

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability Hearing](#), HC 341

Tuesday 11 June 2019

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ben Bradley; James Frith; Emma Hardy; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell.

Questions 2147-2227

Witness

I: Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England.

Examination of witness

Witness: Anne Longfield OBE.

Q2147 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you for coming. I see you have brought a good posse with you today. Just for the benefit of the tape and for those watching on the internet, can you introduce yourself and your position?

Anne Longfield: I am Anne Longfield. I am the Children's Commissioner for England.

Q2148 **Ben Bradley:** Thank you. Good morning. I wanted to kick off on the issue of knife crime—something that is hugely prevalent in the media and much discussed at the minute. The first simple question is about whether or you think there is enough being done. We have heard from a variety of different experts and witnesses who have given evidence here. A number have picked out different issues and the wide variety of challenges that feed into the problem of knife crime. Carlie Thomas, who is a caseworker at St Giles Trust, talked about the nature of people's lives: low-paid work, having to be at work and not having time to be at home, and a lack of continuity and supportive services such as afterschool clubs and youth clubs. I wondered what you think the key to that challenge is. Do you think enough is being done?

Anne Longfield: Knife crime is something that I have talked about a lot. It has been a massive concern and remains so. There is a theme behind it, which is going to cut across everything I am going to say today, which is that everything that has emerged from our work shows that this is a really vulnerable group of kids who are falling through the gaps and becoming marginalised. Those are the kids who we often refer to as being invisible, often until they hit those headlines, be that knife crime or other forms of violence, or custody and the like.

The other part of that is that everything we do leads us to believe that it does not have to be like that, so there is a real belief that it can be different and there can be a solution. That solution is all about getting in early, identifying those children when things go wrong, and putting the springboards in place that help them fly rather than sink.

Hopefully, by now you will know me well enough to know that getting to that different point is an obsession with me, and I know some of you share it, but what we have not got to yet is the point where there are enough people that are as obsessed about making this difference. I would like all parliamentarians to be obsessed, and all of those standing for various posts at the moment to be obsessed, and only then can we tackle the root causes of this and really make a difference. For me, with just under two years to go, my job is to convince enough people to make sure that, in two years' time, you are not asking about this level of knife crime.



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As to whether enough is being done, I have been involved in the Serious Violence Taskforce and in the summits. The level of discussion and engagement is far beyond where it was. There are interventions around serious violence units and there is the Youth Endowment Fund and the like, but the urgency that is needed and the operational follow-through in the plan that is needed just is not there as far as I can see.

My comment to the Prime Minister that day of the summit was that she needed to decide who in every area was responsible. There are structures there already in place. The safeguarding boards are the ones that I have pointed out are there to safeguard children. They need a plan. We need whatever it takes; that may be fortnightly or weekly meetings. Are the risks being identified? Are they being reduced? Is the number of children who are at risk dropping?

Chair: Can I just ask you to make snappy because we have a lot to get through?

Anne Longfield: Yes. I know you always say that at that point.

Chair: There is seriously a lot.

Anne Longfield: Really, it needs child-level and family-level family help. I want all those services that can help in an area to be working flat out, in a co-ordinated way, starting by knowing how many children are at risk—and we know that there is a big gap there—and then determinedly bringing them down. Youth work, though, is something where there is a huge gap at the moment, and they are the ones that can translate some of this.

Q2149 **Ben Bradley:** We have been talking about this a lot, and you mentioned the summit earlier on in the year. You said you had written to various Secretaries of State and had had a lot of these conversations, and you did not feel that anybody was taking that on board. Why do you think that is? Do they take your role seriously enough?

Anne Longfield: I do not think that they are not taking it on board. The response is, “We, as a Government, are taking this seriously”. What I do not think yet is that there is precision of intervention, that there is a scale of intervention that matches the risk, which is high, and that there is clarity with all of those who are able to help to step in and do that. For instance, we should almost be on emergency measures in areas of high violence. I would like to see schools staying open in the evenings and opening at weekends. I would like there to be youth workers who are proactively in schools, talking to the kids at risk. In terms of families who have children who are involved in the periphery, we need family workers knocking on their door and talking to their siblings—all of those things. Go beyond the normality of the day into a particular focused intervention in those areas.

Q2150 **Ben Bradley:** The challenge I see in all of that is the fragmentation of those services, if you look across the piece at the variety of different



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organisations that would need to be involved in that. Even within Government, there is no particular Minister with that whole responsibility. It is fragmented across youth services, sport, education and all the rest of it. How do you overcome that barrier? You cannot make everything into a state of emergency when there are so many things that have—

Anne Longfield: No, you cannot. The more time I spend in this job and the more times I intervene, of course you are really happy when you get to a positive solution but it cannot be right that you just have to rely on someone to intervene at each point. There is not a point in Government that could take that lead. There are various mechanisms at the moment. There needs to be a much bigger strategy around vulnerable children, which would tackle this overall. In the absence of that, you have to make other measures. It needs to be an absolute top priority at No. 10 and Cabinet Office, and that needs to be a leadership team that is rolling out and monitoring what is going on. The fragmentation is where the local safeguarding boards would and could come in, because they need to be absolutely accountable for the plan there and how it is being delivered.

Q2151 **Ben Bradley:** Just finally from me, at that same summit, there was some quite scathing criticism of Government's approach to all of this. Louise Casey from the Troubled Families programme said that if you have no idea what you are doing, hold a summit; that is the go-to approach. There are many areas where that might be evident across different elements of policy. Do you think that is a fair assessment? A lot of that comes back, so she puts that back on Government. You have statutory powers within your role. There are lots of reports that are published, and lots of data and lots of talking about it. What are you able to do? What have you done to intervene?

Anne Longfield: I have no problem with a summit, but a summit is clearly a means to an end. No one could think that that is going to sort things. One of the things I did straightaway was to write to safeguarding boards in the areas of highest risk, and I asked them how many children were at risk in their area. There were huge gaps in knowledge that came back. There were areas where we all know there are high gang numbers, but they said that they did not have any.

I have written since to the Secretaries of State and people like Simon Stevens from the NHS, asking them to do a number of things to protect these children. The Secretary of State for Education has now said he is going to do one of those, which is to write to all safeguarding boards and make it very clear that they are responsible for that plan. That is very useful. I continue to work with the police and crime commissioners, and they are looking for solutions too.

One of the things that is really going to make a difference is, when I publish my vulnerability figures in a month's time—again, I accept it is a means to an end—we are going to break those down, this year, into local authority level and also constituency level. In less than a month, you are going to get a data collection of numbers of children who are vulnerable



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in your area. That is a starting point for a bigger discussion and a bigger plan, but this is all adding to that strength. I am not going to walk away from this. It is absolutely a priority.

