



HM Government

Care leaver strategy

A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care

October 2013

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Foreword

Central and local government have a unique relationship with children in care and care leavers as we are their 'corporate parents'. As someone who grew up alongside foster children, I know how important and difficult the transition into adulthood can be for children in care and I am committed to improving their outcomes.

The government is demonstrating its leadership in this critical area through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee. Government departments across Whitehall are working closely to develop a more coherent approach to how we support care leavers. The publication of this document setting out our strategy for care leavers coincides with Care Leavers' Week, and I can't think of a more opportune time to share this vision with young people and the practitioners who work with care leavers.

As the lead minister for looked after children and care leavers I regularly meet and listen to their views. This has helped me understand some of the everyday problems young people face as they try to navigate their way into adulthood. A consistent message I hear from care leavers is that there needs to be changes in the way mainstream and specialist services support them. All too often, these young people feel that public services do not understand their needs, and as a result, they receive unsatisfactory or delayed support and guidance.

Through working together across central government and through our partners in local government and voluntary agencies, I hope that this document will support the introduction of changes to how local services are provided on the ground, building on the best local practice. We want to see care leavers receiving high quality services that meet their needs and support them make the transition into adulthood.

This is by no means the end of the process. We will continue to discuss how we can further improve support to care leavers over the next 12 months and intend to publish a further report to coincide with Care Leavers' Week in 2014.

I would like to thank Ministers in the other Departments, the voluntary sector organisations, and, most importantly, care leavers who have helped produce this strategy.



Edward Timpson MP

**Children's Minister
Department for Education**

Setting out the case

Around 10,000 young people leave care in England each year aged between 16-18 years old¹. They leave home at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers. Unlike their peers who normally remain in the family home, care leavers will often be living independently at age 18. Information from the Children Right's Director's surveys² on care leavers and Children in Care Council (CICC) meetings show that many care leavers feel that they leave care too early and often feel isolated and lonely.

Research and inspection reports show that the quality of support care leavers receive is patchy and that their journey through the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and troubled. They often struggle to cope and this can lead to social exclusion, long term unemployment or involvement in crime. For example, 34% of all care leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET) at age 19³ in 2013 compared to 15.5% of 18 year olds in the general population.

“Within a couple of weeks I can feel that I’m going to be on the streets and another number”

Care leavers come into contact with a range of services including housing, health, employment, and education, yet they are often not recognised as a priority group for services. Improving how local authorities and other agencies support them is crucial to improving the lives of this vulnerable group of people. They need services which are integrated, easy to access, embedded within local communities, and which treat them with respect.

The report *Access all Areas* (2012)⁴, produced jointly by the Catch22 National Care Advisory Service⁵, The Care Leavers' Foundation, A National Voice and The Prince's Trust, called for each central government department to scrutinize their individual policies and to begin to look at ways of working together across departments for a more coherent overall approach. In September 2012, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)⁶ for looked after children and care leavers, chaired by Edward Timpson MP – now the Children's Minister - published its report on the education of looked after children and care leavers. The report made reference to *Access all Areas* and made a significant number of recommendations aimed at progressing this area of work.

¹ DfE: [Children looked after in England \(including adoption and care leavers\) year ending 31 March 2013](#)

² Children's Rights Director for England: [Learning Independence](#)

³ DfE: [Participation in education, training and employment by 16- to 18-year-olds in England, end 2012](#)

⁴ The Care Leavers' Foundation, A National Voice and The Prince's Trust: [Access All Areas](#)

⁵ Catch22 (NCAS) [website](#)

⁶ APPG: [Education Matters in Care](#)

Our Vision and Strategy

Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parent. Our strategy is based on the principles of good corporate parenting. It sets out the government's commitment to remove some of the practical barriers that care leavers face as they progress into adulthood. In the following pages you will see the steps that government departments are taking to reflect the needs of care leavers in their policies. We want to see holistic and quality support provided in all mainstream and specialist services by: local authorities; Jobcentre plus; housing; health bodies; the justice system; and, educational institutions. We want to see services that are integrated, simplified and that treat care leavers with respect and dignity.

