



ACCESS ALL AREAS

NORTHERN IRELAND

Supporting corporate parents to **improve**
young people's journey from care to adulthood

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ACCESS ALL AREAS - THE COALITION

Access All Areas Northern Ireland was co-produced by a coalition of agencies working with and for young people aged 16 plus who are leaving the care system.



FOREWORD

In Northern Ireland the number of looked after children and care leavers has risen steadily over the past number of years. As of March 2016, 1,475 young people were entitled to access leaving and aftercare services (HSCB, 2016).

For many their earlier childhood experiences will have been marked by adversity, trauma and neglect, and for some the care journey may not have compensated them for past difficulties.¹ Many care leavers continue to experience significant challenges as they transition from care including experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation.

The Access All Areas (NI) coalition is an alliance of organisations working with 16 plus care leavers and was inspired by Access All Areas England and the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant.

Co-ordinated by Barnardo's NI, the coalition engaged in a partnership exercise to identify key areas of concern and to make recommendations to aid care leavers' journeys to successful independence.

Our vision is that every care leaver in Northern Ireland has the opportunity and support to fulfil their potential and make a successful transition from state care into adulthood.

This report is a product of the collaboration which is informed by the practice experience of the organisations within the coalition and by the views and experiences of care leavers themselves.

Care leavers told us about the changes they want to see so that they can fulfil their life ambitions and take their places as equal citizens in our society. Their voices and experiences are reflected in this report and its recommendations.

Thank you to all of the Access All Areas coalition members; associated interest groups/agencies and individuals who gave their advice and support; and the many care leavers who contributed to and helped to co-produce this report.



¹ Hannon, Wood & Bazalgett, 2010; Sinclair et al., 2007; Stein, 2012.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


Young people leaving care typically transition from care much earlier than their non-care experienced peers who are more likely to leave home in their mid-to-late twenties. Many struggle on their journey towards becoming independent adults and continue to experience problems that lead to much poorer outcomes than the general population. They are often living with multiple and complex needs.

The Access All Areas (Northern Ireland) coalition engaged in a partnership exercise to identify key areas of concern and to make recommendations to aid care leavers' journeys to successful independence.

We recognise throughout this report the range of positive activity underway in Northern Ireland relating to work with looked after children and care leavers.

The coalition worked to identify and agree six overarching recommendations to guide all government departments and their associated agencies in their role as corporate parents. Further recommendations are contained within four aftercare policy and practice areas: housing, accommodation and support; education, training and employment; health and well-being; and youth justice.

The perspective taken was that all care leavers are potentially vulnerable but there are those with additional struggles and challenges who require further and concentrated efforts to be made on their behalf. Access All Areas (NI) challenges, supports and makes recommendations to ensure that government fulfils its duties as a corporate parent.



Many care leavers struggle on their journey towards becoming independent adults and continue to experience problems that lead to much poorer outcomes than the general population.

ACCESS ALL AREAS (NI): 6 OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL CORPORATE PARENTS

- 1. Deliver fully resourced statutory support for all care leavers to at least age 25:**
The state as a corporate parent has a moral and unique responsibility to ensure care leavers are appropriately supported through the transition from care into adulthood, to at least age 25. Policy and public services should provide the positive support that any good parent might give to ensure each child's potential is reached and opportunities are maximised.
- 2. Care-proof all government policies:** Corporate parents must recognise the vulnerability of care leavers and assess the impact that policy will have on them and those who support them. Care leaver's experience of adversity, trauma and interrupted development may impact well into their adult lives. Corporate parents should therefore treat them as a 'protected group', with the potential impact of policy changes measured through Equality Impact Assessments.
- 3. Publish disaggregated data collection to age 25:** The impact of actions has to be effectively measured and supported through improved data collection and data sharing between relevant government departments, statutory bodies and community and voluntary sector organisations.
- 4. Firmly establish care leaver 'champions':** Retention of a lead departmental role with responsibility for implementation of policy and practice improvements for all care leavers. Strengthen the voice of young people further through the introduction of an All Party Parliamentary Group for looked after children and care leavers.
- 5. Strengthen rights and participation:** Government departments and agencies with responsibility for corporate parenting take a rights based approach to delivering supports and services to care leavers throughout their journey in, from and after care. Make provision for the meaningful participation and engagement of care leavers by strengthening existing/or creating new forums to enable care leavers to influence policies, practice and services, which impact on their lives.
- 6. Ensure the needs of particularly vulnerable groups within the care leaver population are addressed:** inter-alia care leavers with a disability, mental ill health, care leavers who are young parents, homeless, in the justice system, in rural communities, unaccompanied separated young people, care leavers from minority groups and young people misusing substances.