Q2152 **Ben Bradley:** What powers do you have to intervene? You talk about a means to an end. There are lots of reports. There will be an analysis of the numbers of vulnerable kids. What can you actually do?

Anne Longfield: There is one power I do not have, which the Children's Commissioner in Jersey does have, which I would quite like on occasions like this. I can collect data, I can shine a light, I can convene and I can send letters to anyone in Parliament and ask them to respond. I can do all of those things and they have all been very good, but the Commissioner in Jersey has the power to instruct. I do not have that and I would quite like that.

Q2153 **Chair:** I just want to ask you about home education. I will come on to the Timpson review, some of which—exclusion—has been touched on. There has been a 113% increase in the number of students in home education, and a 112% rise in the number of school attendance orders used since 2017. There is a wide appetite for a registration requirement for home-schooled children. What is your view on this? I know that you have taken a strong interest in it.

Anne Longfield: Yes, absolutely. We produced a report earlier this year and I filmed a documentary as well, which enabled me to spend time with families and with children as well. The reason for doing that was that huge increase. What became clear to me through discussions with local authorities and others is that a situation where it was a philosophical choice for a number of parents to do this had changed into one where it was absolutely the last resort for a lot of parents.

The figures are all very uncertain but I believe that the number of parents who are doing this out of philosophical choice are less than 20%—even 15%—which means that the vast majority of parents are those who have withdrawn their children from school. These are often children with special educational needs and who are not getting the support they need, often after weeks and weeks of phone calls and the like. Looking at what needed to happen, of course I want schools to provide more support there, but I also wanted there to be a register to enable those local authorities to know where those children were, and enable us to ensure they are getting the support and the education they need.

Q2154 **Chair:** The DfE is doing a consultation on a register. If the response is negative to that, because many home-educator parents are against this, will you still push for it to happen anyway, or for an alternative means to track the children?

Anne Longfield: I will continue to push for there to be a collection of data on those children because it is really important that we do not just let 60,000 kids go off the grid. There has always been a consultation and



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Government have said they are going to go ahead. I believe that this is now about implementation in the main. There is a large and vocal body about this and I receive some of those emails and letters too, but I have to say that I have as many sets of communication from people who have said, "Thank you. I thought I was by myself. Please help me". In a way, I think that things have moved on. This is a sensible proposal about all schoolchildren out of school.

Q2155 Chair: Are you doing your own work into looking at the education attainment and outcomes of home-educated children? There is hardly any research out there to find out what is going on.

Anne Longfield: That is right; there is very little. If the register does not go through, this is something that I will look at. One of the things that we also did to go alongside that report was to undertake a survey of children who left for home education from schools in 11 areas. What that found was that there were about one in 10 schools, often off-rolling or semi-off-rolling in different ways, where those children would leave the school roll. We did not publish those names last time—we handed them over to Ofsted—but this year we are going to undertake that survey across the country and we will publish by name.

Q2156 Chair: What is your feeling as to the children who are being home-educated and whether or not they are getting good educational attainment and outcomes?

Anne Longfield: There are, clearly, really dedicated parents. Whether they have chosen to do this or not, the vast majority are trying to make the best of a difficult situation.

Chair: Do not give me a politician's answer.

Anne Longfield: I know, but it is important to say from the start.

Chair: We get it; we understand that.

Anne Longfield: Frankly, the answer is that no one knows. We know that only a small number go through the exams, which they have to pay for. If children are out of school and return to school, they will be out for two or three years that they will never get back. Schools will tell you that it is much more difficult to get children back into school after that point, so it is, frankly, unknown.

Q2157 Chair: For children who are home-educated, you think there should be a register. You are clear about that. What do you think should happen? Should Ofsted be involved? Should the council be much more involved than it is? Should the school still be responsible or accountable for that child? What, in your view, should happen?

Anne Longfield: We recommended all of those things. I saw some really good examples where a local authority had a home education team. They would almost have a month's cool-off period. For any child who was about to go off the register, they would go and meet the parents and talk



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to them about the options. They would say, "Do you really want to do this or do you want to go to another school?" and then they would help them. That was really vital.

Q2158 **Chair:** What do you think should be done, in a nutshell?

Anne Longfield: There should be greater intervention from the local authority at the point of leaving the school roll.

Q2159 **Chair:** Meaning what?

Anne Longfield: Advice and support for parents.

Q2160 **Chair:** At the moment, sometimes local authorities may contact the parent once or twice a year.

Anne Longfield: Some of them, yes, but a few have quite an interventionist team that go in, talk to parents, look at options and help them find another school. That would be the first thing: additional support for those parents that continues out of school.

Q2161 **Chair:** From where?

Anne Longfield: From the local authority, and indeed visits from the local authority. We said twice-a-year visits. Beyond that, schools need to provide that support for those children to keep them in school in the first place. If it is off-rolling, I want Ofsted to crack down on that in a very serious way.

Q2162 **Chair:** How would you ensure that the child is getting as best an education as they are able to get as well as a good outcome? What would you do?

Anne Longfield: In Jersey, they have a situation where the parent has to apply every year to home-educate, and they are assessed every year. I have not gone that far but I do think the local authority needs to be able to make that assessment. At the moment, people have about 500 children on their books and they just cannot make that level of assessment.

Q2163 **Chair:** Who should make that assessment—the local authority?

Anne Longfield: I think the local authority should.

Q2164 **Chair:** Why not twice a year, for example?

Anne Longfield: I think I said twice a year.

Q2165 **Chair:** In Jersey, it is twice a year, is it?

Anne Longfield: No, in Jersey, it is once a year but I think I said twice a year in my recommendations.

Q2166 **Chair:** The parents and the child should be assessed by the local authority to make sure they are getting a proper—



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Anne Longfield: Yes.

Q2167 **Chair:** If I can just ask you about the Timpson report, it made two relevant recommendations for tracking pupils who are excluded from school. One of them was that all pupils moved out of school should be systemically tracked, and the Government replied, saying that they would merely consider the role of local authorities in tracking pupil moves. Another one was that social workers must be notified, alongside parents, when a child in need is moved out of the school. The Government then deferred to the ongoing review of children in need. Do you agree with both those recommendations? Will you push to have them implemented?

Anne Longfield: I do agree with those recommendations. I thought it was a well-thought-through report that had plenty of depth. I want all those recommendations to go through, both in spirit and also in practice.