Whilst this document does not attempt to capture every difficulty care leaver's experience, it is accurate to say the broad areas of concern for them are:

- Education
- Employment
- Financial support
- Health
- Housing
- Justice System
- On-going support

As well as reiterating the government's commitment to supporting care leavers to realise their aspirations, the strategy outlines the actions the government is taking to specifically address the above areas of concern for care leavers.

Education

“If it wasn’t for my personal adviser I would never have got to university. I didn’t think I could do it, but he thought I could and he encouraged me a lot and helped me apply... Now I am there and love it.”

A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

Care leavers are less likely to have achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (37% of looked after children compared to 80% of non-looked after children in 2012). Only 6% of care leavers go into higher education compared to 23% of their peers at aged 18.⁷

A big priority for government is, therefore, to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and local authorities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities

What we have done

- The Department for Education (DfE) placed a duty on local authorities to provide care leavers with a Personal Adviser where they wish to resume education and training up to age 25;
- The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) National Scholarship Programme which runs for three years is aimed at widening access to higher education amongst disadvantaged groups of which care leavers are an important target group;
- NIACE, used grant funding from BIS and its own resources, to undertake a range of work to improve support for care leavers in accessing education, training and employment;
- BIS is working closely with the Buttle Trust, on its Buttle UK Quality Mark for work with care leavers. Currently 72 higher education institutions in England have achieved the Quality Mark. As well as BIS, the Association of Colleges is also represented on the Buttle UK Quality Mark steering group: 29 further education colleges in England have achieved the Quality Mark and more applications are in the pipeline.

⁷ DfE: [Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England: 31 March 2012](#)

Hertfordshire's Virtual School works with young people up to the age of 25 and brings together an education lead virtual school and Learning and employment team under a 'Head of Achievement for CLA'. The extensive team includes advisory teachers and education support workers, youth Connexions personal advisers, University support, and a support learning team.

What we will do

- BIS will publish a brief guide to the further education and skills system, aimed at care leavers and those that work with them. Sector bodies will help make sure the guide clearly gives the information care leavers really need about careers advice, eligibility for free training, grants and other support available;
- DfE will strengthen its statutory guidance about local authority duties to support care leavers aged 21-24 who wish to return to education or training, so that those with on-going problems receive support back into education.

Impact of measures

- Local authorities, through their financial support and policies, encouraging and supporting all care leavers to remain engaged in education, take up training opportunities and undertake activities aimed at improving employability;
- Care leavers experience improved access to further and higher education as well as better support whilst at a further education college or university.

Employment

The Social Justice Strategy, Social Justice: Transforming Lives, sets out the importance of work not just as the best route out of poverty, but as a means of delivering positive change for individuals and for whole communities. The benefits of work are far wider than just remunerative and we know work provides structure, a sense of purpose, progress, achievement, self-confidence and personal responsibility.

Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or are long term unemployed. There are currently significant challenges for many young people taking their first steps into the world of work. However, some local authorities and charitable organisations – working independently and with Jobcentre Plus - have nonetheless increased the number of care leavers they have supported into employment, education and training through focused action and support.

Government is determined to maximise employment opportunities for all care leavers by learning from this good practice and being vigorous about building on our responsibilities as corporate parents.

Catch 22, a charity providing support for care leavers worked collaboratively with Marriott hotels and Jobcentre Plus to design and provide a work experience opportunity for Jodie, an 18 year old care leaver: “When my work experience placement started I didn’t have much confidence but with the right support and encouragement from Catch 22, my employer and my Jobcentre Plus adviser I started to really enjoy working. The experience has changed my life by giving me the chance to start on a career in the Hotel business and prove myself as a valuable employee, while earning my own money and finding my independence. I’ve gained lots of skills and experience”. Jodie’s employer was really impressed with her progress and work ethos and after finishing her placement offered her full time employment.

