

Individual response 01

I provide the following views as an individual with significant experience of working with Government tenders for contracts and of leading teams of people responsible for managing outsourced contracts.

The existing system or market is simply not working, and I suggest four main areas where action is needed

National letting of contracts and management of those contracts

The existing system of individual local authorities (and often different individual teams with those local authorities) letting and managing contracts delivers a fragmented market where individual providers play local authorities off against each other. In a local authority I know, 2/3 of children are placed outside the local authority not because it is in the interests of the child, but rather because many providers choose to limit placed available to that local authority to 1/3 (keep our eggs in different baskets). This is to the detriment of children.

Ofsted also agree that LA managed contracts are not appropriate.

There should be a nationally managed process for contract letting and oversight of those contracts and indeed placing of children.

Outcomes

Different providers measure the outcomes for children in different ways. The Government needs to set the required outcome framework as it did for education (Progress 8) so that individual providers can be assessed as to the benefit they bring to children.

Other Measures

The Government need to establish appropriate measurements against which providers will be assessed as well as cost and outcomes. These could include the % of placements that breakdown. Individual providers can then be measured against all other providers and providers locally.

Using outcomes, cost and other measures will allow a more objective assessment of the quality of providers rather than Ofsted assessments alone

New entrants

Finally, the whole process of new entrants to the market needs review.

The existing process places barriers at much too high a level – Ofsted do not provide advice and support and the process just takes too long

Needing all staff and systems in place before any child is placed, even provisionally, dissuades new entrants

In addition, allowing firms to buy other firms with the local authority agreement, leads to an excessive consolidation of the market

Individual response 02

Feedback on interim report

Thank you for asking to provide feedback

My first thought is that it is amazing that an organisation like the CMA involves itself in evaluating the effectiveness of policies affecting children placed away from home. Having said that, I think this document is well-written and sensitive to the needs of this very vulnerable group of children. Inevitably however the CMA starts with asking the question - is the market working well to meet the needs of these children. I would begin by asking what is the quality of care for these children and secondly, are the resources available being used as effectively as possible?

I have four thoughts about the content:

1. There is an assumption, expressed in a report on this topic by David Foster in the House of Commons Library dated 21 June 2021, that being away from home is a bad thing. It probably is as it makes it much more difficult not only for family members but social workers to visit. But some children will benefit from being removed from localities where they have got into trouble with undesirable friends.
2. There is no mention of the education of these children. These children are virtually all suffering from serious educational retardation. For them to be employable and to lead good lives catching up on education is vital.
3. It would seem to me that a better system would be for local authorities, perhaps half a dozen or so, to group together to fund homes that would be much more

accessible to all the children living in their localities. This would be a better use of their resources.

4. I suspect the market works better for residential homes for the elderly. More very big companies running large numbers of homes. A comparison might be helpful.

Individual response 03

As a foster parent working for an IFA I would like to highlight issues that we see on a daily basis and what effect this has on local authority staff, children in care and foster carers.

1) There are plenty of foster carers who would prefer to work for the local authority so that the children in care would benefit from extra funding freed up. For this to happen we need the additional support and benefits we receive from the IFAs, particularly for children who need additional support. We're not in it to get rich but it needs to pay a decent wage!

2) The local authorities (certainly in Devon) are in a state of chaos and have been for years. The OFSTED ratings are not good enough. The social workers are overwhelmed and stressed and the turnover of staff and use of 'temporary' agency staff is incredibly high. IFAs don't tend to have this problem as they offer better conditions for staff. It is important for children and carers to have continuity.

3) Specialist IFAs like the one I work for provides weekly one to one and small group sessions with a clinical practitioner. When you have a challenging child in care you need this support and help to maintain understanding and empathy toward the child. Local authorities do not provide this.

From the bottom of the pile looking upwards it seems obvious that to 'fix' the problem the local authorities need to offer more support and pay to foster carers and social workers. The money invested would be more than covered by the money spent on IFAs.

Why isn't this a simple concept?