particularly in Greece and Italy and also some in France, as a result of failed processes. The consequence of the closure of the Dubs scheme and the expedited Dublin scheme is that there is now a lot of confusion, both among those young people and among aid workers trying to work with them. And more of those children and teenagers are being driven into the arms of smuggler and trafficking gangs as a result. Would you say that a fair summary is that Britain is not doing what it could be doing, and is not living up to the spirit of the Dubs amendment?

George Gabriel: I would certainly agree with that. One thing we would just emphasise, on the March 20 cut-off date—obviously it isn't in the legislation but was in the discussion in Parliament—is that if a cut-off date is to be approved on the basis of clear evidence that a pull factor does exist, we would urge it to be as close to the implementing window as possible. If one is set for 20 March, and to date not a single child has been transferred from Greece under Dubs, it is setting the scheme up to fail, and certainly is not living up to the spirit of the amendment; because of course that child should be making proactive efforts to try and integrate in Greece if there is no realistic prospect of transfer. Likewise in Italy, where of course there exists no EU-Turkey deal equivalent for Libya.

Martha Mackenzie: I agree with that, and I think it is particularly the case for Italy—that sense of re-evaluating that 20 March cut-off date. We know that a lot of children who arrive in Italy do move on. It is an incredibly popular trafficking route. Thinking about this holistically again is so important going forward.

Melanie Ward: I completely agree with your summary. I would say it is also not just about the spirit of Dubs. It is about whether or not the UK is a responsible global actor in the context of a worldwide displacement crisis.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence, much of which has been, I think, very disturbing, particularly about the risks some of the children and teenagers still face. We will move on to our second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tam Baillie, Councillor Stephen Cowan, Richard Crellin and Councillor David Simmonds CBE.

Q60 **Chair:** I welcome our second panel. Apologies for the delay in starting and the timing of the votes. Thank you very much for joining us. Can each of you introduce yourselves? Clearly you have different perspectives on the current situation, so could you give some quick reflections on what you think the position is at the moment in terms of the capacity that local councils have, particularly to help with the Dubs scheme? I know that some of you have also been involved in visits to other parts of Europe, so could you also give your views on the circumstances for children as a result of the closure of the Dubs scheme and the changes to the Dublin scheme? We will start with Mr Baillie.

Tam Baillie: Thank you for the invite at very short notice. I am here as the Children's Commissioner for Scotland. Collectively, the UK Children's Commissioners have expressed deep concern about the Government's recent announcement. I myself have described it as a shameful step back. I say that because while a figure was not agreed during the passage of the amendment and the Government gave notice that they would set a limit, they did nothing to contradict the belief that 3,000 children would be accommodated or would get entry to the UK under this. They have now come up with a figure which seems to me to be based on an assessment of capacity at local authority level. We know fine well that the amounts of money available to local authorities are the bare minimum to provide accommodation just for those children, but there are a lot of challenges in providing the accommodation. It is not just about foster care costs; there are other associated costs as well.

We are now in a position where we have 200 children, with what looks like a cap of a further 150. We have just heard testimony from people who have knowledge and information about children on the ground that there are still thousands of children. We should be taking a lead in providing that compassionate humanitarian response to what is currently still an ongoing crisis in Europe. I will expand on some of that as the evidence is given.

Q61 **Chair:** Councillor Simmonds?

Councillor Simmonds: I am David Simmonds. I chair the Local Government Association's asylum, refugee and migration task group, which has been responsible for co-ordinating the local government response to a number of Government schemes, including the Syrian resettlement scheme and what is happening with Dubs.

To try to answer your specific questions around capacity, when we look at the available funding at the moment, the Home Office rate is £41,610 for under-16s and £33,215 for ages 16 and 17, and falls to £200 a week for those who are 18-plus. One of the key issues is that 75% of those arriving in the UK as unaccompanied minors are aged 16 or 17, and 93% are male. Less than 1% are under the age of 10, so overwhelmingly we are talking about older teenagers who very quickly become care leavers. Points were



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raised earlier about the availability of foster families. In fact, it is not so much about foster families; it is care leaver accommodation that is the key concern for local authorities.

It is also important to reflect, in terms of the local authority response to the requests that have come out for support, that Dubs is a distinction which largely exists outside the UK. From a local authority perspective, if a child is unaccompanied, that triggers their responsibility under the Children Act 1989, which means that that person becomes a child in care or a care leaver, depending on their age at the time. So although there are authorities that have made a political commitment in saying, "We are particularly keen to support Dubs," we do not have a legal remit to say, "We'll take a Dubs child, but we won't take a Dublin child." If the child is unaccompanied, that is the thing that triggers the responsibility.

If we look at the approximately 8,000 children who arrived as refugees, around half of those were unaccompanied, so the current rate of Dubs arrivals is around one in 10 of the children who have gone into the care of local authorities. The overwhelming majority of both spontaneous and other arrivals are children under either Dublin or existing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrangements.

The final observation I would make was very clearly made by George from Safe Passage UK. Capacity is almost a chicken and egg situation. It costs money. We have children's home providers; we have care leaving support providers who are saying, "Yes, we can find you some advisers and we can find you some accommodation," but that has to be paid for. The ADCS report that came out was very clear in saying that at the moment that funding covers about half the cost. Clearly, local authorities are under significant pressure. I would point the Committee to the cabinet report that Leicestershire County Council did. They reflected that they already had large numbers of refugee children, so they were not willing to take additional numbers under the national transfer scheme, but they analysed the cost impact in quite a lot of detail to determine why they were arriving at that decision. I think that would certainly illuminate some of your thinking about the different pressures there.

Q62 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Councillor Cowan?

Councillor Cowan: Hello. Hammersmith and Fulham Council took the view that it needed to do more than its bit, as this is the largest migrant crisis in the post-war period, so when the Government announced on 1 July the national transfer scheme, we were one of the councils that volunteered in the voluntary scheme, and that immediately took us to our limit of 24 children. What was evident was the issue around Dubs children, and we initially said we would take an extra 10 children and then upped that to 15. We now have, in effect, 13 children and we have been pestering the Home Office since October, asking them to provide us with the other two—the places have been sitting vacant since that period.

As Councillor Simmonds said, there is a funding issue. There is an overall shortfall per year of about a third of a million pounds for Hammersmith



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and Fulham having taken this action. I would say now that if we could have a guarantee of full cost recovery for each of the children that the Government might want to take, for each year that child might be here, either pre-18 or post-18 until the age of 25, we would confidently say that we could take an extra 100 children over the next 12 months, which would make a significant dent in the 3,000 figure, let alone the 350 figure.

Our experience of dealing with the Home Office was an unusual one. We stated in *The Guardian* that we would take an extra 10 children, and the Home Office contacted us to say they had noted this and were going to unilaterally add our 10 Dubs children offer to the national transfer scheme total. So I asked the Minister to call me, which he promised to do on 17 July but then cancelled; that was the day before I visited the camp. What I found surprising was that the officials—one of whom, the director of family services, is sitting behind me—explained to me the Home Office were not pleased that we had offered to take Dubs children. Indeed, when we came to put a letter in, by October 2016, we had actually upped our offer to taking 15 children, which again is an expense to our borough, but again we found a lot of resistance from the Home Office in terms of actually wanting to work with us.

I find it hard to understand, having run a public body for some time now, why, if there is an offer of extra capacity, that isn't just snapped up, given the circumstances. On the whole, we think that there needs to be a much more comprehensive review of how the Government has approached Dubs children in particular. Considering everything that was mentioned by the previous panel about who the refugees are, where they are coming from and whether we take them from Syria, Greece or France—wherever we take them from, we would urge that Britain, as an international player, steps up and do its fair share if it wants to maintain its international reputation for acting as it did previously with refugees.