What we have done

- Through the Youth Contract, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have provided 18-24 year olds, including care leavers with access to additional adviser support, work experience, apprenticeships and wage incentives for employers;
- Jobcentre Plus advisers have been given more flexibility to provide direct personalised employment support to those care leavers who face greater difficulties in finding work, including support to help them volunteer, train or undertake work experience. Jobcentre Plus Advisers also have access to local flexible support funding, which is being used to provide locally based targeted employment support;

- DWP have ensured that care leavers are able to access the Work Programme from the third month of their claim to benefit so they can benefit from tailored, locally-appropriate employment support as early as possible in their benefit claim;
- Since 2011 the DfE have funded the voluntary sector organisation Catch22 to run the *FromCare2Work programme*. The programme brings national and local employers and local authorities together to enable care leavers to benefit from new employment opportunities - from taster days, through apprenticeships to full time employment; this includes big name participants like the Marriott Hotels and Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur football clubs. Outcomes so far include:
 - 105 local authorities creating 6169 employment, training and education opportunities; and,
 - 109 national employers, creating 580 work experience opportunities.
- DfE and other government departments have been providing apprenticeships and short term work experience directly to care experienced young people.

What we will do

- DWP has recently introduced a 'marker' to routinely identify care leavers on their information database. This is a very significant step forward to recognise care leavers within Jobcentre Plus which will enable DWP to track both the support care leavers are receiving and how effective this is in delivering employment outcomes. The communications activity for the marker has encouraged local authority teams supporting care leavers to forge closer links with local Jobcentre Plus;
- Linked to the launch of the marker, DWP is also raising awareness of Jobcentre Plus Advisers' of the issues care leavers face in their transition to independent living/adulthood and work;
- DWP will announce a new commitment to give care leavers the chance to join the Work Programme at the earliest opportunity.
- DfE will continue to fund Catch 22 to expand the *FromCare2Work* programme to increase the numbers of care leavers given employment opportunities.

Impact of measures

- A further reduction in the number of care leavers who are NEET, through improved support by mainstream and specialist services.
- Improved understanding of how effective Jobcentre Plus support is in driving care leaver employment outcomes and identifying areas for further improvements in service delivery.

Financial Assistance

When you do not have the support of family to fall back on, particularly when having to meet the challenge of independent living at a much younger age than your peers, having access to timely financial help is crucial.

Care leavers have told us that they often find it difficult to navigate services and work out what financial support they are entitled to.

Government is committed to ensuring that care leavers are adequately supported financially in their transition from care to adulthood to enable young people leaving care to have the same opportunities to fulfil their potential as their peers.

The benefit processing centre in Sefton has a well-developed joint working group in place which includes Jobcentre Plus and the local authority leaving care team. As a result of this close working a protocol⁸ has been in place since 2011 to allow the local authority to register claimants for benefit two weeks before the young person's 18th birthday. This successful partnership means that care leavers are able to more effectively engage with employment, education and training opportunities as opposed to focusing on their immediate financial constraints at the point of leaving care and making the transition to independent living.

What we have done

- DfE has given an entitlement to care leavers, aged 16-19, attending a Further Education course to the £1,200 Further Education Bursary (Educational Maintenance Allowance replacement);
- DfE has funded local authorities to give care leavers a Higher Education Bursary of £2,000 if they are attending a university;
- DWP have ensured that all Jobcentre Plus districts using current legacy systems can, using dedicated named advisers, allow care leavers to make a claim to benefit in advance of leaving care to prevent unnecessary delays in the payment of benefit and hardship;
- DWP has extended 'Second Chance Learning' from age 19 to age 21 or the end of the academic year in which the 21st birthday occurs. This allows care leavers to claim

⁸ The protocol can be found at the NCAS Leaving Care website [here](#)

Income Support and Housing Benefit if returning to full time, non-advanced, education to make up for missed qualifications. These enhanced measures will continue as part of Universal Credit;

- Following a letter from the Children's Minister the number of local authorities paying at least £2,000 Setting Up Home Allowance (leaving care grant), has risen to date from 32 to 97.