Q2168 **Chair:** The Timpson report also suggested real-time data on exclusions and other moves out of education should be routinely shared with Local Safeguarding Children Boards and their successors, Safeguarding Partners, so they can assess and address any safeguarding concerns, such as involvement in crime. The Government's response has been non-committal, just saying that local areas will be publishing revised arrangements by June 2019. Do you think that the Government need to be stronger on this? What will you do to try to make sure that they give a much stronger response?

Anne Longfield: Government need to be very clear on this through a number of counts. One is being clear with schools about the fact that this should be an absolute last resort. Secondly, given that I have already talk about safeguarding boards and their role in terms of serious violence, they absolutely need to know when children are outside school, so that is something that I will be looking to monitor and also press on.

Q2169 **Chair:** Just finally on the Timpson review, it recommended that the DfE should establish a practice improvement fund, which was partly something that we recommended in our own report on exclusions, of sufficient value, longevity and reach to support local authorities, mainstream, special and AP schools to work together to establish effective systems to identify children in need of support and deliver good interventions. Again, the Government response has been weak-ish, saying that they will only establish a practice programme that embeds partnership, and there is no funding guaranteed. Given that many of the children in AP are precisely those who you are looking after in your role, do you think the Government need to make a stronger commitment on this to ensure that the quality of education they receive is of equal quality to their peers in mainstream schools? Will you push for more funding for mainstream schools?

Anne Longfield: Both of those. Ofsted needs to scrutinise and assess AP. At the moment, they are assessed on the same framework as schools and they probably need a different framework within that from Ofsted.



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Also, I want to see the model of AP radically changing, so it keeps as many children in school as possible. I have seen really good examples of PRUs that are looking to do that through support hubs for schools to keep children in schools. I am really wary and concerned to ensure that Government do not just go down a route of maintaining the model of alternative provision as it is and strengthen that model. Yes, of course, if it exists, it needs to be high quality and we can push for that, but I want it to be much more ambitious and to use that £33,000 that it costs a year to keep those children in school and give them specialist provision there, which we know safeguards them much better.

Q2170 **Chair:** In terms of family hubs, I spoke with you at an event last week.

Anne Longfield: You did.

Q2171 **Chair:** The Government make the right noises about family hubs but why have we not seen a more proactive buy-in and expansion from Government? It was one of our recommendations in our early years committee report. Is there a lack of evidence to substantiate their impact and, if so, would your role be best placed to look at the research about how these family hubs work and whether or not they should be rolled out across the country?

Anne Longfield: I did an early paper on family hubs, because, as you know, I am quite a believer in both family hubs and Sure Start, so I was very pleased that Sure Start has positive evidence back of success last week. It is one that I have been involved in with No. 10.

Q2172 **Chair:** Family hubs are different from Sure Start in terms of the model; they have everything in one place. They are a lot more proactive.

Anne Longfield: They are but there is a lot of Sure Start that can move into that, and also there are similarities.

Chair: That has happened in my area in Essex, in Harlow.

Anne Longfield: I have been involved in roundtables at No. 10 about this, and involved in various discussions and the like. There is not a clear policy area that a Department owns about this. Clearly, children's centres were a policy area in the DfE, but it slightly gets lost. Troubled Families is very relevant but it is not part of its mainstream focus either. Partly it gets missed and partly it suffers from having a legacy of something that is part of a declining agenda.

Q2173 **Chair:** What is your definition of a family hub?

Anne Longfield: It is one that provides an integrated place for families to be able to get support in a local community, and which responds to local needs. Just as at the event last week, great family hubs respond to what is needed. They are not a statutory intervention as such, where the state steps in completely.

Q2174 **Chair:** Your view is that family hubs should be rolled out. Is that what



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you are saying? You want more research into it and you are doing more research. Is that what you are saying?

Anne Longfield: In an ongoing way, but a lot of family hubs are very new. We are constantly looking at the evidence behind that. With the Troubled Families next-stage discussions that we are having with the Home Office, I am pointing to family hubs as part of that. There is a gap at the moment in terms of family support that every local authority says needs to be filled. Family hubs are a way of filling that gap. I hoped that the Leadsom review would have come out and supported that, and we have not yet got that. It is an area that needs to be part of a new support network for families, and it is one that I am going to continue to push.

Q2175 **Lucy Powell:** Following on nicely from that, you just touched on it there but I was going to ask you about the Andrea Leadsom review on the 1,001 critical days. I met with the Cabinet Secretary, Mark Sedwill, last week in Manchester, and he assured me that that work was going to continue. How much have you been involved in that? Do you now worry that the main champion of this cross-cutting review of Government has resigned and it is "chair-less", so to speak?

Anne Longfield: We have been very involved, and I have been very involved in the work of 1,000 Critical Days, like many others have been, for a number of years. We had briefed the Committee a number of times, been part of discussions and the like, and seen some of the evidence. It is critical to have. It is absolutely the right time, ahead of the Spending Review, to have it. For me, it is very important that those conclusions come out. We are in touch with the Cabinet Office and seeking to better understand where it is going. I do not have an answer for you on that but it absolutely has to surface with really very strong conclusions, because there is a gap at the moment.

Q2176 **Lucy Powell:** Do you think that is what it was on track to do?

Anne Longfield: I have not had a recent update but I believe it had the capacity to do that. It was a serious piece of work and the Cabinet Office had a good body of evidence and had done a lot of groundwork in terms of discussions and models. I would expect it to be able to come up with a strong and robust set of proposals that would, in my view, need to encompass parental mental health, early intervention for children and also that integrated support, linking health and education and the like. I am going to be producing an early years Green Paper in September or October. If it does not happen, I will be including it in that, but I am going to push for it to happen in the meantime.

Q2177 **Lucy Powell:** We touched just there on some of the issues around Sure Start, early intervention and the like, and there was the IFS report last week. We can get a bit too bogged down between family hubs versus Sure Start. In essence, these are the same kinds of models, are they not?

Anne Longfield: They are.



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Q2178 Lucy Powell: They are integrated services with a strong outreach, getting to those families most in need. What did you think when you saw that IFS report last week that showed that there really had been quite a good impact on health spending and the health of children? Do you feel that the voice of children could be a lot stronger in saying how much they value the Sure Start or family hub model, and that it has gone in the wrong direction with all the closures that we have seen and the lack of funding that we have seen?

Anne Longfield: I was really pleased to see the evidence, as you can imagine, and it is something that I always, from the experiences and stories from families themselves, knew was the case. They could only give feedback on the evidence of health outcomes, because the rest is not collected, so there are many more outcomes to be had there, in my view. Also, in places like Leeds, where we have just had really quite stunning results in a city that is bringing down obesity rates, they could do that because they continue to use Sure Start and use that as a way to get to families.

