

Witness Name: Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits **9**

Dated: 18 September 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAME RACHEL DE SOUZA, CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND

I, Dame Rachel de Souza, will say as follows:-

1. The Children's Commissioner for England is a statutory role and is a corporation sole. I am provided with a budget to support this work, which funds the current 'office of the Children's Commissioner'. The Commissioner is an office holder who holds a single term of six years. Reflecting this, I am not able to provide a witness statement on behalf of the previous Commissioner on events prior to March 2021 when I began my tenure as Children's Commissioner. There is no role within my office who can speak on behalf of a current or former Commissioner.
2. In light of this, any information included that is pertinent to the questions posed under the tenure of the previous Commissioner, up to 28 February 2021 is offered without interpretation or judgement. I am unable to answer questions that require subjective judgements or reflection on behalf of a previous Commissioner.

The Office of Children's Commissioner's: structure, people and processes

3. The Children's Commissioner is a national, independent role with statutory powers and regulations. As a corporation sole, the Commissioner is granted an annual funding allocation from the Department of Education which has historically been used to fund a staffing budget for a Children's Commissioner's office. The office's primary function is children's rights, views and interests, with a legal duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

(UNCRC). Initially established under the Children Act 2004, the remit of the Commissioner was further strengthened by the Children and Families Act 2014, which gave the post-holder particular responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social services support; the most vulnerable in our society relying on the state for their safety and protection.

4. The office is formed to deliver for children, spanning policy, research, communications and Help at Hand. The Help at Hand service is for children in care, leaving care, living away from home or working with children's services offering free support, advice and information. Alongside this, the In My Opinion (IMO) website is a voice for teenagers in care and care leavers to share their experiences and stories.
5. As well as a team of staff, I am supported by an advisory group, an Audit and Risk Committee and children's groups, stakeholders and specialists. My statutory powers include the ability to enter premises to conduct interviews and observe standards and the ability to request information from any person(s) exercising functions of a public nature which relate to the functions of the Commissioner.
6. A full description of the Children's Commissioner's roles and responsibilities can be found in the Annual Report and Accounts. [RS/1-INQ000137536, RS/2-INQ000137537, RS/3-INQ000137538]

Liaison and communication with the UK Government

7. The following sections set out my liaison and communication with the UK Government from the start of my tenure in March 2021 to 24 February 2022 to the best of my knowledge.

Covid-19 Committee meetings

8. I have not attended any Covid-19 Committee meetings since taking office. I cannot confirm who may have attended meetings prior to my tenure nor do I hold any information relating to any briefings or papers that may have been produced by the former Children's Commissioner or her team to Ministers attending these meetings.

Ministerial Meetings

9. To the best of my knowledge, the following meetings took place with myself and UK Government ministers or senior civil servants between the start of my tenure and 24 February 2022:

01 March 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
01 March 2021	Minister for Children and Families (DfE)
03 March 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
05 March 2021	Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Education
10 March 2021	Permanent Secretary (DfE)
17 March 2021	Directors for CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
19 March 2021	Director General, Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery (DfE)
19 March 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
22 March 2021	No 10 Deputy Chief of Staff and Special Advisor
24 March 2021	Education Recovery Advisory Committee
25 March 2021	Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State for Education
30 March 2021	Leadership Team meeting with ALB CEO's (Permanent Secretary DfE)
31 March 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
13 April 2021	Vulnerable Children National Board (Chair: Director General for Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group)
14 April 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (MoJ)
14 April 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)

15 April 2021	Minister for Children and Families (DfE)
16 April 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
16 April 2021	National Schools Commissioner
20 April 2021	Education Recovery Commissioner (DfE)
20 April 2021	Education Recovery Advisory Committee
21 April 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group (DfE)
22 April 2021	Director, Equality Hub (Cabinet Office)
28 April 2021	Secretary of State (DHSC)
29 April 2021	Secretary of State (DWP)
05 May 2021	Permanent Secretary (MoJ)
07 May 2021	Permanent Secretary (DHSC)
18 May 2021	Director, Strategy (Vulnerable Children lead) (DfE)
18 May 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
18 May 2021	Leadership Team meeting with ALB CEO's (Permanent Secretary DfE)
24 May 2021	Minister for Digital and Culture (DCMS)
25 May 2021	Director General's (DfE)
26 May 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
02 June 2021	Minister of State (Minister for School Standards) (DfE)
03 June 2021	Director General, Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery and Director, Education Recovery (DfE)
07 June 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and

