

Care Review Implementation Plan:

Priorities from the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is made up of 129 local authority leaving care teams. We work together to share good practice & improve services & support for care experienced young people.

We believe the following areas from the Care Review will make the most significant difference to young people leaving care:

- **Introducing a Corporate Parenting Duty to all public bodies**

Introducing corporate parenting duties to all public bodies has the potential to make a big difference to tackling many of the barriers both care experienced young people and the leaving care teams who support them face, for example around accessing mental health and housing. How this is outworked will need to be considered carefully, with the involvement of care experienced young people, so that it leads to a meaningful response from public bodies, but having this duty in legislation will provide an important framework for this.

- **Launching a National Offer for care experienced young people**

There continues to be a 'postcode lottery' of support within local authority local offers and progress can be slow as each local authority has to negotiate with their local partners. We believe that introducing a National Offer would greatly improve the quality of life for care experienced young people. Young people should be consulted about priorities for a national offer but this could include:

- Free transport – supporting all 5 missions for care experienced young people & saving money for the taxpayer where, for example, a young person is able to move into work
- Free WiFi provision up to 25 – also vital to implementing all 5 missions
- A Council Tax exemption up to 25, whether or not you live in your home local authority
- Free prescriptions, eye and dental care up to 25.
- The young person's first Passport and provisional driver's licence provided free of charge.

These are the things that parents would normally help to provide and as a corporate parent, the State should do the same. This highlights how placing corporate parenting duties on other public bodies can improve things for young people leaving care, for example, the Home Office providing a first passport for free as part of their corporate parenting duty.

The [Standardised Care Leaver Offer](#) that care experienced young people from Care Leavers National Movement developed in 2020 could form the basis of consultation around a national offer.

- **Pursuing the recommendation around making care experience a Protected Characteristic**

We believe that this would raise awareness of the barriers that care experience can bring and the long-term impact this can have; and lead to action that ensures the needs of people with care experience are considered in the design of systems, services and policies. People with care experience are ‘our kids’ and should be seen differently than other disadvantaged groups.

- **Focusing on Relationships**

We welcome the focus on building meaningful relationships. We are planning to launch a peer learning programme, funded by Esmée Fairbairn in the new year to stimulate and share practice in this area with a number of local authorities and will ensure that we keep the DfE team updated with learning from this programme.

- **Pursuing the 5 missions for care experienced young people**

We welcome the focus that the 5 missions for Care Experienced Young People bring, provided that we continue to develop the areas around the missions – for example promoting a diverse range of educational opportunities and not just Higher Education. We also want to ensure that within each of the missions we can identify how different groups of care leavers may need specific approaches, for examples young parents, those in custody, UASC young people, young people with disabilities and those in the LGBTQ+ community.

- **Establishing an Advocacy offer for all young people leaving care**

Members of the Young People’s Benchmarking Forum have spoken to us about the need for the independent advocacy provision recommended in the care review to be extended to include care leavers up to age 25. This could be a step down from the ‘opt-out’ advocacy service for children in care that is recommended in the review to a service that could be requested. This could be provided by the same organisation, with the offer and contact details outlined in each local offer.

- **Implementing the recommendations around mental health provision as a matter of urgency**

Working with Health to see the recommendations around care leavers’ mental health (Pg 97) must be a priority. Barriers to accessing appropriate mental health support and a lack of understanding about the impact of care experience from mental health professionals are one of the main concerns raised by our Young People’s Benchmarking Forum.

Care experienced young people need specialist mental health support that where professionals understand the impact of care experience and design services around this. Across our Forum, this is working best where that support is co-located with the leaving care team, as part of a multidisciplinary team. Mental health issues are a barrier to many young

people engaging with the 4 other missions – engaging with education; engaging with employment; managing a tenancy and building relationships.

- **Considering the needs of young people in semi-independent accommodation as well, in addition to the housing and homelessness recommendations**

We welcome the recommendations around the extension of Staying Close and Staying Put (provided the capacity issues can be addressed for children in care); ending intentionally homeless practice and removing the local connection test. We would like to see greater emphasis on the group of young people who move into semi-independent accommodation or their own accommodation, who are in the majority. Young people regularly talk to us in particular about barriers to working when in supported accommodation which projects like St Basil's 'Live & Work' schemes address.

We would ask that you would press the Department of Levelling Up and Communities to implement these recommendations, which would make a huge difference to young people being able to secure stable accommodation.

- **Ensuring the Financial wellbeing of young people leaving care, essential to the success of the 5 missions.**

Although the Care Review does not talk much about financial wellbeing, this is also key to the success of each of the five missions, for example enabling young people to afford managing a tenancy; making sure they have sufficient money to spend time socialising with friends and family members and ensuring they have enough money to manage living costs while at college etc. We need a focus and commitment to financial wellbeing in the Implementation Plan, starting with addressing the current Cost of Living Crisis. Our recommendations for targeted action to address the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis can be found on Page 12 of our [Impact of Cost of Living in Care Experienced Young People Report](#).

- **Increasing the Leaving Care Grant to £3000, with a commitment to increase with inflation**

Since the report was written recommending the leaving care grant guidance be increased to £2,438, costs have risen significantly and we would like to see the figure in the guidance increased to £3000/person, with a commitment to continue to review this in line with inflation

- **Establishing multidisciplinary Leaving Care Teams**

We welcome the recommendation around creating multidisciplinary leaving care teams as we have seen the positive impact where professionals from health, employment, DWP, housing and other services are embedded within leaving care teams resulting in improved support for young people.