For me, the evidence was important because trusting the model and being able to know that there is an outcome is important. However, it now means that it needs to re-enter the policy arena in terms of a solution for what we know is a difficulty around under-fives who are not reaching the levels of development they need.

Q2179 Lucy Powell: Following on from that, as a final question, which we have been asking some of the people who have come in recently, we are about to have a new Prime Minister. We do not know who it is going to be yet. In her first speech on the steps of Downing Street, the last Prime Minister talked about the burning injustices. I am not sure she really followed through on that legacy but that is for another committee to discuss. What would you like to see from an incoming Prime Minister in relation to children and your brief? What would be that key message that they deliver on the steps of Downing Street when they take up office?

Anne Longfield: It goes back to my opening remarks about the significant number of vulnerable children and the ability to turn that around. Where you have a fifth of all children who are either vulnerable or highly vulnerable, and also the knowledge of how that can be prevented to enable them to get the life they deserve, there is a moral obligation for a Prime Minister to do that. We have had a distraction, clearly, around our relationship with the rest of Europe, which remains. Looking forward, there is now an opportunity to build a new legacy for the new Prime Minister around a new framework of support for these vulnerable children. It needs to be a mission—as I say, an obsession—and, within five or 10 years, there could be a complete difference in what we are describing and seeing in our communities, with very vulnerable children being given the building blocks they need to be able to flourish. For me, there could be no better legacy than that.

Q2180 Emma Hardy: We have spoken before about the use of isolation booths



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in schools. How do you think the isolation is impacting on the number of parents choosing to electively home-educate?

Anne Longfield: It is having a big impact. Usually, that decision is not taken lightly. It comes at the end of weeks, if not months, of phone calls from the school, and children being very upset and distressed about their experience in school. Often, they will talk about periods in isolation that sometimes can be a week long. It is something that we are going to be looking at this year in some depth as part of a project we have about good schools. The kinds of stories I hear are about how teachers are having their classrooms taken off them to be made into isolation booths, which just feels like one of the most negative things you can do.

Children tell me how they feel very anxious about isolation booths, and distressed about them. If they have been put into isolation because of challenging behaviour in the first place, that is probably the last thing that they are going to benefit from. One of the reports that I saw last week, from the Education Endowment Fund, said that children responded better to schools that engage with them or say hello to them, and treat them as individuals, rather than those that have some of the more extreme behaviour policies that we can see isolation booths as part of. It is something that I am really concerned about and we are going to be looking at. Again, I would like the DfE and Ofsted to be much clearer that it is not acceptable to put children in this intolerable position.

Q2181 **Emma Hardy:** That is brilliant. You talked about the DfE being much clearer. Are there any specific actions that you think the Government should take? Do you think they should update guidance or write to schools? What action do you think they should take?

Anne Longfield: I do think they should update guidance and be very clear about that. When Ofsted goes in and inspect a school with its new framework, it should be asking questions about isolation, the wellbeing of children and the monitoring of the impact of those treatments on children. I welcome that new framework from Ofsted but I want it to use that and use it boldly. We know that, again, it is not the majority of schools that are doing this. The majority of schools do not have this kind of behaviour policy but, for those that do, Ofsted needs to be very clear that it is not what it is looking for in a good school. That is a message that I do not think we have heard yet.

Q2182 **Ian Mearns:** On that one, Anne, have you communicated that directly to Amanda Spielman, in terms of what Ofsted should be doing?

Anne Longfield: We have communicated it in a number of ways, including around the framework itself and in terms of off-rolling. I write to Amanda from time to time. We meet with Ofsted as well on a regular basis. With isolation, it will be part of that dialogue that we are having as part of the work we are undertaking, when we can gather more evidence of it over the coming weeks.

Q2183 **Ian Mearns:** Is there any evidence that Amanda Spielman has taken



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that on board in terms of them imposing a new inspection framework to take on board your recommendations?

Anne Longfield: Clearly, we are not yet at the stage of seeing that. With off-rolling, for instance, if I was going into school and I saw a lot of movement of children that was unexplained and I did not get a satisfactory answer to that, I would not think that that was a good school. There was a report last week where there was a high level of movement with a child, and the head teacher described it as “children not being able to hack it”, and they still got a very good result—good or outstanding. For me, that should not be happening.

That is the clarity that I am talking about. Yes, the framework gives more opportunities to do that, but it has to follow through. When we produce this survey of schools that are off-rolling, I would want every one of those to be investigated by Ofsted, and the same for the 10% of schools that are excluding. It is quite easy for the DfE to work out who they are. It is that level of determination and proactive intervention that I am looking to see.

Q2184 Ian Mearns: What is stopping the DfE from doing more about this? Is there a lack of will, do you believe, or is it the fact that they do not believe there has been enough evidence gathered on this issue? It is difficult to gather evidence if you do not go looking for it.

Anne Longfield: I do not know the answer, in truth. I would start there. I would want to know now what these 10% of schools were doing. There is a reliance on behaviour management, and the investment they are making in behaviour management is making that change, and a reliance on Ofsted and their interventions and their assessments of making that change too. I really want there to be that momentum about the change in culture that is expected, led from the top. That is something that I have said to the Secretary of State.

Q2185 Ian Mearns: You said that you do not know, Anne, but as Children’s Commissioner and the champion for children, should you not be urging the Secretary of State to be collating and collecting the evidence about this?

Anne Longfield: Absolutely. I have met with the Secretary of State probably about five times in the last three months, and these discussions have formed part of every one of those conversations, along with wider things about exclusions and the like. We are absolutely pushing on this. I was pleased that we moved the exclusions review to the place it was. I know this Committee had a big role in that too but I do not think it would have got where it was if it had not have been for our interventions. We need to really press Ofsted on this too; it is not going to go away.

Q2186 Ian Mearns: In 2017, you told us that independence was very important, and you told us that you intended to move from Sanctuary Buildings. We said before that, as an independent body, it was important that the Children’s Commissioner, from the perspective of the man on the



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Clapham omnibus, was seen to be independent. It was difficult for people to come to the conclusion that you were totally independent if you were embedded within the DfE, but you are still there.

Anne Longfield: Yes, I have not moved. One of the reasons I was going to move is that the whole building was going to close down and everyone was going to move. That was one of the triggers for moving, and it is not the case anymore. It is a judgment call and it is something that I consider all the time. I do not think I present myself as being part of Government, and I think the work stands for itself. The relationship and the dialogue with the outside world and the Clapham omnibus stand for themselves. I have to make that judgment. At the moment, I have private office that do not put me in hour-by-hour contact with others, but it is in central Government, it is five minutes away from here and it is a fantastic market rate. I could spend my days and months looking for somewhere else. I could go and log myself out in some part of outer London but we are delivering independence from where we are. It is a state of mind for me.