What we will do

- As part of the national roll-out of Universal Credit, DWP will ensure care leavers can make a claim to Universal Credit in advance of leaving care;
- DWP will ensure care leavers who need help managing their money and paying bills on time in Universal Credit will have access to personal budgeting support. This will include the option of having their Universal Credit payments paid more frequently than monthly;
- DfE will amend statutory guidance to encourage all local authorities to pay at least £2,000 as part of their Setting Up Home Allowance (leaving care grant) to their young people when they leave care, and to review this annually with their local Children in Care Council.

Impact of measures

- Care leavers receiving financial support and guidance from their local authority and benefits agency, so that they are able to manage their income and reduce the risks of falling into debt;
- An increase in care leavers attending further and higher education.

Health

Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse. Two thirds of looked after children have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health disorder. Care leavers frequently tell us that they encounter a lack of support in accessing appropriate services. They often feel that the professionals working close to them do not have an understanding of their needs, particularly in respect of mental health. Care leavers also face difficulties around the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult services.

In Blackburn there is a dedicated care leavers CAMHS worker who provides good levels of support for young people in their transition to adult services. Comprehensive CAMHS are provided through locality working and specialist teams, which are meeting the current identified needs of the local population, including good and timely access to tier4 beds.

What we have done - through the Department of Health (DH) and its partners

- The government's Mandate to NHS England (November 2012) includes an expectation that the NHS, working together with schools and children's social services, will support and safeguard vulnerable children -- including looked after children and, by extension, care leavers;
- Health and wellbeing boards are required to undertake Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and agree Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and reduce inequalities. Revised statutory guidance (March 2013) says that they must consider the needs of vulnerable groups -- such as looked after children and care leavers;
- The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produced a quality standard for the *Health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people* in April 2013, which sets out for health and social care the priority areas for quality improvement. It builds on public health guidance issued in 2010. Both cover care leavers;
- The mental health strategy, *No health without mental health* (February 2011), highlights looked after children and care leavers as a group whose mental health needs are greater than those of the general population of the same age. DH is investing £54 million in 2011-15 in the Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, to drive service transformation in CAMHS;

What we will do

- Statutory guidance on *Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children* (November 2009) highlights the importance of care leavers being able to continue to obtain health advice and services. In updating it in 2014, DH and DfE will set out how organisations in the reformed health system should work with local authorities to improve support for care leavers;
- The Royal Colleges and other health professional bodies will shortly update the intercollegiate framework, *Looked after children: knowledge, skills and competences of health care staff* (May 2012), in light of the NHS structural changes in England. It covers responsibilities to support care leavers;
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC), Ofsted and the other inspectorates are developing plans to commence multi-agency inspections of local arrangements for safeguarding children and for looked after children in 2015. In the meantime, CQC introduced in September 2013 a new programme to inspect local health service arrangements for these groups, including care leavers;
- DH will launch interactive e-learning programmes to support children and young people's mental health, via an e-Portal, in 2014. This will help extend the skills and knowledge of NHS clinicians, teachers, social workers, counsellors and supervisors working in a range of health, educational and youth settings. The e-Portal developers will invite care leavers to help shape its content and presentation.

Impact of measures

- Care leavers have timely access to mainstream and specialist health services, which meet their physical and mental health needs.

Housing

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Around a quarter of those living on the streets have a background in care.⁹ The majority of care leavers leave care by the age of 18 and rising demands on social housing and other accommodation is making it increasingly difficult for young people to find suitable accommodation as they enter adulthood.

“Being a care leaver has to be the most pressure I’ve been under in my life, one minute I was 12 and living at home then I’m 21 and find myself being homeless.”

88% of care leavers live in suitable accommodation at aged 19¹⁰. Frequent feedback from care leavers, however, is that they do not always feel safe in their accommodation. We know that the best local authorities are using “staying put” arrangements to ensure that care leavers can continue to live with and get support from their former foster carers.