	Strategy Group (DfE)
08 June 2021	Minister for Children and Families (DfE)
08 June 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group and Director, Strategy (Vulnerable Children lead)
08 June 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) (DfE)
10 June 2021	Minister for Children and Families (DfE)
14 June 2021	Director General, Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery (DfE)
15 June 2021	Minister for Crime and Policing (Home Office)
17 June 2021	National Economy & Recovery Taskforce (Public Services) (NERT PS Committee) (Cabinet Office)
21 June 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group (DfE)
22 June 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
24 June 2021	PSSG (DfE)
24 June 2021	Director General, Schools (DfE)
28 June 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding) (Home Office)
29 June 2021	Deputy Director, SEND Review (DfE)
05 July 2021	Secretary of State (DfE) and Home Secretary
05 July 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
06 July 2021	Leadership Team meeting with ALB CEO's (Permanent Secretary DfE)

06 July 2021	Minister of State (Minister for School Standards) (DfE)
8 July 2021	PSSG (DfE)
13 July 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Rough Sleeping & Housing) (MHCLG)
15 July 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group (DfE)
16 July 2021	PSSG (DfE)
19 July 2021	NERT PS (Cabinet Office)
22 July 2021	VCYP Programme Board meeting (Chair: Director General for Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group)
23 July 2021	PSSG (DfE)
26 July 2021	Permanent Secretary (DCMS)
28 July 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
04 August 2021	Update from JCVI on the vaccination of 16 and 17-year-olds
05 August 2021	Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury
12 August 2021	PSSG (DfE)
17 August 2021	Head of Education, Policy Unit, No10
24 August 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
24 August 2021	Leadership Team meeting with ALB CEO's (Permanent Secretary DfE)
26 August 2021	PSSG (DfE)
02 September 2021	PSSG (DfE)
07 September 2021	Cabinet Secretary

14 September 2021	Director of Policy Unit, No10
15 September 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
16 September 2021	PSSG (DfE)
17 September 2021	Permanent Secretary (DfE)
20 September 2021	ALB CEO's (Permanent Secretary DfE)
22 September 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) (DfE)
23 September 2021	Secretary of State (DWP)
28 September 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding) (Home Office)
28 September 2021	Director General for Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group (DfE)
28 September 2021	SEND Review Steering Group (DfE)
30 September 2021	PSSG (DfE)
11 October 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group and Director, Strategy (Vulnerable Children lead)
12 October 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) (DfE)
12 October 2021	LT Meeting with ALB CEO's (DfE Permanent Secretary)
12 October 2021	Director of School Strategy and System Reform (DfE)
18 October 2021	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families) (DfE) Minister of State (Minister for Security) (MoJ)
04 November 2021	PSSG (DfE)

09 November 2021	Permanent Secretary (DfE)
16 November 2021	Secretary of State (DHSC)
16 November 2021	PSSG (DfE)
17 November 2021	Deputy Director, SEND Review (DfE)
17 November 2021	Director General, Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery (DfE)
17 November 2021	SEND Review Steering Group (DfE)
18 November 2021	Secretary of State (DCMS)
22 November 2021	APPG Childcare and Early Education
22 November 2021	Secretary of State (DfE) Schools White Paper
23 November 2021	Minister of State (Minister for Higher and Further Education) (DfE)
24 November 2021	VCYP Board meeting (Chair: Director General for Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group)
30 November 2021	LT meeting with ALB CEO's (DfE Permanent Secretary)
30 November 2021	Secretary of State (DfE)
30 November 2021	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
30 November 2021	Deputy Director, SEND Review (DfE)
6 December 2021	Deputy Director, SEND Review (DfE)
6 December 2021	APPG Health & Care Bill
8 December 2021	Secretary of State (DfE) Schools White Paper External Advisory Group
9 December 2021	Permanent Secretary (DfE)

9 December 2021	Attendance Action Alliance Meeting (Secretary of State DfE)
9 December 2021	Chief Medical Officer (DHSC)
13 December 2021	PSSG (DfE)
14 December 2021	Director General, Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group (DfE)
16 December 2021	Send Review Steering Group (DfE)
20 December 2021	LT meeting with ALB CEO's (DfE Perm Sec)
10 January 2022	Deputy Director, SEND Review (DfE)
11 January 2022	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) (DfE)
13 January 2022	Minister for Children and Families (DfE)
18 January 2022	Attendance Action Alliance (Minister of State, Minister for School Standards) (DfE)
18 January 2022	LT meeting with ALB CEO's (DfE Permanent Secretary)
18 January 2022	Secretary of State (DfE)
18 January 2022	APPG Commercial, Sexual Exploitation
19 January 2022	Schools White Paper External Advisory Group (Minister of State (Minister for School Standards) (DfE)
24 January 2022	SEND Review Steering Group (DfE)
25 January 2022	Directors, CSC Strategy & Care System (DfE)
26 January 2022	PSSG (DfE)
27 January 2022	Secretary of State (DfE) SEND Review Update
1 February 2022	Minister of State (Crime and Policing) (MoJ)