Q2187 **Ian Mearns:** In terms of your independence, two of the people involved in your appointment are now members of your current advisory group. One of them was a Government Minister at the time of your appointment but is not now, and the other was a member of the appointments process, and they are now on your advisory group.

Anne Longfield: One of them was.

Q2188 **Ian Mearns:** That does not really help to take away the mystique about independence or not, Anne. That is the thing.

Anne Longfield: Edward Timpson is the one you mean. There is no one else on there who was involved.

Q2189 **Ian Mearns:** What about Martin Narey?

Anne Longfield: He left the advisory group a couple of years ago.

Ian Mearns: Okay. I thought he was still a member.

Anne Longfield: We all know that, with that individual, it is someone who has immense knowledge, huge passion and real expertise and commitment around vulnerable children, and especially children in care. That is why I wanted him on that advisory group. Again, this is a judgment call. I want people there who know the system and can help me get the ambitions that I have for children through the system, so they can become reality. That is something that I am pretty certain that I am managing to do well. It is something that I do not leave and make no assumptions around, but the proof of the pudding is in what we do, and we are demonstrating that.

Q2190 **James Frith:** In your earlier answer to Ben's question, you used the phrase "We, as a Government". Was that a Freudian slip, and do you want to correct the record?



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Anne Longfield: I did not say, “We, as a Government”. I said “we” as in people in this room, because I made an assumption that we were all working in the same way in terms of our commitment to children. I did not say “Government”.

Q2191 **James Frith:** The tape will show it but I think I heard “We, as a Government”, which plays to the fear—

Anne Longfield: I would be very surprised if you did because I have never, ever thought of myself as part of the Government. I have never worked for Government. I have never thought of myself as Government.

Q2192 **James Frith:** In terms of the five times in three months that you have met with the Secretary of State, do you get to meet him every time you want to meet him? Are they his meetings where he calls you in, or are you calling on him? How is that working?

Anne Longfield: It has been a mix of those. One was around home education, where I went to brief him about the home education recommendations. The second was a follow-up where he said he was going to accept one of the recommendations, which was the register, which I was quite pleased about. One of them was around the exclusions review, and he came to brief me about the exclusions review. It is a mix.

Q2193 **James Frith:** Does the amount of change that has happened in the last four years—one referendum, three Prime Ministers soon to be, four Secretaries of State, two general elections and two Governments—prevent any change happening? You are unchanged in that time, so what has changed in that great period of change in terms of the area that you are responsible for?

Anne Longfield: Looking ahead when I took this post, I would never have anticipated—and who here would?—that level of change or uncertainty, but I am a pragmatist. Children grow up. I cannot put this on ice until Parliament decides it is a good time to do it. Five years is a lifetime for children. I am dealing with the lived experience and with the here and now. It is my task to break through on that. I need to convince. I have just under two years left before my term comes to an end and it is my task to convince enough people that it is a priority to get that national strategy and to get that top-led investment in vulnerable children, because it will cost money in the short term. It is my task.

Q2194 **James Frith:** Do you begin to worry, though, that, with all of that change—and, in full candour, it is an issue that MPs wrestle with—you end up becoming an observer and commentator on decline as opposed to enacting and effecting change? To your point about you being the child’s voice on, for example, Sure Start needing to return to the policy arena, I hear that loud and clear, but where was the objection on behalf of the children’s voice when the policy was to shut 1,200 Sure Start centres, when all of the evidence was known at the time?



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Anne Longfield: I ran a campaign for Sure Start for many years, so I have campaigned on Sure Start for a decade. I campaigned to have it, I campaigned to keep it and I campaigned to reinstate it as well. I am well versed on that issue, but there have been things that have broken through on this. I do think there are achievements we can point to that would not have happened unless we had raised these issues and tackled them. Mental health is one of those. The NHS 10-year plan now has targets to help 100% of children. We have gone beyond just a third of children or one in four, whichever is incrementally better, to say “10 years, all children”, and that would not have happened, in my view, unless we had pushed it and added investment in children beyond that for adults too.

In terms of the exclusions review, I have already said that I do not think that that would have been as strong if the issues had not been raised and if the representations had not been raised. The same goes for home education. With digital, we have led on that, not only saying that there needs to be a duty of care but also writing a draft Bill, taking it to a completely different place than it was.

Yes, there has been change, but if I became dispirited against every one of the barriers that came up, I would not bother coming in in the first place, and that would not be what children need.

Q2195 **James Frith:** The need for money and the need for funding is absolutely right. Do you hope for a lot in the CSR next year?

Anne Longfield: Yes.

Q2196 **James Frith:** What would you put as your priorities? That is going to coincide with your final year.

Anne Longfield: We are already working on the CSR and we intend to put in a detailed submission on spend. We have been working with a number of local authorities over the last six months to really get under the skin of what is happening, understand what the drivers are and understand why the funding has gone away from early intervention and why high cost is really driving the funding. We know an awful lot more about that than we did.

Over the next few weeks, starting in July, we are going to be presenting proposals around spend. The LGA has said that there needs to be a £3 billion intervention to fill the gaps, if you like, or to fill the holes—it is almost potholes—for children’s services, and our figures support that. I just do not want us to fill that hole and then continue as we are, because there needs to be reform and there needs to be change.

There needs to be attention and money to sustain services that are already there, and then those services need to reform and change. There needs to be a move away from crisis management, which is where we are, to early intervention and support, including the Troubled Families programme there. The amount that you are looking at realistically is at



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least double the £3 billion, if not as much as £10 billion, but I know, for that, over a period of time, the savings on the public purse would be immense. Then, of course, there are the gains for children within that.

Q2197 Ian Mearns: The tailored review into the Office of the Children's Commissioner looked at a number of areas, including the form it takes and whether it should remain independent and at arm's length. The review team suggested that consideration should be given to re-establishing the Office of the Children's Commissioner with an independent chair and board. What impact would this change have on the role?

Anne Longfield: The first thing is that I did not support that suggestion. Apparently, it is Cabinet Office policy to reintroduce that idea whenever there is a vacancy, so it was included on that basis. It started off as "should" and I argued that it could be "could" rather than "should". I have worked really hard to remove bureaucracy around my very small office, so that it could be focused on getting things done. The role and the status of the role that I am in, which is very much about the individual and the sole nature of that, is really important and drives that level of responsibility that the Commissioner has and the accountability that the Commissioner has to really deliver on the goods. I can understand why people want to wrap more bureaucracy around that, because it may make people feel more comfortable, but it is a small budget and a small office, and the laser focus on one individual who has to deliver and report to this Committee—and, indeed, report to children—is much more impactful.

