

## Care leaver strategy – HM Government

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### Summary

The Government has published (29 October 2013) [Care leaver strategy: A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care](#). It pulls together into one document recent actions and future plans for each of the major service areas which can be 'areas of concern' for care leavers. This briefing provides many hyperlinks to documents and initiatives referenced in the strategy, but mostly not provided in it – thereby providing a valuable resource on a wide range of issues for all those working on policy or practice for and with care leavers.

### Overview

The Government has published a cross-departmental [strategy](#) for young people leaving care. It pulls together into one document recent actions and future plans for each of the major service areas which can be 'areas of concern' for care leavers. This briefing provides many hyperlinks to documents and initiatives referenced in the strategy, but mostly not provided in it – thereby providing a valuable resource on a wide range of issues for all those working on policy or practice for and with care leavers.

In his foreword, Children's Minister Edward Timpson writes:

'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... 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.'

The document describes how 'Around 10,000 young people leave care each year aged between 16 and 18 years old... Information from the Children Right's Director's surveys on care leavers and Children in Care Council meetings show that many care leavers feel that they leave care too early and often feel isolated and lonely... They often struggle to cope and this can lead to social exclusion, long term unemployment or involvement in crime.'

In April 2012, a 'call to action' was developed and published jointly by the [Catch22 National Care Advisory Service](#), The Care Leavers' Foundation, A National Voice and The Prince's Trust. Their report, [Access all areas](#), called for each central government department to scrutinize their

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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) for looked after children and care leavers, (then chaired by Edward Timpson) published its report, [Education matters in care](#), on the education of looked after children and care leavers, which made reference to *Access all areas* and made a significant number of recommendations aimed at progressing this area of work.

This strategy document outlines 'What we [ie. government departments] have done' and 'What we will do' under the following headings: Education, Employment, Financial Assistance, Health, Housing, Justice System, and On-going support, with short sections on Challenge and inspection, and Data collection.

## Briefing in full

### Education

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); and only 6% of care leavers go into higher education compared to 23% of their peers at aged 18. '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 has been, and will be, done includes:

- the DfE placed a duty on local authorities (LAs) to provide care leavers with a Personal Advisor where they wish to resume education and training up to age 25
- the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is running a three-year [National Scholarship Programme](#) to widen access to HE; care leavers are a target group
- NIACE's work to increase support for care leavers, includes publication [Voices of Care Leavers](#)
- BIS is working with the Buttle Trust on its [quality mark](#) for further and higher education providers who demonstrate their commitment to young people in and leaving care
- BIS will publish a guide to the FE and skills system aimed at care leavers and those who work with them
- DfE will strengthen statutory guidance on LA duties to support care leavers aged 21-24 who wish to return to education or training.

### Employment

'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.'

What has been, and will be, done includes:

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- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are providing a range of initiatives for 18-24 year olds, including care leavers, through the [Youth Contract](#)
- Jobcentre Plus advisors have been given more flexibility to provide direct support to care leavers, and have access to local flexible support funding
- Care leavers are able to access the DWP Work Programme from the third month of their benefit claim
- DfE funds Catch22 to run [FromCare2Work programme](#), supporting LAs to place employability on the corporate parenting agenda, and enable employer engagement
- DWP has introduced a 'marker' to identify care leavers on their information database, and is raising awareness of Jobcentre Plus advisors of issues faced by care leavers.

## Financial Assistance

'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.'

What has been, and will be, done includes:

- the DfE [16-19 Bursary Fund](#) (replacing Education Maintenance Allowance) includes an entitlement to care leavers attending an FE course to a bursary of at least £1,200
- LAs are under a duty to give care leavers a [bursary](#) of at least £2,000 if they start a higher education course by their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday
- DWP extended 'Second Chance Learning' from age 19 to age 21 or the end of the academic year in which the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday occurs, allowing care leavers (and certain others) to claim Income Support and Housing Benefit if returning to full time, non-advanced education to make up for missed qualifications
- following a [letter](#) from Children's Minister Edward Timpson to DCSs last October (on improving outcomes of care leavers), the number of LAs paying at least £2,000 Setting Up Home Allowance (care leaving grant) has risen from 32 to 97
- as part of the national roll-out of Universal Credit, DWP will ensure that care leavers can make a claim in advance of leaving care (to avoid delays in payment), and that those who need help managing their money will have access to budgeting support
- DfE will amend statutory guidance to encourage all LAs to pay at least £2,000 to care leavers as part of their Setting Up Home Allowance, and to review this annually.

## Health

'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.'