2 February 2022	VCYP National Board (Chair: Director General for Children's Services, Communications and Strategy Group)
7 February 2022	Minister of State (Minister for Care and Mental Health) (DHSC)
9 February 2022	Secretary of State (DfE) Schools White Paper External Advisory Group
17 February 2022	Briefing on JCVI updated advice on Covid-19 vaccines for 5–11-year-olds (DfE)
21 February 2022	Director General, Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery (DfE)
22 February 2022	Minster of State (Minister for Equalities) (DLUHC)
22 February 2022	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System) (DfE)
23 February 2022	National Expert Steering Group on Domestic Abuse (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State) (Minster for Rough Sleeping & Housing) (DLUHC)
24 February 2022	Attendance Action Alliance (Minster of State, Minister for School Standards) (DfE)

10. I do not hold minutes of these meetings which in the case of ministerial meeting were organised by their respective offices, so I am unable to confirm if and what specific concerns relating to the UK Government's response of Covid-19 on children may have been discussed at each meeting.

Select Committees

11. Between March 2021 and 24 February 2022, I have provided oral and written evidence to the following UK Parliament Select Committees:

Select Committee	Topic	Date of Oral Evidence	Written Evidence submitted
Health and Social Care	Children's Mental Health	23 March 2021 Transcript – RS/4- INQ000255829	RS/5- INQ000255830
Public Services	The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability	13 October 2021 Transcript – RS/6- INQ000255831	RS/7- INQ000255832
Education	Children's Homes	11 January 2022 Transcript – RS/8- INQ000255833	RS/9- INQ000255834

Children's Commissioners for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

12. Quarterly meetings are usually held between the Children's Commissioners for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the Commissioners for Ireland and Jersey, which form the BINOCC (British and Irish Network of Ombudsman and Children's Commissioners) membership. Informal meetings via phone sometimes take place between individual Children's Commissioners, however, these were not usually recorded.

Work relating to the UK Government's response to Covid-19

Local area profiles

13. During the tenure of my predecessor as Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, a 3-year project was conducted, with the latest stage in April 2020 involving a matrix of data to create local area profiles of child vulnerability.
14. These local area profiles of child vulnerability aimed to provide a way for councils to understand which groups of children were likely to be at risk under lockdown, and how many children in their area fall into those groups. It also provided a framework for central government to target additional resources at the areas most in need. I understand that it was intended that Local Authorities should be factoring this information into their decision-making on Covid-19 responses – for example, making sure children living in areas with largely crowded homes have space to play outdoors, or getting them into schools as a priority.

Research and Data on the impact of Covid-19 on children

15. I had spent the first stages of Covid-19 leading a multi-academy trust, so I was aware first hand of the sacrifices children had made, schools being closed, exams cancelled and the profound impact it had on them. I had seen this in schools on a daily basis, as we worked to keep them open for the most vulnerable children and those of key workers. I was in no doubt that I needed to make recovery from Covid-19 central to my work, with a particular focus on vulnerable children.
16. In my first month as Children's Commissioner I launched the Childhood Commission with the objective of taking stock of where we were, and how we could truly 'build back better' for children. At the heart of the Childhood Commission was The Big Ask survey. This survey was completed by 557,077 children in England – an unprecedented number for a survey of this type. It provided an incredibly rich source of information about what children wanted

prioritised as they emerged from the shadow of Covid-19. I used this survey and children's voice to form all my early conversations with policymakers and Government, making it clear that children's needs must be at the heart of the recovery.

17. This survey formed the foundation of all the work that I have done since then. I have focused my work around seven pillars, which emerged as most important to children – Family, Communities, Children's Social Care, Health, Education, Jobs and Skills, and a Better World. The Big Ask led to policy asks to improve children's lives post-pandemic which were sent to all officials, Ministers, and Parliamentarians in relevant roles before the Spending Review in autumn 2022.
18. In this statement I will set out how in each of those pillars, and the policy work underpinning them in The Big Answer, I have sought to understand what happened during Covid-19, what we learnt from it, what the impact was on children and how we can make sure that children's experiences don't return to how they were before Covid-19, but are better.