Q2198 Ian Mearns: Do you think that the proposals that have come forward would reduce the independence that you have from Government?

Anne Longfield: Do you mean the proposal of a chair?

Ian Mearns: Yes.

Anne Longfield: Possibly. More than anything, though, independence was not really my starting point because, again, for me, independence is a state of mind. If you are not independent, you are not doing the job. For me, it was really about diluting the level of accountability to an individual, and that judgment call for that individual. It became more of an organisation rather than an individual with a team, which works well as it is.

Q2199 Ian Mearns: The review made a number of suggestions to improve the effectiveness of your work, particularly around Children's Rights Impact Assessments and the UNCRC Action Group. What will you be looking to take forward?

Anne Longfield: We are part of the UNCRC Action Group, which is working with voluntary organisations and Government to look at the priorities to implement. We are doing a half-year review of where Government is in terms of the concluding recommendations of UNCRC,



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and we will publish that later in the year. With child impact assessments, the DfE have produced a child impact-assessment test. Part of my obsession, if you like, would be that every policy area would need some kind of impact assessment. What I do not want to do is have that as a tick-box. I want it to be done because people believe in it and see it as their mission. That would be the practical implementation.

Q2200 Ian Mearns: We have talked about the UNCRC Action Group but we have also had a recent disturbing and alarming report from the UN Special Rapporteur on poverty, who is suggesting that, by 2021, 40% of children could be living in some measure of poverty. Government Ministers have been absolutely dismissive of that report. Where do you stand on it?

Anne Longfield: I am really concerned about poverty and made a representation to the Secretary of State at DWP following that report. I have always been clear that there is a cumulative approach of welfare reductions and also lived experience of families that is driving more and more children into poverty. I was really clear that universal credit should be paused until there could be a guarantee that no child would be worse off. I am pleased to see that there has been a pause in the new pilots, and we went to see the Secretary of State to talk about really being able to use that period to get proper data and a proper understanding of that impact.

We have also talked about the need to get proper data. We believe that it is possible to be able to get that good data now through software, in a way that was not there before, so we can anticipate those who are most vulnerable. Most of all, if you are looking at the implementation of universal credit, the support programme needs to be in place to help families, as well as the mechanisms changing.

Q2201 Lucy Allan: I would particularly like to thank you, Anne, for all the work you do for children in care and being an absolute champion for them. Certainly during your term of office, we have been hearing an awful lot more about children in care, so thank you for that.

One point I wanted to pick up with you was around a report that you did referring to toxic families and toxic homes. I just wonder if that was really the right emphasis. The toxicity you were referring to was about mental health and addiction issues. Should we be stigmatising and demonising families when they really are in need of support to better care for their children? My worry is that that term has been picked up, and certainly Nadhim Zahawi, Children's Minister, keeps talking about toxic families and toxic homes. There is probably quite a lot of toxicity in most families, if we are talking about mental health being one of those issues. On reflection, do you have some thoughts on that?

Anne Longfield: We were referring to a toxic trio of conditions that those families were experiencing: poor mental health conditions, severe domestic violence and addiction. Those were the three things that we



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established and well evidenced that have a very severe impact on children. The report that you are referring to was when we took the 2.1 million figure, which was for all children, and looked at babies and children under one. There are about 15,000 children living in families with that level of challenges.

In terms of the use of the term, it is a lively debate. I also sometimes get criticised when I talk about children in care who pinball around the system. I want people to understand the full extent and impact of those situations. When I talk about children who are pinballing around, people sometimes say, "It is a dreadful term. You are defining those children". I am not; I am just trying to explain how awful that situation is that they have to live in, day in, day out. It is an established term around the toxic trio of challenges that those families face, but I am only doing it to absolutely show that those families need help and support. What I hope we went on to show with that report is that those very vulnerable children, who are often not recognised at the earlier stage, need help within those families. Again, that is what most local authorities say, if it came down to it, they would spend most of their money on: that absolute support for families early on.

Q2202 Lucy Allan: Ultimately, children grow up in families, and families will be flawed. Families will have challenges and problems. If we are not getting the message across of "Support the family and then you are benefiting the child", we are ending up with a never-ending system of more and more children going into care, where they do not necessarily have far superior outcomes. That is not a solution in itself and I sometimes worry that we focus on removing children from potentially risky environments and not doing better for them in the care system.

Anne Longfield: As it is now, the system has a very short-term approach around immediate risk, which is really important, but there needs to be a much broader concern around the outcomes for children as well. One of the things I am going to be talking about in September is vulnerable adolescents, who are the largest number going into care. I am told regularly about vulnerable adolescents who go into care. The amount spent on them is around £1 million in four years. I was really quite shocked at that, until people started saying it time and time again. What the most dispiriting thing is about all of that is that there is an acknowledgement that that child might not be that much better, if not worse, at the end of that period of time. That is wrong on so many counts.

I read a thematic review of very vulnerable adolescents from Croydon the other day, which is well worth a read. They looked at 60 who many agencies had identified. A third of those had been excluded from school at primary school. If that had been taken as a trigger point, where it was not just an administrative issue where people needed to look at where the child goes, but where understanding that things are not going well if you have a primary-school-age child being excluded, then there could be



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additional help before that child escalates into a different stage. The early years Green Paper will look at all of this, but I am very clear that, with the reductions in budget as they stand, there is not the funding there to provide that package of support for children at that earlier stage, and their families too, and that needs to change.

Q2203 **Lucy Powell:** Just moving quickly back to the toxic issue, one of which is domestic violence, I have dealt with a number of cases where women who have been victims of domestic violence have had their children removed into care. There must be a better way of supporting women victims of domestic violence than simply removing their children. I just wondered what your views are on that.

Anne Longfield: I agree completely.

Q2204 **Lucy Powell:** They cannot protect themselves. We should be helping them, not saying, "We are taking your child".

Anne Longfield: At the moment, Troubled Families does not have a guaranteed future, although it is getting strong support from Ministers in that Department. I have said that, if you could treble that funding for very vulnerable families, target it on the early years and on the vulnerable children that we are identifying, it could be transformational.

Q2205 **Lucy Powell:** I want to quickly ask about unregistered accommodation. *Newsnight* did an excellent piece quite recently about accommodation for post-16s, and I am just rather concerned about some of the issues that were being flagged up about local authorities placing children in caravan parks, et cetera. I just wonder what you are doing about that type of issue and whether you think that that type of accommodation ought to all be registered or regulated, et cetera.