Richard Crellin: Thank you for inviting us today. I am a policy manager at the Children's Society. We provide services in England, and last year we worked with about 600 young people who were unaccompanied—they could have been undocumented—or in families, doing intensive one-to-one work with them, and about 700 children on more of a low-intensity offer around wellbeing, orientation and other needs that children might have in terms of making friends and settling into their community. So we see a whole range of different migrant children with different needs, and I can say that, particularly with the recent Calais closure, we are now coming into contact with a lot of Dublin children particularly and also, increasingly, Dubs children, although I will have some comments to make later about how difficult it has been for the voluntary sector in the UK to connect up with those children, due to the process.

In terms of capacity, the issue we would raise is that, as Councillor Simmonds and others in the previous panel pointed out, the financial question cannot be ignored. One of the things we would point to is that there has been an awful lot of work despite the lack of money and the financial difficulties. The DFE commissioned training for foster carers; it



was over-subscribed and has been extended to the end of the financial year. Many strategic migration partnerships have now appointed lead social workers, and that is really helping to develop capacity in different areas. There is the child trafficking fund and the controlling migration fund. I know from many colleagues in the voluntary sectors that we are all trying hard to work with local authorities to provide training, whether for social workers or for support staff.

While there is obviously a capacity issue, and much of that comes down to the costs of placements and of providing care, as we move forward there is going to be quite a burgeoning within this sector. There will be a lead time, and things take time to be established—one of the earlier panellists cited Home for Good—but within the coming months we can expect many more people being able to foster. There is strengthening of capacity and we are all working together to try to support our local authority colleagues in providing this care.

- Q63 **Chair:** Can I clarify what you just said? You said that the DFE's foster care training scheme was over-subscribed.

Richard Crellin: From what I understand, the Department for Education commissioned ECPAT UK and the Refugee Council to provide training for foster carers and support workers in, say, supported lodgings or supported accommodation, to help prepare them to support unaccompanied children. That scheme has now been extended beyond the period it was supposed to be for, until the end of the financial year, and they had very high uptake. That is from talking to colleagues at the Refugee Council and ECPAT UK.

- Q64 **Chair:** Interesting. Councillor Simmonds, do you know how many local councils did offer to take Dubs children? The Government use the figure of 450. Do you know how many councils are part of that?

Councillor Simmonds: We need to be clear that the Home Office was not in a position to say, "How many Dubs children will you take?" The question that was asked and was required in the context of UK law is, "How many unaccompanied children will you take in under the national transfer scheme?" It is not my place to defend the Home Office—they will say what they wish to say for themselves—but I understand, because it caused some frictions in local government as well, that there are councils coming forward saying, "I am willing to take Dubs children, but I am not willing to take children under some of the other schemes, particularly when their status may well change after they arrive in the UK."

The origins of the national transfer scheme were the large numbers who had arrived, principally in Kent but also in councils like my own, Hillingdon, and the rising numbers, again principally in the south-east of England, as an overspill consequence of that. The national transfer scheme's objective was to say, "How many unaccompanied children will you take in?" That was the question that was asked.

We know that before the inception of the scheme 89% of councils were already supporting at least some unaccompanied children. I expect that



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number will have risen significantly. In fact, Leicestershire is the only one I am aware of that has said it is not willing to participate further. That has the consequence that it will be taking in only those children who are spontaneous arrivals in Leicestershire, as opposed to additional ones who may be transferred in from elsewhere.

- Q65 **Chair:** But the Dubs amendment specifically asked for a consultation before deciding the number of children to take under the Dubs scheme. So it would have been open to the Government and the Home Office, under the Dubs amendment, to consult just specifically on the Dubs scheme.

Councillor Simmonds: I think that is the subject of a judicial review that is going on at the moment. Again, I am not a legal expert and I cannot comment on that. What I do know, following the Hillingdon judgment in 2003, which clarified the responsibilities of local authorities in respect of unaccompanied children, is that a distinction based upon the status of the child prior to their arrival in the UK is not one where a local authority could take a view that, "I am willing to take a child who arrived on this basis, but I am not willing to take a child who arrived on that basis." Either you are willing to support an unaccompanied child who comes to you, or you are not. There is not a legal basis for saying, "I will only take them if they meet certain criteria."

- Q66 **Chair:** If the Government wanted to promote safe legal routes, as opposed simply to responding in a passive way to those who have come through illegal routes, it would be possible for the Government to say, "We need active intervention to expand the safe legal route," and to look for additional places on that basis.

Councillor Simmonds: In my view, that is what the Government sought to do with the implementation of the national transfer scheme, which is something for which local authorities have been asking for a long time. Looking at it from a UK perspective, the operation of the Children Act, which says that a child automatically, by operation of law, becomes the responsibility of the local authority at the port of entry, meant you had huge pressure on a relatively small number of authorities—Croydon, Kent, Hillingdon and a small number of others.

So there needed to be a means by which those children and that responsibility could be distributed more evenly, given the latent capacity of other local authorities. I am not aware of any means under the operation of the Children Act where the Government could have said, "We want you to take in a specific group of children that we have identified." In my view, all they were in a position to do was to ask, "How much additional capacity will you have in the round for unaccompanied children, who may be coming in under Dublin, Dubs or any other scheme that is available?"

- Q67 **Chair:** The Government have referred to a 0.07% figure, which would include both spontaneous arrivals and the Dubs children. Do you have any figures on how many local councils currently meet that 0.07%?



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Clearly Kent does, but do you have a view about how many other councils do?

Councillor Simmonds: We can provide you with that information. From memory, there are about 20 councils that would meet that: Kent, Croydon, Hillingdon, Northamptonshire, Surrey and a number of other outliers around the country. The 0.07% was arrived at through the Home Office discussion with ADCS to look at what the consequences were.

It is important to recognise that one of the big challenges is that children who may have arrived in a particular area may not wish to move. I am certainly conscious of my experience in Hillingdon. We have young people who have arrived who we have put forward to the national transfer scheme. We would say, "Hammersmith and Fulham are offering places for NTS. Would you be willing to go?" The lawyers for the children for those children are saying, "UK law says you are with Hillingdon now, so you don't have to move." That will be a practical consideration because, of course, where the children are living is not necessarily the same place as the local authority that is responsible for caring for them.

Chair: It would be helpful if you could provide us with that information.

- Q68 **Mr Burrowes:** There is statutory provision behind this, but if the Government insisted on the 0.07% capacity, what does that mean? What is the capacity if they were to insist on 0.07% across the country in terms of NTS? How many places would that mean would be available?

Councillor Simmonds: That would bring us to about a doubling of the current numbers, so the 4,000 that are in care. That wouldn't be specifically Dubs—it would be unaccompanied children.

- Q69 **Mr Burrowes:** So it would be 4,000 to meet that legal obligation. To deal with the implementation, I understand the point about the Children Act and the role of local authority responsibilities, but looking at the responsibilities under section 67 of the Immigration Act, can you inform us? The Government said in their statement, "As required by the legislation, we have consulted with local authorities on their capacity to care for and support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children before arriving at this number."

Following the implementation of section 67, what was the quality of the consultation with your particular local authority? Perhaps you can talk more generally about across the LGA.

Councillor Cowan: We had a letter come in September, I think. It is currently subject to a judicial review about whether the consultation was thorough enough. We had that come through in September. I don't think it came to me. It was not registered as a thorough consultation. We would say that it didn't get picked up in the system, but at the same time as that was going on in September, we had already volunteered to take our full quota of national transfer scheme children and we had been offered ten extra. So the system wasn't picking up the different communications.

- Q70 **Mr Burrowes:** So you got a letter and then the letter wasn't picked up.



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Just going quickly across, in your borough or any other boroughs, did you get anything more than that letter?

Councillor Simmonds: There was certainly some correspondence from Ministers at both an official level and at a political level. One of the points the Local Government Association made was the importance of political buy-in at local level, not least because there has been a lot of parliamentary interest in this and quite a few MPs saying, "I'm bending the ears of my local councillors about it."

There have also been a number of consultation events at which Ministers and official representatives from the Home Office have spoken. I have been present at a couple of those, which have outlined the operation of the scheme. Similar to what happened with the Syrian scheme, although probably not to the same extent, those have taken place around the country, bringing together groups primarily based upon the Association of Directors of Children's Services regional groupings, to brief people and to seek engagement.