The Big Ask: Family

19. When it comes to family, it was clear from The Big Ask responses that never had the fundamental importance of a loving, stable family been more clear than during Covid-19. Many children told us that a silver lining of lockdowns was their ability to spend more time with loved ones. But it was also clear how the stress of Covid-19 created, and exacerbated, real challenges for families. The parents of babies and toddlers that I spoke to in particular told me how isolated they felt, as wider family networks and support groups that they needed were shut off from them. That is why I wanted to focus on strengthening and supporting families in my work, and why I was delighted to undertake a commission from Government to carry out an independent Family Review. This work highlighted some of the most significant changes that had come about during Covid-19 – such as fathers' time spent with children – and examined what families needed now. I made a series of recommendations about how Government must commit to strengthening families and providing them with the right support network to thrive.

The Big Ask: Community

20. It was extremely clear from The Big Ask that children did not view their communities as simply a physical space – their online worlds had always been equally important to them and Covid-19 only made clearer how central children’s online worlds were to them. Whilst the learning environment shifted online during Covid-19, it is also clear that there needs to be more regulation in this space. That is why I have made online safety such a core feature of my work, producing analysis on the harms that children face online – including from, for example, being exposed to abusive pornography at a very young age. I have engaged closely with the Online Safety Bill and am delighted to be a statutory consultee on the legislation.
21. Covid-19 was also a moment where children’s views and relationships with police were challenged. The sudden increased awareness of police powers to impose lockdown regulation, as well of course as the Black Lives Matters protests, created a new urgency for ensuring that the police could be trusted by children. The work I have done in the wake of the Child Q incident on strip-searching of children is part of this conversation – to make sure that the children both are, and are seen by children to be, people who respect the rights of children, and do so regardless of their background.

The Big Ask: Health

22. One of the starkest findings to come from the Big Ask was the level of worry children had about their mental health. 20% of children were worried about it, rising to 40% of older teenage girls. These findings mirror prevalence studies showing how mental health conditions have increased dramatically in the past decade. This generation of children have faced a seismic disruption to their lives, and it has taken its toll on their mental health. I have called for far more early intervention in children’s mental health, bringing it into the place where most children want to receive help – from their schools.
23. One place I did this was in response to the Health and Social Care Select Committee report (published 09 December 2021) into children’s mental health. The Committee issued a call to not undo recent progress to tackle the gap between children’s need for mental health support and what is provided. My office worked closely with the Health and Social Care Select Committee and I

gave evidence on this, given the prominence of mental health in The Big Ask as children spoke about their experience in lockdown.

24. I have, and will continue to, track and publish the spending by local areas on children's mental health services, and the information about how long children are waiting to get help. I am deeply concerned that these waiting times are increasing and there is no doubt there is increasing challenges due to Covid-19. This is also accompanied by a series of visits to children in secure mental health settings.

The Big Ask: Children's Social Care

25. During Covid-19 I think the country formed a new understanding of vulnerability. Schools were kept open for vulnerable children; there was a heightened awareness of the risk of domestic abuse, and the impact of home on children's education. Attendance was seen not only as an academic endeavour, but as paramount to safeguarding too. It was all too clear that for some children, staying at home was itself what was dangerous. That is why I have been clear that there needs to be a fundamental reset of children's social care, so that every Local Authority's children's social care team in the country is not just good enough but provides fantastic care to every child, every family— because until they are, there will be far too many children who are unsafe. These risks were only exacerbated by the strain created by Covid-19.
26. It was also clear to me that throughout Covid-19 children in care, and living in other institutions away from home, faced some of the harshest restrictions. Children in YOIs and mental health wards were often stopped from seeing family, and were placed in isolation for their safety, in a deeply shocking manner. That is why I have made it my ambition for no child to be in an institution, and for all children to be in care until 18.

The Big Ask: Education

27. It was abundantly clear to me from The Big Ask that children loved their teachers, and loved their schools. Their absence during lockdown, meant they valued them anew. When I took up post there were still partial lockdowns in place, and I knew that getting all children back into school had to be a priority – for their education, safety and mental health. That was why at the beginning of September 2021, I

published a back-to-school guide, to tell children some of the changes they might see when they returned to school in the new term, to reassure them about everything adults were doing to make it safe, as well as providing tips on how to cope if they were feeling worried or nervous.