Alice is 19 years old. She was looked after by local authority foster carers for 5 years and was able to remain with them through a “staying put” arrangement. Alice’s foster placement was close to her family and friends and meant she was able to continue with her education in the school she had attended prior to becoming ‘looked after’. Alice gained her GCSEs and then went to college and was successful in gaining full-time employment. Alice eventually moved out of her foster placement to live with her long term partner but she remains in touch with her foster parents and stays with them on a regular basis, going back for important events such as Christmas and birthdays. She said that Staying Put “gives young people the opportunity to be with people they want to be with post 18 and provides a stable and secure family unit for them to prosper in.”

What we have done

- DfE have revised Leaving Care guidance, issued in April 2011. The guidance encourages local authorities to consider introducing “staying put” provision, as part of their range of options to provide care leavers with suitable accommodation. It says ‘Local authorities should develop “staying put” policies that provide foster carers and young people with information and guidance regarding all aspects of extending placements

⁹ Source: CRISIS: [The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England](#)

¹⁰ Source: DfE: [Children looked after in England, including adoption 2013](#)

beyond the young person's 18th birthday.'; and, *'For young people living in foster care, the first statutory review following the young person's 16th birthday should consider whether a "staying put" placement may be an option.'* The Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson, wrote to Directors of Children's Services in October 2012 urging them to prioritise their care leaver services. In that letter, the Minister asked all local authorities to ensure that all their care leavers are living in safe and suitable accommodation and that "staying put" is offered to their young people;

- DfE have published guidance on tax and benefits to help foster carers and local authorities entering into "staying put" arrangements. We hope that this guidance will encourage greater take up of staying put.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has:

- Worked closely with leading voluntary sector organisations and local authorities to develop a *Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway* for those who cannot stay within the family network (for example care leavers). The Pathway approach requires that Local Authorities offer tailored accommodation options and a supportive transition into adulthood. It focuses on developing services and practices which invest in early intervention, putting young people in charge of planning for their future and providing consistent information and advice about every aspect of the young person's life, not just housing. The Pathway also focuses on progression to work and economic independence through a range of accommodation options;
- Published statutory guidance for local authorities on homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers which highlights the importance of providing housing with support;
- Implemented a new homelessness Gold Standard with investment of £1.7million that sets the bar for local housing services and supports local authorities to provide cost effective and efficient homelessness prevention services. It has several youth homelessness elements including a specific commitment not to place 16-17 year olds in bed and breakfast accommodation, partnership working with Children's Services and the need to develop a specific accommodation pathway for young people.

What we will do

- DCLG is consulting on proposals to issue new statutory guidance on social housing allocations encouraging local authorities to adopt a residency test as part of their qualification criteria for social housing. The guidance will recommend that local authorities, when adopting a residency test, consider the position of those who might be particularly disadvantaged, such as care leavers who are in out of borough placements;
- DCLG is currently developing proposals for tackling youth homelessness including looking at models offering affordable shared accommodation options for homeless young

people and a programme aimed at improving the integration of local services for young people, including care leavers, who are at risk of homelessness;

- DfE is funding Catch22 (NCAS) to run a residential children's homes project over the next two years, with a particular focus on supporting care leavers.

Impact of measures

- Care leavers live in safe and suitable accommodation that meets their individual needs.
- Programmes to reduce homelessness address the specific needs of care leavers.

Justice System

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Home Office (HO) recognise that young adults who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Equally we know that care leavers can be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline.

What we have done

In support of the cross-government strategy to make services and policies reflect the needs and aspirations of care leavers the following actions have been undertaken:

- In October 2013, MoJ's National Offender Management Service (NOMS) published new guidance for those working with care leavers in the Criminal Justice System. This takes into account the new criminal justice landscape, where a range of providers and not just the prison and probation staff, will have responsibility for supporting young adults to make the right choices and reduce rates of re-offending. It will be made available to all of those working with this cohort, both in the community and in custody;
- The Youth Justice Board (YJB) carried out significant work with young people who are under 18 who are or have been in care. The YJB funds dedicated social workers in all under-18 young offender institutions to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers;
- Set up a new national group on Sexual Violence against Children and Vulnerable People, led by Home Office. This is a panel of experts brought together to co-ordinate and implement the learning from recent inquiries into historic sexual abuse and current sexual violence prevention issues;
- The group membership is made up of key partners such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Government departments and very importantly, experts such as Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), Barnardos, Rape Crisis and the NSPCC. The National Group has already launched an action plan outlining activity across nine key areas (Prevention, Culture Change, Supporting Victims, Offenders, Institutions, Cybercrime, Policing, Criminal Justice Systems, and Local Implementation);
- In addition, the National Group have also published early findings on the Home Office sponsored Multi-agency Working and Information Sharing Project, which aims to support

local areas in putting in place more effective strategies for identifying and protecting all those at risk, including care leavers.¹¹

What we will do

- MoJ will appoint a new Care Leavers Champion, who will act as an internal advocate for this group, and will ensure effective dissemination of the published guidance to staff and relevant staff groups.
- Through the Home Office led National Group we will ensure that the risks to particularly vulnerable groups, including care leavers, are included in our work.
- MoJ will develop clear ways of identifying care leavers in adult services both in custody and in the community so we can better ensure they receive the right support. This builds on improved identification in Asset for young people who are under 18. It will be coupled with guidance for practitioners who are completing assessment tools so that they understand better who qualifies for care leaver status.
- MoJ will work with other Government Departments, particularly with DCLG, to help ensure local authorities improve their links with young adult offenders who are care leavers, particularly in custody.

Impact of measures

- Programmes to reduce crime and the risk of young people being exploited specifically address the needs of care leavers.

¹¹ The action plan and early findings can be found [here](#)

On-going support

Care leavers require support and guidance before and after they turn 18. Care leavers, unlike their peers, may not have networks of support outside of their local authority. We know that young people leaving care frequently feel isolated, lonely and lacking the safety net of someone to talk to and to advise them in a crisis.

“I wish more people were given more support in the transition of semi-independent to independent living.”

What we have done

- DfE have issued more rigorous regulations and guidance, *Transitions to Adulthood*, which sets a clear expectation that local authorities continue to stay in touch and support young people when they leave care through pathway planning until the young person reaches 21, and beyond if he or she is in education;
- DfE published the Care Leaver Charter in 2012, which was written by young people. The charter is a set of principles that enshrine the aspirations and needs of young people. The majority of local authorities have now signed up to the charter which endorse the principle of local authorities staying in touch with young people when they are no longer anybody’s statutory responsibility;
- Since 2012, DfE have started to open a Junior Individual Savings Account (JISA) worth an initial £200 for every young person who has been in care for more than a year. Young people will be able to access these accounts once they turn 18. In the first 12 months, 35,000 such accounts have opened.

What we will do

DfE will:

- Amend the Care Planning Regulations for 16 and 17 year old looked after children. A new rule will mean that a decision to cease looking after a young person of this age is not put into effect until it has been approved and signed off by the Director of Children’s Services. The intention behind this proposal is that young people do not leave care until they are properly ready;
- Fund the Care Leavers’ Foundation to run the *New Belongings* project. Nine local authorities in England have signed up to this project that - aims to create the gold standard in supporting care leavers, which can then be replicated in other areas to improve the lives of vulnerable young people leaving care;

- Amend the statutory guidance to encourage all local authorities to pay at least £2,000 as part of their Setting Up Home Allowance (leaving care grant) to their young people when they leave care;
- The Cabinet Office will work in partnership with DWP and DfE to explore innovative ways to support care leavers. The Cabinet Office's Centre for Social Action aims to tackle social issues by making the most of community resources and individuals, for example by promoting volunteering, mentoring or peer-to-peer support. There are some strong examples of projects using social action to support young people through the transition to leaving care: the Centre for Social Action will lead this cross-departmental project to understand what works and build upon it to improve outcomes for care leavers.

Impact of measures

- Care leavers receive high quality on-going support from their local authorities so that they do not feel lonely and isolated;
- Care leavers leave care at a time when they are ready.