Anne Longfield: It is being raised more and more with me, and local authorities also say that it is one of the biggest issues at the moment with children in care. It is completely unacceptable to me that they are in that kind of accommodation, and the stories that kids talk about in terms of feeling unsafe in those places are just heart-breaking. They are the most vulnerable kids. They should be inspected by Ofsted. There is a notion from some that a quality assurance scheme for provision may help. I have no problem with that but it still needs to be regulated as well.

Q2206 **Chair:** Do you think there should be no unregulated part of this market, so to speak?

Anne Longfield: It needs to be an exception but the local authorities that are making their everyday purchases need to know and have assurance that that is high quality and suitable. The distance away from suitability for some of this accommodation is just astounding: young women put into hostels with men in their 20s, many of whom have addictions themselves.



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Q2207 **Lucy Powell:** How is that even possible? If you are putting somebody into B&B accommodation, why is it mixed with people who might be ex-convicts?

Anne Longfield: I agree. A young woman told me how she was given the key to somewhere that just had a mattress on the floor and nothing else. There are young mothers who dare not go to the toilet in the night, because they do not want to leave their babies and they share a toilet. These are things that the majority of people would think would never happen. It has been overlooked. It has grown in terms of an issue. It has also grown in terms of the unregulated market. Funding is clearly an issue within that, and again that needs to be address. Also, pathway plans seem to fall down for young people at this place. It is an area that we will be scrutinising. We have the Homeless piece of work going on, and it is something that we are going to be writing to Ministers about.

Q2208 **Lucy Powell:** Please keep talking about it.

Anne Longfield: The *Newsnight* piece had a big effect as well.

Q2209 **Chair:** What does the Children's Minister say when you raise these issues with him?

Anne Longfield: I have not had the conversation about that with him yet.

Q2210 **Chair:** Why not? It is a pretty big issue.

Anne Longfield: It is. In terms of children in care, I have been really focusing with him on stability. I am pleased that, three years on with stability, he has established a stability forum within the Department. That is one of those things that this office does not need to continue doing forever, but it is one of those proof-of-concept things that we have established and are now really looking to hand that over.

Q2211 **Chair:** Just to confirm, you do not think there should be unregulated aspects of this. It should all be regulated.

Anne Longfield: No, we have to have complete assurance that the most vulnerable children under our care have the best accommodation possible.

Q2212 **Chair:** Just before I come to Emma, the last time you came before us you were concerned that local authorities were prioritising children in care over early intervention, and prevention work that might have prevented these individuals being looked after in the first place. You said that the Government should introduce some kind of transition fund that enabled local authorities to maintain and rebuild their preventative service at the same time as spending on care. What signals from the Government have you had that they are serious about reform on this?

Anne Longfield: That would be the basis of the Spending Review. My view would be to provide funding that would be linked to reform, and the reform would be to drive that funding into early intervention and



preventative work rather than the high-end cost of risk management and the like, which is completely unsustainable. There are a few green shoots where people indicate that they are looking for those kinds of solutions. I am not convinced that there is anywhere that is looking at it in a holistic manner. I do not think the Treasury are looking at it in the holistic manner that they need to, which comes back to the obsession: they need to have the obsession. If it continues as it is, it will be a selection of fragmented interventions that may have money attached to them, which might look to address one aspect of vulnerability and may look to bring funding back towards prevention, the Youth Endowment Fund being a really good example. It is a good thing, but actually it needs to be plumbed into lots of other things. It has not got the breakthrough, which is what I would see as my job to be done.

Q2213 Lucy Powell: Just following on from that, do you think that in the way Government work there an over-emphasis, which is actually a problem, on initiative-itis, which is not that strategic and holistic view? We hear a lot in this Committee that sometimes these initiatives actually are a barrier to that kind of work.

Anne Longfield: They distract and they give a false sense of security that something is happening. They are not strong enough to address what the real cause is, which is the vulnerability that needs to be tackled at the root. It is not just the addiction to initiatives in itself. It really reflects the structure of Government, which is not around whole people, whole lives and outcomes for kids. That is what needs to change.

The children in need review that the Department for Education undertook ended up being a children in need review about the education of those children. Actually, it needed to look at every aspect of those children's lives. The Home Office's intervention around gang crime will be looking at prevention of crime. Yes, of course that it important, but it needs to be much broader.

Q2214 Chair: The NHS has a 10-year plan. Education should have a 10-year plan—education for children.

Anne Longfield: Education should have a 10-year plan, absolutely, but Government should have a 10-year plan. It has to come out of Departments.

James Frith: Any plan will do.

Anne Longfield: You will take one anywhere.

Q2215 Chair: You talked about child poverty earlier and the DWP say that there are 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty. Do you recognise this figure?

Anne Longfield: 300,000 in absolute poverty.

Chair: 300,000 fewer in absolutely poverty.



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Anne Longfield: No. My understanding is that the figure is much higher than that.

Q2216 **Chair:** I am saying 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty.

Anne Longfield: Sorry; I thought you meant 300,000 children in absolutely poverty. My understanding is that poverty rates are increasing.

Chair: I am talking about absolutely poverty.

Anne Longfield: I do not recognise that figure. I will go away, scrutinise it and give you a note back.

Chair: Could you let us know whether you think that the DWP figure is correct?

Anne Longfield: We do scrutinise figures from Departments as well.

Q2217 **Emma Hardy:** Thank you very much. You cannot fail to have noticed the problems around the protests in Birmingham over sex and relationship education. As you have probably seen, Anderton Park Primary School had to close early so the children could avoid the protestors. Damian Hinds has said that tolerance and respect has broken down. The BBC interestingly reported that a lot of the protestors outside the schools do not actually have children in those schools. Do you think there has been enough focus on the rights of children in this debate about teaching of the No Outsiders project in Birmingham?

Anne Longfield: No, there has not. I have been pleased that people have come forward and said that the programme must go ahead and that the curriculum must be upheld. That needs to be said stronger and stronger. In terms of children within this, absolutely, there are lessons that I have campaigned for years for around PSHE. I am pleased that we have got RSE. I am pleased that we are now looking at equality, tolerance and the like. There can be no point where anyone, either parents or otherwise, start to opt out of that curriculum. It is not something we allow for any other aspect of the curriculum. It is something that those children have a right to be able to take part in. I am very clear on that. It needs to be stopped.