Q71 **Mr Burrowes:** To pick up on that point, from your position in the LGA was there a specific and adequate consultation on the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act?

Councillor Simmonds: That is a very difficult question to answer. The LGA and I have written to councils to encourage them to take part. Where there probably is some degree of misunderstanding and ambiguity is around this Dubs and the rest issue. On the question of whether the Government consulted adequately on Dubs, when you translate that into asking a local authority, the Dubs distinction cannot, by operation of UK law, exist at a local authority level.

Q72 **Mr Burrowes:** But the written ministerial statement said: "Local authorities told us they have capacity for around 400 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children until the end of this financial year." Is that accurate?

Councillor Simmonds: Local authorities have certainly not placed an explicit cap on the numbers. What we have said—

Q73 **Mr Burrowes:** This was a parliamentary statement.

Councillor Simmonds: What we said in our response is that—exactly as Stephen outlined—it is contingent on the funding. We know that there is latent capacity out there. There are organisations—some commercial, some voluntary—that are saying, "We can bring forward places in children's homes. It will be 40 grand a year for this child. We can find you some trained foster carers. That will be £700 a week. If you need the extra capacity, we can sell it to you." What we have said to the Government is, "You need either to make sure the funding is extended or you need to find another way of doing it." I would conjecture the Home Office has looked at their available budget for the operation of this scheme, their experience of working with Governments and authorities in other countries, and the local authority capacity.



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- Q74 **Mr Burrowes:** But that is not what it says here. It says, "Local authorities told us". When you make a judgment on your capacity, is it based simply on a financial year? You say you have legal responsibilities under the Children Act. That isn't, as I understand, a financial year consideration.

Councillor Simmonds: Correct.

- Q75 **Mr Burrowes:** So your legal responsibilities in terms of what you have capacity for is not contingent on a financial year. Is that correct?

Councillor Simmonds: If I understand the question, you are asking whether our legal responsibility would in effect go away because there was no funding available. The answer is: if the children have arrived in the country and are unaccompanied, no, it would not. The Hillingdon judgment again clarifies that lack of resource is not a defence for a local authority not fulfilling that responsibility. However, the key issue with Dubs is that it commits the Home Office to go to other countries to find the children and bring them to the UK. Assuming they arrive and they are unaccompanied, they would then by operation of UK law go into the care of the local authority. If you ask whether we can provide significant extra capacity, the answer is yes, but there are organisations out there that we will then need to pay to provide that capacity.

- Q76 **Mr Burrowes:** You said no when I asked whether it was accurate when local authorities told us that is the capacity.

Councillor Cowan: Yes, if I talk to council leaders across London, there is certainly extra capacity. The Lewisham example stands for itself: over 20 places sitting available that have not been picked up. There are all sorts of Government consultations done locally and nationally. Quite often they are done with a specific objective in mind. In this case, it does not look like the objective was to go and find extra places. It was a very low-key consultation. It was not picked up by large numbers of authorities and, as a consequence, I do not think it got an accurate figure.

- Q77 **Mr Burrowes:** Finally, you mentioned the Syrian VPR scheme and the consultation in relation to that. There is a five-year funding pledge and a sign-up to the 20,000. That is all in the bag. That is all clear. Everyone has signed up to that. Can you contrast that with the process and the commitment in relation to the implementation of section 67?

Councillor Simmonds: The Local Government Association and I personally have been very clear about the contrast. The Syrian scheme has felt like a model of how to work between central Government and local authorities to bring about the resettlement of refugees. It has brought forward voluntary offers of places to meet that requirement within 12 to 18 months of its having been announced when the deadline was still some years away. The ongoing challenge that we have had with unaccompanied children—I am going to say something positive about the Home Office—has improved quite dramatically in the last 12 to 18 months.

My council has been £2 million short every year, which our council tax payers have picked up for 15 years. The fact that children are largely separate from the normal operation of immigration processes is something



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that has been exploited by traffickers bringing children to this country for decades. Quite a few of us are very frustrated about that and have been banging on about it for a long time. It is positive that there is now much more interest in that. However, a lot more could be done. There are positive signs coming out of the Home Office. I am aware that they have rearranged some of their management arrangements and I hope that will provide a basis for a much more effective operation going forward.

- Q78 **Mr Burrowes:** Does that include the 3,000 children at risk from the Middle East and North African region? Have you come forward to make pledges on that and is there a defined, adequate process to meet the pledges for 3,000?

Councillor Simmonds: As far as I am aware, that is within the overall capacity of local authorities. When arriving at what was an appropriate number for Dubs, Government will also have considered what was the impact of that 3,000 within that context. We do know that that 3,000 is not just unaccompanied children; it may include some of their families. That will be contingent on some of the information from UNHCR.

Clearly, one of the questions in their minds would have been: if the total latent capacity is around 4,000, and we think there might be 3,000, of whom maybe half turn out to be unaccompanied, and there will then be spontaneous arrivals and Dublin arrivals, what is the number left that might reasonably equate to Dubs within the context of our budget?

- Q79 **Chair:** Just to clarify, the 0.07% Mr Gabriel was suggesting was around the 8,000 figure. He said that there were more than 4,000 in some form of local authority care at the moment. Do those figures sound accurate to you?

Councillor Simmonds: They do. I think the latest number was something like 4,210, as of 31 March 2016. There will be a census update from that to come. We do know that the number of asylum applications from children had risen by 15% up to September. There had been a 54% rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the care of local authorities. There has been a very, very rapid increase in the space of about the past three years.

- Q80 **Chair:** If all local authorities were able to meet that 0.07% figure, there would be current surplus capacity of around 3,000-plus. The Middle East and North Africa children we are expecting to be children at risk, a lot of them with their families and also spread over several years. So you would not expect that to absorb all of the remaining capacity in local authorities.

Councillor Simmonds: We don't know, but in terms of your analysis you are spot on. Let's say the capacity is around 8,000 to 8,500 nationally. We know there are a number of routes by which that capacity will be used up. The key challenge is that if you are asking for proactive offers of additional support, that there comes a point where local authorities will say there needs to be full funding to make that possible.

- Q81 **Chair:** I would like to follow up on this with a question about Scotland,



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because I know Scotland has also talked about having additional capacity that could be used. There is clearly an important point about the funding. Even given existing funding, Lewisham has clearly offered more places than are currently filled. I had heard that there were some Scottish councils that had also done so. Is your sense at the moment that, even within the existing financial envelope, there is spare capacity beyond what the Government have committed to?

Councillor Cowan: Yes. Talking to council leaders across London, there are certainly spaces that have not been filled. In our own case, we have two places sitting free and we are full members of the national transfer scheme. It is worth making the point that the national transfer scheme deals purely with children who have presented in the UK, normally in Kent or Croydon. It is a voluntary scheme and it has a capability of dealing only with children who may have been trafficked across the Channel.

The Dubs amendment was very specific. It dealt with boys under 12, children fleeing from Syria or Sudan and girls in France. The issue was that they were not being picked up. Indeed, it looked like the Government did not want to take them for all sorts of different reasons. The question is: what is the best way of taking children currently in Europe out of the refugee camps they are in and placing them in safe foster homes?

The easiest way, as Councillor Simmonds says, is if there is full cost recovery. Then we would take 100 children over the next year immediately. In fact, we might take more without full cost recovery. Is there going to be a scheme that allows children to get from refugee camps into safe haven in Britain? At the moment, the scheme of just allowing children to come through from a national transfer scheme is insufficient at doing that.

There are many different schemes. We are about to place a Syrian family in Councillor Simmonds's borough, which we are paying for. Again, there is a lack of co-ordination in that. Initially, I think, Hillingdon didn't want them but we are paying for them and are about to do that.

There is not necessarily the co-ordination. The only people who are capable of co-ordinating that are national Government. If the will was there, there would be a way. At the moment, what we struggle to see is the will.

Q82 **Chair:** Mr Baillie?