28. It is also why I have made it my ambition to see 100% attendance in schools, because for children's education to recover this is essential – not just academically, but because the routine of school helps with mental health and with safeguarding. It is an ambition that means creating a school system that meets every child's needs. Where additional needs are identified and supported. Schools do an incredible job of providing for children, especially during lockdown when they stayed open for vulnerable children. However, even when taking into account disruption caused by Covid-19, there were simply too many children on school rolls who were persistently absent, and whose absence was insufficiently understood. This was the catalyst for my inquiry into pupil absence in a number of local areas, as part of a wider effort to understand why young people had disappeared from view.
29. In October 2022 I welcomed the announcement on the return of exams with support. Many children had expressed worry about exams, but few had said that they didn't want exams at all. The clarity and speed of the announcement was welcome, as well as the message; exams are still, post-pandemic, a central part of how we judge and measure academic success. This is something that I made absolutely apparent in front of multiple Select Committees.

The Big Ask: Jobs and skills

30. Childrens' perception of the working world fundamentally shifted during Covid-19. With living rooms turned into home offices, and kitchen tables into desks, children were acutely aware of the importance of their parents working environments. None more so than the children whose parents were key workers and continued to go out to work during that time. They understood the risks and were cognisant of the financial environment as we began to recover. But, rather than being pessimistic or afraid of the world of work, this generation are ambitious and hopeful. They want great jobs, fantastic careers, close to where they live. They are keen that opportunity is spread equally among them.
31. The Big Ask showed me that this is an enormously ambitious generation, who

have high hopes for their future. It is down to us to meet those ambitions and show children where the world of work can take them. That is why I produced resources for setting out where they can go in their careers with certain skills. I have created various tools to support them including Maths resources. Alongside this I have advocated for apprenticeships and training opportunities for children and young people.

The Big Ask: Better World

32. The Big Ask showed me how the children of this generation prioritise fairness and equality. They are socially conscious, altruistic, optimistic, and generous. They want to make the world a better place, for their peers and for future generations. During Covid-19 they saw how connected the world was, and how to solve the great problems of the day the world needs to work together. Concerns about the environment are one of children's key priorities, and so policy makers must deliver for them. That is why I have, for example, produced a children's guide to COP26.

Written correspondence

33. Whilst we do not retain complete lists of all recipients of our report, I wrote to the following Ministers and officials across Government to share our research. These included:
- 30 June 2021: Letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.
 - 21 September 2021: Emails sent to all MPs, Minister and Secretaries of State sharing the results of The Big Ask and what children have said about how Covid-19 has affected them.
 - 23 September 2021: Letter to the Secretary of State for Education.
 - 23 September 2021: Letter to the Minister of State (Minister for Care & Mental Health).
 - 23 September 2021: Letter to the Minister of State (Minister for School Standards).
 - 23 September 2021: Letter to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

- 23 September 2021: Letter to the Lord Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister.
- 23 September 2021: Letter to Minister of State (and Minister for Afghan Resettlement).
- 24 September 2021: Letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families).
- 24 September 2021: Letter to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 24 September 2021: Letter to the Minister of State and Minister for Equalities (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities).
- 24 September 2021: Letter to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills).
- 24 September: Letter to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for the School System).
- 11 October 2021: Letter to the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work.
- 11 October 2021: Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- 19 November 2021: Letter to Chief Medical Officer.
- 21 December 2021: Letter to the Shadow Secretary of State for Education.
- 21 December 2021: Letter to the Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.
- 21 December 2021: Letter to the Shadow Secretary of State for Justice.
- 21 December 2021: Letter to the Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social.

Future risks, reviews, reports and lessons learnt

34. Across all the pillars identified from The Big Ask, my focus has been work putting children's needs at the heart of policy-makers thoughts and thinking. Covid -19 presented unprecedented challenges for children not just in lockdown but in adjusting to a new post-pandemic normal. When taking office in March 2021, my role was to ensure that the voices and experiences of children and young people were at the heart of shaping the recovery and looking ahead to how the Government can meet their needs both in the short term and long-term.
35. Many Children's Commissioners across Europe and the world are set up as ombudsmen conducting investigations and legal advocacy in individual cases. In England, the Children's Commissioner role is about children, and families, and bringing their views to policymakers and the Government to make sure that they are heard. I feel that the unique powers I have under the Children and Family Act 2014 in gathering data and building an evidence base have allowed me to do this, and as a whole, Government has been receptive to the representations I have made through Ministers, officials, parliamentarians across all my work.
36. Reflecting more broadly on the findings from The Big Ask and my visits to speak to children in a range of settings up and down the country, it was clear that more could have been done to protect those most vulnerable, particularly in settings such as children's homes and youth justice institutes where many children and young people felt forgotten and isolated.
37. All possible options have to be explored to minimise disruption to children lives which includes plans that reflect the range of settings and situations children live in. When minimal disruption cannot be achieved, it is essential that the Government work with the agencies that have a statutory duty to represent the needs of children in order to come to an informed decision based on the short and long-term implications.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 18 September 2023