Q2218 **Emma Hardy:** As the Children's Commissioner, how can you emphasise the wishes of children and the rights of children to have this kind of curriculum? What more can you do? At the moment, the debate seems to be about what adults are saying about this, not actually what children need.

Anne Longfield: That is true. The aspect of children's rights again parents' rights is one that we are coming up against more and more. It was something with home education. The parents may have chosen that, but actually the child has a right to education. With anti-vaccine, for instance, the child has the right to be safe and healthy, as do other children. We do raise that, but you are right that that aspect has not yet



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come to the fore. It is something that we can look at and consider how we do that in a more robust way.

Q2219 Emma Hardy: What actions could we start to see you taking as the voice of the children in this debate, to say that? Statistically, some of the children in this school will be children who might grow up to be LGBT. They have a right to learn about these things in school. What more can you do?

Anne Longfield: Absolutely. We constantly talk to children and these are some of the issues that they raise. We can highlight how important these experiences are for children. Also we can write to those individual schools. We can write to the authorities. We can do all of those things. We can look at that in more detail.

Q2220 Emma Hardy: Could you offer more support to the teachers in these schools, who are having to face a lot of protest every day?

Anne Longfield: We can certainly add strength to their arguments around the necessity for those lessons.

Q2221 Emma Hardy: On a slightly different topic, I have been reading and researching a lot about ACEs—adverse childhood experiences. I wonder if this is something that your Department is looking into and if there is something that is starting to inform your thinking around early intervention and prevention.

Anne Longfield: For ACEs, I talk about vulnerability. I am meaning very similar things. When we looked at our vulnerability framework, we considered whether we set it within the context of ACEs or whether we actually talked about wider vulnerabilities. We chose to look at wider vulnerabilities because we thought it gave greater breadth to enable us to do that. We do also very much support those individuals and organisations that are looking at ACEs and we refer to ACEs within it as well. It is very much a similar approach. It is just a different terminology.

Q2222 Emma Hardy: Have you had conversations with the Department for Education around ACEs and how that can be used to inform the decisions they make in Government?

Anne Longfield: I have not specifically done that, but I am sure others in my team have. Certainly, in terms of vulnerability, if you like, those are constant discussions about informing policy in terms of children's outcomes.

Q2223 James Frith: Just on RSE, there is a bit of a theme with the 2014 Act, when we have been looking at SEND, EHCP and exclusions: there is well-meaning legislation that has good intent, but we do not have a completer-finisher Government. We have not got a Government with their eye on the ball beyond the first move. This guidance on RSE is supported across the House. It was a joy to be in agreement on something so important in the House, during the debate, and to speak to



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that. They have then only gone so far when we needed to go further on actually making it a requirement, not a recommendation. This last week, at a time of great anxiety for the children who are being harassed on the way into school, we have a Secretary of State that outsources responsibility to schools to determine when it is delivered. It is about leadership, is it not? Do we not need a braver Secretary of State to speak to the original intent of the guidance?

Anne Longfield: It is right to put it alongside the SEND reforms, which were widely welcomed, recognised and the like, but which we know are not the lived experiences of children or indeed their parents in that situation. What you are seeing is that you have not got an implementation plan and follow-through plan that actually holds people accountable, backed up by the resources. Obviously, we welcome all of these things when they come into place, because it is important to get to that stage, but the second stage is following it through and knowing, as you would in any implementation plan, what it will take to get there and have the resources to back that up and show that through.

Because we have been going through this period where we have had reduced resources, austerity and the like, the money has pulled that back. It has not been able to deliver—not with the RSE. It has not been able to deliver to the extent it should have, because the money, which is vital, has been that barrier. That means people then lose confidence in telling people what they can or should do, because the money is not there. That wastes everyone's time, to an extent.

The policies are there and the intentions are there, but we now need to see clear follow-through plans, which have risk registers, which have accountability points, which have development teams alongside them to go out and work with them. It is like you see in NHS improvement teams, going along and working alongside people to implement it. That is how, in my view, you get things done.

Ben, you asked me earlier about the serious violence and about whether a summit is enough. You need an implementation plan, which is determined and works out exactly whose job it is to do this, and that has the money there to make that happen and that holds people to account. There are several segments that are missing. There is the wider question of change and whether it makes it difficult. Those are some of the things that make it difficult, because if they are changing people who are accountable during that process, it makes it difficult.

Q2224 **Chair:** Finally, you have indicated to us that you have made a difference in every area that we have mentioned so far.

Anne Longfield: I did not quite say that, but go on.

Chair: You have been pretty extensive. Is that even possible? Are there any areas you would argue that you have not been able to make a difference in?



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Anne Longfield: There is a long list. There are some that are stubbornly frustrating, I have to say. There is the whole area of youth custody, from the fact that the most vulnerable children fall into that to the way they are treated to what happens when they come out; that is one that is so frustrating to me. You are talking about a relatively small group of kids, less than a small comprehensive school now. We cannot get that bit right so that they come out in a better place. Some do, but it is not consistent enough.

The other one that we have had enough warning about is those children in secure mental health institutions. A lot of people have been shocked recently. We should not have been shocked because we have known about it for years. Most of those children in those institutions should not have been in there in the first place and half of them should have been out once they were in there.

There are so many areas that need impetus and reform. That is why I talk about the obsession. In places like Leeds, where people can see that they are working well, and Manchester and others, they describe that obsession. It comes from the top and people do not rest until they have gone into all of those corners of Government. That is what kids need to see.

Q2225 **Chair:** What are your top one, two or three priorities, in a very simple way, over the coming year? What can you most make a difference?

Anne Longfield: The biggest priority is around the change in level of priority for vulnerable kids, backed up by a funding and spending review with a national plan to make that happen. If I go away in two years' time and I have not done that, I will have failed to convince people that that is absolutely necessary.

Q2226 **Chair:** Will it also be encouraging the Government to implement properly the Timpson review?

Anne Longfield: It will, of course—all of those. In terms of the Timpson review, I am absolutely convinced of the change that can make and the necessity of it. We are looking. We have a list of all of all the recommendations, we have a plan against each of them, we are scrutinising them all and we have an action plan for every one.

Q2227 **Chair:** In your list, you agree that exclusions are a major social injustice in education, with all of the problems that they bring. Is that why it is a priority?

Anne Longfield: Yes, there cannot be a system where 90% of the kids get along and 10% are sacrificed. It fuels the situation we are in for some of those schools at the moment that are excluding most. Schools have to be about all children, they have to be about social justice, they have to be about wellbeing and they have to be about outcomes for all children. That is the responsibility that we hold for them.



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Chair: Thank you very much indeed for your public service and for answering our roving questions.