Tam Baillie: Talking about spare capacity is maybe not the best way of looking at it, because it makes it sound as if there were empty places that will be filled and that is just not the case. There is a long-standing national shortage of foster placements, and I include Scotland in that. Scotland has already taken 35 children under Dubs—of the 200, which is high, although we have been very willing to do that. To give you an example, 19 of those children are in Glasgow. They were not put in foster placements, because the placements were not there. Instead, we reopened a unit which was previously closed to accommodate those children until such time as other, more suitable accommodation was found. So to talk about spare capacity



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as if somehow there are hundreds or thousands of places that are washing around the system is not the case, but there is a willingness—I can speak from a Scottish perspective—to try to provide for these children in desperate circumstances.

That is where the importance of the finances comes in. I would not normally home in on them, but for a foster placement, £41,000 just about covers the costs. It does not cover the costs of the health needs of those children—many come in with post-traumatic stress disorders—the costs of the legal representation necessary to establish the children's proper refugee status or, in Scotland, the cost of the access to the guardianship scheme. So there are all sorts of on-costs that are way beyond the accommodation costs. If, as has happened in the example I gave, it was about residential care as opposed to foster care, you can count on the costs of residential care being at least three and sometimes four times as much as the cost of a foster placement. So that is some of the disincentive that you hear coming through from local authorities when they say, "Yes, we have x number of places." It is great that, despite that, people are responding in that human, compassionate way to provide for the children, but there has to be some equation in terms of making sure that, in order to provide the best for these children in distressing circumstances, the resources on the ground are not just local authority resources, so they can properly respond to the needs.

Q83 Tim Loughton: May I build on that point? It was very interesting what Councillor Cowan said—if there was full cost recovery, whatever that might be, it would instantly open up 100 additional places, potentially. No doubt other authorities would say the same thing. There is a financial constraint there, but I just want to extrapolate, based on what Mr Baillie has quite rightly said, what that actually buys. We have a shortage in England of around 10,000 foster placements for children who are already here, and the number of children coming into care is still increasing. We have a shortage of children-specialist social workers, to the extent that in one borough there is a 57% use of locums. There is a shortage of independent review officers, for example.

A child coming into care, either because they live here and come into care, or because they are treated as a child coming into care, as Councillor Simmonds has described—perhaps I should declare an interest as someone who knows Councillor Simmonds and worked with him when I was Children Minister in his capacity as chairman of the LGA committee. I also advise an independent fostering agency. All those considerations have to be applied to children who come in on whichever of these schemes—they still count as an unaccompanied child in need. While I admire the good will being shown by your council, Councillor Cowan, and others, practically how well can we provide that support package? It is not just a matter of 100 children arriving on your doorstep; they need to be supported and it must become sustainable.

Councillor Cowan: You are absolutely right to say that there are problems with the way in which fostering care works. Indeed, there are also problems with the way in which private agencies charge and engage



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in persuading local authority foster carers to move away from being local authority and to work for the private agency. That is certainly one whole set of problems that you will be extremely familiar with.

I would not have made that promise that we can take 100 over the next 12 months if I had not gone through it in detail with our family and children officers. We have never failed to place any child that has been presented to us. I can only talk on behalf of Hammersmith and Fulham, but what I know is that if we can do 100—I talk to other council leaders, and Lewisham has got more than 20 places unfilled, and other councils have unfilled places—it begins to raise the question that the arbitrary figure of 340 or 350 that the Government say that they might now take on the Dubs scheme is not necessarily a safe figure.

Q84 Tim Loughton: I understand all that, but it is quite a bold offer you have made.

Councillor Cowan: Thank you.

Tim Loughton: I applaud you if you can pull it off. If it is a question of the Home Office having to stump up more money in order to fulfil full cost recovery, that is a political decision and a recommendation that the Committee might want. It is worthless, however, if you cannot produce 100 supported places—or whatever the sustainable equivalent for other authorities—because otherwise those kids in traumatic circumstances having come over here will not be properly looked after, with all the additional mental health needs and everything they will have, which will be more so than children who are coming into care—

Councillor Cowan: I absolutely understand your concern, but with the greatest respect you are a little bit in danger of teaching me to suck eggs. I know full well that it would be worthless to make such an offer if it was not possible for it to be substantiated. We would be very happy to act as a pilot and work with the Government. Our offer would be very clear: if we have full cost recovery for each year that the child is in our care up until 25, we would happily do that.

Q85 Tim Loughton: Okay, so how are you doing it? If another authority said to you, “We have got 100 children in care that we cannot cope with who are not children from abroad. Would you take them?”, would the offer still be there? How can you do it and Leicestershire or another authority cannot?

Councillor Cowan: I am not here to talk about what other authorities can or cannot do. That is for them. I have been invited here to talk about what we have been doing in Hammersmith and Fulham. We have done a comprehensive assessment of our current capacity as a children’s department, because clearly any child that presents themselves, whether they are a refugee or a child from a UK family, is treated exactly the same and their needs are dealt with. Whether they are children who have suffered sexual abuse or other types of abuse, we put a wraparound service around them. We have carried out a full assessment of what we would be capable of doing, and I am saying that the critical issue is full



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cost recovery. We know that we could work to get sufficient support to take up to 100 children over the next 12 months.

Q86 Tim Loughton: Okay. Just out of interest, how many children in care per 10,000 have you got in Hammersmith and Fulham?

Councillor Cowan: I could not answer that straight off. Under the national transfer scheme, our allocation is 24. We went straight to 24. It drops down and goes up as children move in and out of care.

Q87 Tim Loughton: But how many children in care have you got generally?

Councillor Cowan: Just over 300 at any given time. That is a figure that moves about, because obviously children move out of care.

Q88 Tim Loughton: I ask because there is a very large divergence in the proportion of children in care from one authority to another. It ranges from 22 per 10,000 in one authority to 165 per 10,000 in another.

Councillor Cowan: I am fully aware of that. What you are really doing is making the point that there needs to be a national scheme that deals with this, because it is quite unfair on Hillingdon, Croydon or Kent to be taking extra children just because they happen to have presented themselves in those areas.

Q89 Tim Loughton: Sure, but what I want to learn from Hammersmith and Fulham is how others can do it and whether there is best practice—if you can deliver that—that others can learn from.

Councillor Cowan: My pilot offer stands.

Councillor Simmonds: My initial response would be that I very much welcome Stephen's offer. I have 70 children I could send him today, if he would like to take them on. The answer on the Syrian point is an indicator to where this becomes a practical challenge. You can say, "We will take in a Syrian family, but we are going to put them in Hillingdon, because we do not have somewhere to put them", but Hillingdon cannot put them there, so we send them to Birmingham, who then cannot place someone they need to place, so they send them to Scotland or wherever it may be.

One of the ongoing challenges with asylum—this is where the cost issue becomes greater—is that the larger the number, the more acute that demand becomes. I know that Mr Loughton is involved in the National Fostering Agency, which is a very reputable agency. They are quite clearly saying, as are many fostering agencies, "We think we could offer you additional capacity, but we need a commercial conversation about what the cost would be. If you need 100 placements tomorrow, that will be £70,000 per placement. When you are making your spot purchases, it may be £50,000. If it is part of a regular block booking, it may be as low as £20,000 or £30,000." There is that commercial conversation, and there are lots of operators out there that we would look to for additional capacity, which would need to be provided at cost. I think Stephen's point is very clear: if we are going to go through a process in which we incur more costs defending judicial reviews, we are paying higher prices to



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secure agency independent reviewing officers—probably £50,000 to employ directly or £100,000 through an agency—all of those things will push the cost up. The more capacity that we want to create, the greater that commitment to full-cost recovery would be.

- Q90 **Tim Loughton:** This is my final question. Community support schemes came up in the earlier session and are something the Committee has recommended in the past. You can use “amateur” groups—church groups, faith groups, non-faith groups and others—who can provide that support network. It is not just, “I happen to have a spare bedroom; I could take a refugee” or whatever. You are largely talking about using professional services. To what extent have you been able to garner those voluntary offers, for which there is a substantial network of people who can offer that support to make it sustainable?