What has been, and will be, done includes:

- revised statutory guidance ([Working together to safeguard children](#)) says, 'the Director of Public Health should ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are a key part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment that is developed by the health and wellbeing board'

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- the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published a [Quality standard for the health and wellbeing of looked after children and young people](#) in April 2013
- the document says that ‘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’ (though neither term actually appears in the strategy); DH is spending £54 million in 2011-15 on the [Children and Young People’s Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme](#)
- when updating statutory guidance on *Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children* in 2014, DH and DfE will set out how organisations in the reformed health system should work with LAs to improve support for care leavers
- the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Ofsted and other inspectorates are developing plans for multi-agency inspections of local arrangements for safeguarding children and for looked after children from 2015; meanwhile, CQC introduced in September a new [programme to inspect local health service arrangements](#) for these groups, including care leavers
- in 2014, DH will launch interactive e-learning programmes to support children and young people’s mental health by extending the skills and knowledge of NHS clinicians, teachers, social workers and others.

## Housing

‘Around a quarter of those living on the streets have a background in care. 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... 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.’

What has been, and will be, done includes:

- DfE issued revised Leaving Care [guidance](#) (in October 2010) which 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 beyond the young person’s 18th birthday’ and that ‘the first statutory review following the young person’s 16th birthday should consider whether a “staying put” placement may be an option’; the Children’s Minister’s [letter](#) to DCS’s last October asked all LAs to make ‘staying put’ arrangements a priority; and DfE (with DWP and HMRC) has published [guidance](#) on tax and benefits to help foster carers and LAs entering into such arrangements
- the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has worked with voluntary organisations and LAs on [Developing positive accommodation and support pathways to adulthood](#) (though the paper makes clear that it ‘does not represent Government view or policy on youth homelessness’)
- DCLG published (in April 2010) [statutory guidance](#) for LAs on homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers; and, in April 2013, 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, which has several youth homelessness elements

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- DCLG is developing proposals for tackling youth homelessness, including a programme for improving the integration of local services for young people 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.

## 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 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 has been, and will be, done includes:

- 'In October 2013, MoJ's National Offender Management Service (NOMS) published new guidance for those working with care leavers in the Criminal Justice System... It will be made available to all of those working with this cohort, both in the community and in custody' (CSN cannot find a link to this guidance)
- the Youth Justice Board (YJB) funds dedicated social workers in all under-18 young offender institutions to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers
- a new national group on Sexual Violence against Children and Vulnerable People has been established, led by the Home Office, with membership made up of key partners such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Government departments and experts such as Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), Barnardo's, Rape Crisis and the NSPCC; the National Group has published a [progress report and action plan](#), and early findings on the Home Office sponsored Multi-agency Working and Information Sharing Project supporting local areas in putting in place more effective strategies for identifying and protecting all those at risk, including care leavers
- MoJ will appoint a new Care Leavers Champion, to act as an internal advocate
- 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
- 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.

## 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.'

What has been, and will be, done includes:

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- DfE issued (in 2010) more rigorous regulations and guidance, [Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers](#), 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 [Charter for Care Leavers](#) in 2012, which was written by young people, and to which most LAs have signed up
- since 2012, DfE have started to open a Junior Individual Savings Accounts (JISA) worth an initial £200 for every young person who has been in care for more than a year; in the first 12 months, 35,000 such accounts have been opened
- 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 DCS
- DfE is funding the Care Leavers' Foundation to run the [New Belongings](#) project, with nine LAs signed up to bring the principles and concepts of *Access all areas* and the *Charter for Care Leavers* down to a local level.

## 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.'

Ofsted has introduced a single [framework](#) for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, including children looked after and care leavers, which includes a specific focus and a graded sub-judgement on the 'experiences and progress of care leavers' (see 'Related briefings').

## Data collection

'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.'

In addition, 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; and the MoJ will develop mechanisms that will better identify care leavers in custody and in the community, to help those who work with care leavers to ensure they receive the right support.

The government will explore how it might develop a joined up approach to data collection so that services such as health and employment agencies can also readily recognise care leavers and their needs.

## Next steps

The Government will continue to work through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee to review and agree how to improve support provided to care leavers, and a further report will be issued in October 2014 on progress and further action. 'We need to continue and expand our discussions

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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.'

## Comment

This strategy document – published to coincide with National Care Leavers' Week – is more of a review of recent (and, in some cases, not so recent) initiatives than a description of a strategy as such. Nevertheless, pulling all the strands together into one document has performed a service which should help to raise awareness of the need to give greater priority to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group. Some of the documents referenced highlight the particular difficulties they can face, which are exacerbated by the current financial situation. It is to be hoped that there will be some significant progress to be included in next year's report.

## External links

[Care leaver strategy](#)

## Related briefings

[Ofsted framework for inspection of services for children in need of help and protection](#) (October 2013)

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