Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons SW1A OAA

17th December 2020

Appointment of the next Children's Commissioner for England following Education Select Committee's pre-appointment hearing

Thank you for your letter dated 16 December providing the Committee's observations following the pre-appointment hearing held with Dame Rachel de Souza – my preferred candidate for the Children's Commissioner for England - on Tuesday 15 December, and for providing sight of the Committee's report.

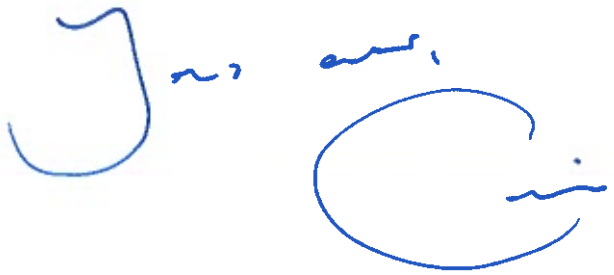
I have considered your letter and report carefully, and I am pleased that the Committee's overall conclusion was that Dame Rachel is appointable as the next Children's Commissioner for England. I write to inform you that I will be progressing with her appointment. As stated in my letter to you on 8 December, I am confident that Rachel's skills and experience as an educational leader make her an incredibly strong fit for the role, to champion the voice of the child and to protect and promote the rights of children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable. As noted in your letter, Rachel has a strong track record in improving the lives of children and young people in disadvantaged communities and speaking out on the issues they face. I have no doubt she will use this as an underlying principle when challenging local and national government and delivering change, as she takes on the role as Children's Commissioner.

In response to your request for additional information on the recruitment process, I am setting out further details. As with all Public Appointments across Government, Ministers are assisted in their decision making by an Advisory Assessment Panel. The governance code highlights that ministers must agree the composition of the panel, including who the panel Chair is. I approved the composition of the panel

earlier this year, and it was chaired by Sir Simon Burns, who recently sat on the panel for the Chair of Ofsted (announced in July 2020). Furthermore, the Senior Independent Panel Member, Cindy Butts, was endorsed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments as an independent panel member, with a wealth of experience, and ensured the panel operated in line with the Governance Code.

As you are aware, all shortlisted candidates were invited to attend a children and young people's panel session. This was led by three young people who were identified by two charitable organisations that work with young people across the country. During the session, each candidate ran a consultation exercise with the young people on a topic of their choice related to issues impacting children and young people in England. The young people asked follow-up questions, to explore the candidate's suitability to the role, and assessed the candidates against three of the essential and desirable criteria that they had selected. They provided their feedback on how the candidates performed and highlighted any areas the main panel could explore further during the interviews. Their scores and feedback were subsequently relayed to the Advisory Assessment panel who considered these when assessing the candidates against the essential criteria following the interviews.

Thank you again for your role in assessing Rachel's suitability.



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Secretary of State for Education