Councillor Cowan: We are certainly looking to increase the number of spaces via voluntary community support. However, the fundamental case is that, if we take the Dubs children specifically, most of those children have suffered horrendous abuse and need fairly sophisticated foster care or other types of similar care, so I don’t think that is necessarily the right solution. We have been working with Hammersmith and Fulham Refugees Welcome and other groups—churches, faith communities—that have been very keen to make sure that the children that we take into our care settle in. They all have all sorts of social needs that are not necessarily met just by the care system. That is where we are finding the third sector and faith communities are being extremely helpful.

I don’t want to get away from the fact of just talking about children. We are talking very specifically about the Dubs amendment, what happens and what the best way is to take refugees from across Europe. One of the reasons that we went out on a limb on Dubs children, and offered to take them separately to the national transfer scheme, is that we were advised by Lord Dubs and others that there did not seem to be any traction from the Home Office in engaging in that issue. That is certainly what Safe Passage, Help Refugees and others told us, and we wanted to help to break that logjam by saying that we have places.

Not only did we have places, we asked the volunteer social workers to go to the camp in Calais, for example. Some 40 volunteers from Hammersmith and Fulham’s qualified social workers stepped up. They were among the social workers who assessed all of the 30 children that George Gabriel mentioned earlier. They were all assessed, under UNHCR criteria, as their best interest being in safe haven in Britain. Added to that, we found extra homes for those children in Ealing, Redbridge, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham. We even had QPR willing to send a coach to pick them up. We had everything ready to take them as a test case. At that point, no Dubs children had come in. Most of those children didn’t get in; I think four came in out of the 30 assessed. You have to ask why. I am saying that there does not appear to be the will from the Home Office to have taken section 67 of the Immigration Act seriously. That is why we made the statement that we would take children on top of the NTS allocation for those children.



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Q91 **Nusrat Ghani:** Councillor Cowan, you made a statement that said you would take on an extra 100. However, when Mr Loughton asked you how many children you have in care now, you couldn't identify that figure. I find that slightly disturbing. Do you know how many children are in care right now in Hammersmith and Fulham?

Councillor Cowan: You shouldn't find it disturbing, because a politician's job is to ask officials for advice and—

Nusrat Ghani: Do you know how many children are in care in Hammersmith and Fulham?

Councillor Cowan: We have 192 directly in care; that goes up to 300 at any given time.

Q92 **Nusrat Ghani:** So just under 200. How many children were adopted from Hammersmith and Fulham last year?

Councillor Cowan: I am not here to talk about how many children were adopted.

Q93 **Nusrat Ghani:** So you don't know how many children were adopted?

Councillor Cowan: I think you are asking questions purely to try to dismantle the case.

Q94 **Nusrat Ghani:** I just want to understand—how many children were adopted from Hammersmith and Fulham?

Councillor Cowan: 10.

Nusrat Ghani: I have a figure of 5 from the parliamentary Library.

Councillor Cowan: Your figure is wrong.

Nusrat Ghani: We can check with the parliamentary Library. I am trying to understand how much capacity there is in a local authority, compared with how much capacity they say there is and how much capacity the Government tells us there is. I am just trying to work out the accuracy. Let's say you have two spaces right now that you want to fill.

Councillor Cowan: That's right.

Q95 **Nusrat Ghani:** And you are very keen to fill those two spaces. Have you turned down any children who would have arrived spontaneously in this country?

Councillor Cowan: No.

Q96 **Nusrat Ghani:** And you haven't turned any children away under that scheme?

Councillor Cowan: No.

Q97 **Nusrat Ghani:** You haven't sent any children arriving here spontaneously to any other council or local authority?



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Councillor Cowan: You seemed to be quoting something in your question.

Nusrat Ghani: No, I was just doing some research as you were talking.

Councillor Cowan: Every local authority takes children and takes a responsibility to do that. That means we pay for them. It means the taxpayers in Hammersmith and Fulham pay for those children. They are not always placed exactly in your borough; there are properties across a much wider geographic area as foster parents volunteer. So no, we have not turned any down.

Q98 **Nusrat Ghani:** So you have not turned any away to another local authority, to make these two spaces. These two spaces exist because there are no other children who need to be taken care of by your authority, no other authority has asked for your support and you have not turned any children away.

Councillor Cowan: We have taken the national transfer scheme limit of 24, which is what the 0.07% is. We stand by, ready to fill the number. It goes up and down as children leave care age, but we stand by ready to maintain the 24, which is our target. We are also saying that we will take an extra 15 children, and we have 13. If you add the 13 to the roughly 20 we have on the national transfer scheme at the moment, you can see we are well over the target. But no, we are not turning children away.

Q99 **Nusrat Ghani:** So if you have two spaces now and potentially 100 spaces coming up, would you take children from other local authorities that felt they could not meet their commitment?

Councillor Cowan: We would take children, under the national transfer scheme, from other local authorities to the maximum, and we will take 15 Dubs children in order to break the political logjam that we believe the Home Office has created.

Q100 **Nusrat Ghani:** So you have not turned any children away or sent them to any other local authority.

Councillor Cowan: That's right. Indeed, on 26 January 2017 I wrote to Baroness Williams making the offer to provide us with the extra children. I haven't had a reply as yet.

Q101 **Nusrat Ghani:** And you have capacity for 100 more children.

Councillor Cowan: To be absolutely clear—I think Councillor Simmonds touched on this point—the fundamental issue is full funding per year per child for as long as they are in care. If the Government made that offer now and said they would do that for every local authority, there would be a significant increase in the number of places available. In Hammersmith and Fulham's case, the director of family and children's services, having gone through it and carried out an assessment, says we could take up to 100 children over a 12-month period from now if the Government were able to fund those places.

Q102 Nusrat Ghani: And what will happen to the just below 200 children you have in care? How do you prioritise their needs compared with the needs of the 100 extra children you say you have the capacity to take?

Councillor Cowan: We are one of the councils that are fortunate enough to be marked as good under Ofsted regulations. We provide a full wraparound service. We work with the national health service and with schools, but as you can imagine, any child who comes into our care has been through tremendous abuse. When we first won control of the council in 2014, the cabinet member for education and I went through each and every case of children in care, and I must admit I had to go and sit in a dark room after the first 30 because the examples of their abuse were horrific. All the children in any local authority care have been through a tremendous level of abuse. We make sure that they get the exact social, psychological and physical healthcare they need in order to put them on the right track.

Q103 Nusrat Ghani: So all children in your care are treated equally and you would not prioritise those 200 who are in care now over the two in the spaces you are trying to fill or the 100 coming forward?

Councillor Cowan: We treat every child who is in our care with what Ofsted said is a remarkable level of high-quality service. By trying to qualify whether one child gets better care than another, you are on a slippery slope, because it is not as objective as you are making out. We believe that everyone in our local authority's care is getting excellent care, and that is backed up by Ofsted.

Q104 Nusrat Ghani: If you have capacity for 100 children to come in and 200 in care, how can you encourage the 200 who are in care to secure foster homes or be adopted?

Councillor Cowan: Well, we agree with the premise in your question that adoptions are the right way to go in many cases, but we have an active programme of recruiting foster carers. I am pleased that because of the crisis around refugees, we have had an awful lot of people contacting us to say, "How do I become a foster carer?"

There is an opportunity to take these issues and put out a clarion call for people to take children in. They will need about six months' specialist training. All 52 girls, for example, in the Calais camp had been raped and had suffered tremendous sexual abuse. If you can imagine one of those children being in your charge, you would need an awful lot of specialist knowledge to deal with that. That takes about six months. We have a very active programme of recruiting foster carers, and we are upping that in order to meet the obligations I just set out.

Q105 Nusrat Ghani: Do you think councils in London and possibly other urban areas take the bulk of the responsibility for this care compared with other councils?