Challenge and Inspections

The government wants all local authorities to work to the standard of the best. It is vital that they are able and willing to support and challenge each other so that those with the greatest challenges are able to learn from those with a strong track record.

It is in this context that the Department for Education has published a data pack on outcomes for care leavers. Its aim is to:

- summarise national data about children who leave care aged 16 and over and outcomes of care leavers at age 19;
- help local authorities to compare their performance with others; and,
- investigate issues such as age of leaving care and placement stability on the outcomes of care leavers.

We have asked all local authorities to consider the findings from the pack and learn from the best practice¹².

Ofsted is revising its local authority children's services inspection framework to place additional emphasis on those young people preparing to leave care and care leavers. Separate local authority fostering and adoption services inspections will be replaced with a new single inspection of services for children looked after and care leavers. Inspections will look closely at each child and young person's 'journey' from entering through to leaving care.

The new inspection arrangements, which will come into effect from this autumn, will have a specific focus and 'sub judgement' on care leavers. In particular it will look at:

“Young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood. Plans for them to leave care are effective and address their individual needs. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live. Young people acquire the necessary level of skill and emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence. They are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing. They enjoy stable and enduring relationships with staff and carers who meet their needs.”¹³

These changes should help drive improvements to the care system and ensure standards are monitored effectively.

¹² DfE: [Care Leavers Data Pack](#),

¹³ Ofsted: [Prioritising the experiences of children who need help, protection and care - a new single inspection](#)

Data collection

A crucial area of intelligence for policy making is the extent of data available to policy makers to make informed decisions. It will also be critically important that our data collection arrangements allow us to assess the impact of this strategy.

We recognise that in the past we have not had sufficient data on young people such as care leavers. From 2014, the Department for Education will be collecting data on care leavers at 18, 20 and 21 in addition to age 19. This data will provide the Department with more information on how care leavers progress at different stages of their lives and how our policies are impacting on their lives.

DWP have developed mechanisms to identify care leavers who claim benefits and will start to collect data to assess the effectiveness of the support they receive to find work.

The MoJ will develop mechanisms that, over time, will better identify care leavers in custody and in the community. This will facilitate those who work with care leavers to ensure they receive the right support.

As part of the cross-departmental work we are undertaking on care leaver policy, we will explore how the government can develop a joined up approach to data collection so that services such as health and employment agencies can readily recognise care leavers and their needs.

Next Steps

Recognising the critical role central government must play, we will act as a catalyst and advocate for wider change, promoting opportunity and changes to attitudes to care leavers. We will continue to work through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee to review and agree how we can improve support provided to care leavers and will issue a further report in October 2014, both to measure progress and set out what more we intend to do.

It is not for government alone to bring about change – we all have a role to play. Dynamic and creative partnerships across sectors are essential for innovation, and can bring about the changes needed in communities that will have a real and lasting effect on the day-to-day lives of care leavers. We need to continue and expand our discussions with others: we will work in partnership with local authorities, the voluntary sector and wider civil society, as well as with care leavers' organisations and individual care leavers

Some of the questions the group will review include:

- What are the key guidance or strategy documents currently being produced by departments which could be care proofed?
- What other initiatives that are being aimed at vulnerable or socially excluded groups could care leavers benefit from?
- Where policy is changing are there any protected groups amongst which we can include care leavers?
- Is there any guidance or regulations being developed by departments where care leavers can be included?
- What skills development programmes are there for the workforce of frontline services where care leavers can be highlighted?
- What are the frontline services that are being provided and how can these be tailored to meet more effectively the needs of care leavers?
- How can we ensure the needs of care leavers are considered as part of the on-going Welfare Reforms?
- Are there new and innovative ways of supporting care leavers, and, if so, what barriers are there holding them back?

Feedback from Care Leavers

We would welcome feedback from care leavers on what issues and themes they consider we should address over the coming year. As indicated earlier in the document, a working group will continue to review care policy which will include monitoring progress of the actions to be taken by each department. Please send suggestions to: careleavers.feedback@education.gsi.gov.uk



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