Councillor Cowan: The numbers suggest that. I think you get into a much wider subject. Let's come back to the fact that there is a significant shortfall—it is about £10,000 per child under 18 and £13,000 per year for



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children over 18. There have been 70% cuts to local government budgets since 2010. I understand that councils in the north and other parts of Britain are under severe financial pressures just maintaining basic services. I think you are going to get a very different response depending on the nature of the finances of each council, which is why having a fully funded scheme from central Government is the solution.

Q106 **Nusrat Ghani:** Councillor Simmonds, the discrepancy between rural and urban councils?

Councillor Simmonds: London has been a magnet for asylum seekers and refugees for a very long time, and one of the things we notice—it applies to adults as well—is that those who may be placed in other parts of the country by the Home Office while their asylum claims are determined will then move to London and the south-east of England, because it is a much more diverse area. Kent is a major port of entry, Heathrow is a major port of entry and Croydon is the main asylum processing centre. Croydon is part of a London asylum seeking rota under which authorities—with the exception of Hillingdon, because we deal with all the Heathrow arrivals—have taken children who arrive at Croydon into their care in rotation. Many more London authorities are above the 0.07% than is the case outside London, but there are outliers, such as Northamptonshire. There is a pattern of lorries arriving in the country and then using the motorway network and dropping children off at service stations in Northamptonshire, which means they are also an outlier when it comes to the numbers.

Q107 **Mr Winnick:** Councillor Cowan, may I clarify the position? Your local authority, Hammersmith and Fulham, is capable of taking more children arising from the present situation—the current crisis—under Dubs.

Councillor Cowan: That's correct. The crucial issue is funding. At the moment, we are about a third of a million pounds out of pocket a year. Half a million pounds in Hammersmith and Fulham is the equivalent of 1% on council tax, so you can see it is a significant proportion of our budget. That is the fundamental problem. If the Government were to say, "We will give you full cost recovery per year for as long as that child is in care"—in children in care cases, that is up to 25 years old—we would be able, in a measured way over the next 12 months, to take up to 100 extra children.

Q108 **Mr Winnick:** Local authorities face all sorts of problems, particularly in London—my own local authority, which is outside London, has its problems, but London is somewhat different—so some people would say, "Hammersmith and Fulham has enough problems on its hands. Why should it be willing to do this?"

Councillor Cowan: George Gabriel was quite correct when he said we always put our own residents first. We are the only council in London to have cut council tax this term and one of the few to have frozen it this term, we have put a record number of council-funded police on the streets, we are the only council in the country to have abolished adult social care charges, and much more. The Trussell Trust says we are the best council in the country at dealing with food poverty. All those things



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mean we are absolutely taking our democratic responsibility very seriously and putting our residents first. But we also think that we have a wider responsibility—an historic one that Britain has always lived up to—to step up when there are international crises. It is not just right that the national British Government steps up; we think that if we have the capability to do it as local government, we should, too. We believe we are doing that. I am not saying we are doing it perfectly—we will always be open-minded to learning how we can do it better—but taking refugees in desperate situations is the right thing to do.

When I was in Calais, I met a child from Afghanistan. His older brother actually told me he was acting like his father. The child was nine and he sat with his arm under his armpit shivering on 18 August, a baking hot day. When I asked the translator, “Why is this child shivering?” they said, “He has been driven mad with fear.” I know that the people of Britain are thoroughly decent and would never let that happen in Britain. We shouldn’t have let it happen in Calais. It is going on now in Syria, in Greece, in Serbia, in Italy, and it is our responsibility to step up.

Q109 Mr Winnick: That is highly commendable, and I sincerely mean that. You have said in reply to my Conservative colleague that people have been phoning in and saying that they would be willing, as I understand it, to foster care and the rest of it: do you think that signifies what you have just been saying—that, with all the problems which obviously exist in your area, there is this feeling of responsibility for children, which none of us would like to face if they were our own children?

Councillor Cowan: It absolutely does. We had a meeting on refugees, at the town hall, that a voluntary group wanted to hold. So we said “Fine.” Normally at town hall meetings 20, 30 people turn up—sometimes more: 750 people turned up. There is something about British character which is generous and people quite rightly expect that we do the right thing by our own country first, but they also expect we do the right thing on the world stage. I have been deeply encouraged by the number of people who have just been pleased to see different councils round the country doing more than their bit.

Q110 Mr Winnick: I would like to ask you this, finally. Are you convinced, as the leader of the council; and your officials and officers—are they equally convinced that if you took the number of children, if they were funded along the lines that you have indicated, they would be properly looked after, bearing in mind the problems that you already have as a local authority?

Councillor Cowan: Ofsted says that Hammersmith and Fulham’s children’s services is one of the best in the country. I do not think there is a council leader in the country who does not fear that one day they wake up and there is a Baby Peter or Victoria Climbié case that has appeared on their watch. I think it is probably the biggest nightmare for everybody, across the political spectrum; so I would never make offers like that if it did anything to put our services at risk. But we have gone through this in detail, and what we are interested in doing is—what can we do to help



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break the logjam and create a consensus of how we deal with children currently in the closest thing to hell that there is for any child, which is a refugee camp in Europe?

Q111 **Mr Winnick:** And your senior officers responsible for children are quite satisfied. They have told you they are.

Councillor Cowan: One of them is sitting behind me and he is extremely happy, yes.

Q112 **Mr Winnick:** He cannot give evidence; but he is happy.

Councillor Cowan: I must admit he would have told me: we often get pushback. We are quite ambitious in Hammersmith and Fulham so we do get pushback, sometimes, from officers; but on this one it was a very straightforward "Yes, we will do that."

Mr Winnick: Thank you. I wanted to clarify that from earlier questions.

Q113 **Chair:** Mr Baillie, Mr Crellin, do you want to add anything to those points?

Tam Baillie: I cannot speak for Scottish local authorities; I am a parliamentary commissioner. What I can do is reflect statements from local politicians in Scotland who have made declarations that they want to be supportive of migrant children, not just under Dubs; statements from Scottish Government—and indeed the First Minister is hosting a round table to look at this very issue next week. What I can say on the basis of that is that Scotland really wants to play its part in this. Some of the evidence of that is the number of children that they have already taken under the Dubs amendment. It is not about spare places. It is about trying to make sure that we create the extra capacity to be able to accommodate and care for these children in the way that they deserve.

Richard Crellin: I think that there is an awful lot of goodwill, and we ourselves are contacted by an awful lot of our supporters wanting to help and do more. I think what we would say as a service provider, though, is that local authorities and their social workers and their professionals need an awful lot of support sometimes to look after and care for these children. So it is about making that partnership work, and kind of enabling them to deliver this care. Yes, they need funding but, as Mr Simmonds pointed out, there are an awful lot of judicial challenges against practice in some areas, particularly given the role that we do, where we are dealing with some of the worst cases where young people have come to us because they feel they have been let down. We are challenging poor practice. There are significant difficulties accessing legal aid and legal advice, and making their immigration claim move through the system in a way that does not leave them in limbo when they turn 18.

I think the Children's Society's view would always be that there are lots of people—we are a charity and we run on charitable funds, and there is lots that can be done, but it is a significant challenge as well and I think there is a role for everyone to play doing that. Central Government has its role and we have ours, and local authorities have theirs; but we would not

want to underestimate the needs of these children, because they are particularly vulnerable.

Q114 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Baillie, I think you said 35 children had arrived in Scotland under Dubs. Is that correct?

Tam Baillie: Yes.

Q115 **Stuart C. McDonald:** The estimate from the Guardianship Service is that around 60 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrive each year irregularly or undocumented. Does that sound about right to you?

Tam Baillie: They will be much more in touch with those figures than myself. The guardianship scheme, as far as I am aware, is unique to Scotland in terms of linking an unaccompanied child with a guardian to ensure they get access to the right services, including advocacy services.

Q116 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Given what you said earlier about the challenge that that poses for foster placements, pressures on the guardianship service and so on, you are still absolutely clear that extra capacity could be created in Scotland to help towards that.

Tam Baillie: The thing I would temper that with is that extra capacity means that people need to think maybe slightly differently about how they provide care for these children, particularly if they are of an older age group. In answer to the question, "Are they children?", of course they are—under UNCRC it is under 18, but also we now know about the brain development of adolescents in particular, and their brains are still developing, so they should be treated as children and not somehow as young adults. They are children and they are in need of care, but there may be different models to look at. The key thing there is to make sure that—in Scotland this would be the Care Inspectorate—they are satisfied that the level of care is commensurate with the needs of those children and young people.

The other thing that I would mention is that we now have progressive legislation in Scotland that a child has a right to stay in care up to the age of 21 and, indeed, to have after-care support up to the age of 26. So if those children come in and have looked-after status, this is a long-term responsibility that we as a nation would have to take on for those children. In fact, I believe that there have been extensions to the responsibilities for children in care in England—

Tim Loughton: "Staying Put", it's called.

Tam Baillie: "Staying Put", yes. It is for foster placements. In Scotland, it is for all youngsters in care. So there are additional responsibilities that we would need to honour. But it is about creating extra spaces; it is not about having spare capacity and just slotting those youngsters in. That is where the pressure comes on the local services, health services included. It is also where some of those questions about appropriate resources get asked.

Q117 **Stuart C. McDonald:** In terms of the national transfer scheme, am I right



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in thinking that up to now there has been a legal hurdle that has not yet been overcome but we are almost there?

Tam Baillie: Yes. It requires regulation and, as far as I understand it, the regulations have not been laid, which hampers the transfer of children of looked-after status in England to looked-after status in Scotland. To be honest, this problem is decades old, so you might have thought we could have sorted it before now, but be that as it may, if this is the vehicle to ensure that the proper monitoring of children has some sort of statutory oversight between the nations then that would be a good thing.

Q118 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I do not know if anyone has any information on this, but I understand that the regulations may be in the offing in the next couple of months, to allow that to happen.

Tam Baillie: We want them as soon as possible. I am already aware of cases of children who could have been transferred but because of the legal impediments between Scotland and England that just has not happened. So the quicker that happens the better.

Q119 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Crellin, the Children's Society has previously expressed some concerns about the situation of migrant children when they reach the age of 18. Will you say a little about that and how you would best see them addressed?

Richard Crellin: Our main concern is that when you look at the asylum decisions made with regard to most young people, the most common outcome from the Home Office is the unaccompanied asylum-seeking status, rather than the refugee status or humanitarian status. That is not a durable solution for a young person. It basically puts a hold on their situation until they turn 17 and a half. They are then thrown back into the immigration system and have to make new claims or fresh representations in order to secure their status.

Within our practice, we always try to work with our young people to get them to challenge that unaccompanied asylum-seeking status, rather than refugee status, because it does not offer them a long-term solution. So we say, "Okay, appeal that now and get a concrete decision, so that you know where you stand." But one of the problems that we see, particularly with young people in local authority care, is that because of case management, time, drift and social workers often not necessarily understanding the process so well, young people's asylum claims are often not sorted out by the time they turn 17 and a half, so they enter into this limbo at 18 where it is difficult for them to access education or for them to work.

Under the new Immigration Act, when the regulations come in for those who are appeal-rights exhausted, all support will be withdrawn from them. We are extending an offer to young people to come here and for us to support them, but we are not then giving them a way to realise their future. For some of them, their claims may not come to fruition, but they need to have options and a clear way in which to deal with that.



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The assisted voluntary return scheme was delivered previously by Refugee Action and is now being delivered by the Home Office. It is about giving young people real options and an ability to participate in the decisions about their lives. In many ways, some of the problems around bringing children over here and into care to be looked after are tricky and difficult to solve, but we are building up a series of problems for care leavers that we must address, because many young people will find themselves in very difficult situations.

Q120 Stuart C. McDonald: On a related note, the Government are currently in the process of putting together a new strategy on the safeguarding of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, which I think is due to be published by 1 May. Could each of you give a couple of top priorities for what would you like to see in that strategy?

Councillor Simmonds: When we look at the figures that relate to that, there were 2,050 initial decisions relating to unaccompanied children in the year ending in September. Around 31% were granted asylum or another form of granted protection, and 44% were grants of temporary leave. The big concern with that group is that they then go missing and they are at risk. There is a continuum of activity; we need to see this not just as something that happens when someone turns 18 but to think about what it means when they arrive in the country.

From my experience, traffickers have long recognised that if someone looks under the age of 25 and claims to be under 18, essentially the UK border policy is that they are allowed in. The assumption is that they are saying what they are saying truthfully, and it is seen by traffickers as an easy way of bypassing immigration control into UK, so that people can be trafficked onwards into the sex trade on the continent, or indeed in the UK, and to various other awful destinations in this country. We need to be much, much clearer in the way that we engage with young people at the point at which they arrive about the routes that Richard talked about—what is likely to happen to you, what are your options going to be, and how can we support you through that process.

Q121 Stuart C. McDonald: Mr Crellin, what are your top priorities for that strategy?

Richard Crellin: There are three main things that I would raise that we are keen to see in the strategy. We support a number of Dublin children, and we would argue that the estimate of 50 places breaking down among those children who have already arrived is probably a little low. We are dealing with children who are receiving no support from their local authority; we are having problems getting them assessed and making sure that they are plugged into local systems. Most surprising is that in other cases one particular area has set up a multi-agency team, and they are doing really great work on helping those young people to settle in. The outcomes are brilliant. It does not cost much money and involve that much co-ordinated working to make sure that those children who have come to rejoin family members can really succeed in this country.



The Dublin process is a bit chaotic and I know of numerous cases where family members have been contacted by the Home Office, but at the end of the process they were not sure whether they would receive their relative into their care. That had not been communicated to them through the process, but that is the whole point of it. One of our main priorities is that we need to clarify the Dublin process and to make sure that future iterations, when it is run from Greece and Italy, work better. One of the big disappointments about the strategy is that it has nothing in it about social workers. The Government have not said that they will provide training for social workers and any kind of capacity building. We talk to a lot of social workers who say that they would like that help, that this is an area that they find themselves often uncertain in and have to talk to colleagues and get advice. That is a big missing piece.

The final piece comes back to what I said about the immigration system. We need clear options and all the children should have access to legal aid, but currently only some of them are in scope and a lot fall out of scope. The strategy could address simple things like that at probably very little cost, and that could do a lot to help children to have more certainty and be able to build their lives as they choose to.

Q122 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Councillor Cowan, do you have anything to add?

Councillor Cowan: I support all of Richard's points. The fundamental thing at the moment is that there is an awful lot of uncertainty about what is happening to Dubs. I think what needs to come forward is a comprehensive strategy that addresses some of the concerns that you have heard today. At the very least, it should involve funding and putting people into the host countries. It should certainly also involve legal aid and a route into safe haven in the UK.

Q123 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Baillie?

Tam Baillie: I am going to fess up. I know it is three points, but what strategy?

Q124 **Stuart C. McDonald:** The strategy that the UK Government will publish on 1 May on safeguarding for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Tam Baillie: Oh, wow, right. Okay, then. The first thing that I would pick up is from the first session and is about assessments of children who are in Europe. It seems as if we are sadly lacking in terms of resources to identify those children. It might help us put an end point on the operation of the Dubs amendment if we actually put some time and energy into making sure that we were assertive about trying to identify and provide for those children.

The second thing is that I think we should look at what has been talked about a lot here: proper resourcing at local level in terms of the provision that we make for our children. The third thing picks up on the thing that you said, Tim, about the lack of prosecutions. We do have prosecutions in Scotland, and I think in England—you had Operation Golf, which was really impressive—but if we are much more assertive about prosecutions, that



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makes the UK an unfriendly place for traffickers. We really need to have that prong of the action to try and ensure that it does not just become a place to which traffickers are attracted. We need to attend to some of that, and prosecutions are a clear way of helping. That means operations that are not just based in the UK but that get out and about.

Q125 Stuart C. McDonald: One final quick question to Councillor Simmonds. Mr Crellin raised an issue about the breakdown that happens with Dublin in family cases when children are being reunited with distant family relatives. Is there more that local authorities can do to try and stop that from happening? Is it a question of resources? Why are they seeing these cases appear?

Councillor Simmonds: One of the offers which local authorities made was to take a bigger role in the verification process for family members. One concern, speaking from personal local experience, is that when someone is brought to the UK by the Home Office on the basis of reunion with a family member, they turn out to be a 16-year-old care leaver who was never realistically in any position to take on parental responsibility for that new arrival. Had we as the local authority been undertaking that process, we would have known that straight away. We would have been able to say straight away that this person was going to be an unaccompanied child in our care. That is something that local authorities do day in and day out in respect of people who may be coming or on the edge of the care system. Clearly, making use of that support would be better.

Q126 Naz Shah: Staying on the Dubs amendment, the scheme has been going for only six months. You have said already that the consultation was not adequate. If the Dubs scheme continued for the next financial year, do you think councils could offer more?

Councillor Simmonds: On behalf of the LGA, I think we have all been very clear that support is contingent on resourcing. The concern we all have is that councils around the country are under differing degrees of financial pressure, and therefore want to know that a commitment to taking in a refugee child does not then mean that they cannot meet a responsibility to another child in the local area, or indeed in respect of adult social care. I think that message has been very clear.

Q127 Naz Shah: Is there a time issue as well, though? The reason I ask is that I have had one experience of a boarding school which would like to offer places, but that needs to be co-ordinated with the local council, which is taking some time to do. I am just wondering whether there is a timing issue. If the consultation process only started in September, in addition to the funding points that we have discussed already, would simply having longer give councils more time to explore alternative arrangements as well?

Councillor Simmonds: My understanding is that the national transfer scheme continues to operate. That example is one type of placement that may come through a community route, which would be continually taken up by local authorities for the foreseeable future. I don't think they will



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arrive at a date when the need is not there to take advantage of those things. Clearly, each offer that comes forward needs to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

A number of people have highlighted the point that we have community offers. I have had people contact me to say, "I am happy to take in a Syrian child. What would be appropriate is a girl, because I am used to having girls in the family, and somebody under 10." Well, less than 1% of UASC children are under that age, 93% are male, three quarters are aged 16 or 17 and they are either Afghan, Iranian or Albanian, followed by sub-Saharan African. So one of the challenges is about how we make use of offers like that when they come forward.

Q128 Naz Shah: Do you think it is time that you offered social workers to go over to Europe to do those best interests tests for the purpose of the Dubs assessments?

Councillor Simmonds: We have, as have Hammersmith and Fulham and the LGA. As with the Syrian scheme, when it came to housing officers, we said, that we were willing to facilitate that and social workers volunteered. My understanding—again, I think you would need to test this with Home Office officials—is that the assessment is not about whether we think it is in the child's best interests, but whether the national authorities of those countries under their laws consider it to be in the best interests of the child. It may be useful to the Committee to invite ambassadors from those countries along to share that.

Certainly when the Dubs amendment was passed, my expectation was that the number of situations where an unaccompanied child in Europe would pass a best interests test to be relocated to the UK was always going to be very small, because our immigration rules are clear that that would not confer a right on their parents to join them in the UK should the parents come to light. So if you were the Italian authorities, the Greek authorities or the French authorities, in exactly the same way as we would if you went to a British court and said, "We want to send this child to France, but the French say that if the parents were to arrive in the UK afterwards they could not go to France to join the child," the court would say, "That means you can't send them."

Councillor Cowan: We had 40 volunteers, as I mentioned, and they went to France to assess the children under UNHCR criteria, which are very similar to British criteria. Their assessments were that if those children were in Britain they all would be immediately taken into foster care. So there is an issue there. The overall impression from everyone I spoke to, particularly in the NGOs, was that the French were desperate to come to some type of arrangement with the British, particularly around the Calais camp and the children who were coming into France. So I am sure that issue could have been dealt with at national level, if the will had been there.

Q129 Naz Shah: One final question. I have provided foster care to a young Afghan refugee who presented without parents and I have also provided



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supported lodging to Afghan refugees. One of them told me—I have mentioned this before—how he saw one child murder another child to get that place on the back of that truck, and he was traumatised. One of the things that we did not get to support him was specialist mental health support. When he was 18, he was left in limbo. He had all this support and then all of a sudden literally he had to fend for himself. That was a few years ago, but is that the same now?

Councillor Simmonds: At national level I would say that, if anything, it is probably worse. Mental health services for children and young people in this country are woefully short of what they should be. Stephen talked about funding, but you are then talking about those practices probably employing private consultants at a very high price to do those assessments in order that services can be found, which would need to be fully funded.

Richard Crellin: We would say from our practice as well that there is another piece here, and it is interesting to hear your story. Lots of these young people need to have some time and to talk to someone about their wellbeing, and they need to understand mental health and the fact that services are available before they can access them. So you could meet a child who is displaying quite severe post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and clearly needs help, but if you went and put them into CAMHS—a clinical place with a psychiatrist—they would not respond to that because they have never had to do that before and they are not in that place.

There is a big piece of work that we do, particularly with boys and young men who have been trafficked into the country, about getting them to recognise what has happened to them and to understand their experience and to cast off some of those cultural taboos they might have about seeking help and admitting that they might have been raped or that they have been exploited in different ways. That piece of work before CAMHS is very lacking and very difficult to find in some areas.

Q130 **Naz Shah:** Do you know of any work that has been done around transcultural psychiatry of children?

Richard Crellin: We do some in our services and we see other voluntary sector organisations that do it, but it is very much as a kind of add-on to the actual service that we are providing if we have been commissioned to, or we are providing that through our unrestricted income.

Councillor Cowan: It is certainly right that children's mental health is an issue that has yet to be fully addressed. In our looked-after children service we have two specialist mental health advisers who work with all our foster carers to make sure that they pick up on the signs very quickly, and then we can liaise with the health services to bring in more specialist support. You are dealing with children who have all been traumatised, in nearly every single case with refugees, so it is a crucial part of the support that needs to be offered. That may be something that might require a national assessment.



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Q131 Naz Shah: Is there anything nationally? Adults who have experienced torture can come in and have specialist one-to-one support from Freedom from Torture. Is there any equivalent for children in our country to support refugee children who might have been trafficked, abused or raped?

Richard Crellin: One of the major differences between the adult system and the child system is that if you were trafficked, for example, you might make an application to the national referral mechanism to be recognised as a victim of trafficking. As an adult, you might get a safe house and you might get some support. All of those responsibilities are with the local authority in the way that we respond to trafficked children. It is up to local authorities to provide that support at their own cost.

Q132 Chair: Quick final question to Councillor Simmonds. Has there been any willingness on the part of the Home Office to talk further to you about alternative approaches to funding, given how critical the funding issue is?

Councillor Simmonds: Yes. That is an ongoing process. Clearly funding is always going to be a matter of dispute but I think it has been very clearly explained by Tam that the funding that is available at the moment, in the view of most local authorities, will at best fund the cost of the placement and not, for example, mental health support that might be provided or school places and so on. That is an ongoing engagement with the Home Office.

Chair: So there is ongoing discussion about funding; there is clearly ongoing and quite substantial willingness from all sorts of councils and so on to do more and to provide more places; however, the Government have closed the Dubs scheme. I find it quite extraordinary to hear the evidence that you have had councils offering places that have not yet been taken up and have had to effectively knock on the Home Office's door to offer those places, at the same time as the scheme is being closed.

I think two key reasons were given to us by the Home Secretary as to why the scheme was closing. The first was the risk of trafficking, which we heard very different evidence on from the first panel. The second was the inability of local councils to provide more places, which I think we heard very different evidence on in the second session. I think that gives us a series of further questions that we will need to pursue. On that basis, can I thank you for your evidence, and for all the work that you are currently doing to support child refugees? It certainly creates some considerable challenges to the Government and the decision that they have taken. Thank you very much.