AFTERCARE POLICY AND PRACTICE AREAS

Actions for all corporate parents to support care leavers in housing, accommodation and support, education, training and employment, health and wellbeing and youth justice.



HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition to adulthood. Care leavers often face particular difficulties with accommodation including: finding and maintaining appropriate, safe and affordable accommodation on a low income; taking sole responsibility for managing a household; and being at increased risk of homelessness.



- 1. Encourage, enable and empower all young people' to remain in positive care settings until they are ready to leave.** Not all care leavers have the opportunity to remain in positive care placements after their eighteenth birthday, even if it would benefit them. Extending care across all placement types has the potential to provide opportunities for all care leavers, particularly for those with more complex needs, to benefit from an extended needs-led transition.
- 2. Ensure care leavers have access to a range and choice of appropriate accommodation, housing and support based on their unique needs and circumstances.** Care leavers require person centred planning and access to a range of appropriate accommodations to meet their unique needs. In the absence of familial support, access to a safety net of support and services, including alternative short term accommodation options within the care continuum/accommodation framework, is critical to avoiding homelessness.
- 3. Support care leavers to maintain long term housing stability.** To help care leavers maintain safe and settled accommodation, they need long term support networks and financial stability. As a particularly vulnerable group with distinct needs, they must be prioritised within support structures and mitigation packages of welfare reform. Floating support services and local councils have an important role to play in supporting and integrating care leavers into their communities.



EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Care leavers are more likely than the general population to be 'not in education employment or training' (NEET). Raising greater awareness of the barriers faced by care leavers as well as the role of corporate parenting will help to strengthen care leaver's position within the education system and beyond.

4. **Increase understanding of and respond to educational barriers faced by care experienced young people.** Significant resources are being provided to improve the educational attainment of care experienced young people. While the picture is improving, a considerable gap still exists when compared to the general population.
5. **Recognise and respond to unique needs of care experienced young people within educational, training and employability programmes.** Many care leavers' educational pathways are seriously disrupted. Employability services and alternative education and training programmes are vital provisions. All relevant

government departments and agencies as corporate parents are in a position to ensure there is flexibility within these structures to support care leavers and to provide additional employment and training opportunities.

6. **Collaborate to reduce financial barriers and obstacles to engaging in and sustaining pathways into employment.** Corporate parents need to fully address the financial barriers and obstacles faced by care leavers engaging in and sustaining pathways into employment. Current systems create financial disincentives to young people accessing or changing routes into education, training or employment.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Due to early adverse experiences, many care experienced young people are at risk of developmental, emotional and physical health problems. At the time of leaving care, it is not unusual for the physical and mental health problems of young people to increase.

7. **Expand services and support to meet and promote the health and wellbeing of care experienced young people to age 25.** The specific health and wellbeing needs of young people after they leave care and up to age 25 warrants attention in strategic planning mechanisms in order to address the needs of more vulnerable care leavers and the barriers they face to effective engagement with health and wellbeing provision and support.
8. **Promote and improve effective services to address care leaver's mental health and emotional wellbeing.** Care experienced young people have much higher rates of mental health problems than the general population

and investment is required in services to meet their needs. Extending CAMHS (or a suitable alternative) to age 25 is a viable way to respond to young people who do not meet adult mental health thresholds but require ongoing mental health services post 18.

9. **Take steps to reduce isolation once young people leave care.** Isolation is both a concern and a reality for many vulnerable care leavers. All corporate parents need to make efforts to ensure care leavers are not subject to more exclusion, for example through welfare reform, and that programmes such as befriending, mentoring and peer support schemes are expanded.



YOUTH AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

There continues to be a disproportionate number of care experienced children and young people within Northern Ireland's youth justice system and an over representation of this population detained in custody. Children living in care homes are more likely to be referred to the police for committing even minor offences who ordinarily would not have reached the criminal justice system if they were living in their own homes.



10. Reduce the number of care experienced young people in the justice system.

Effective mechanisms need to be established or restored to further reduce the number of care experienced young people entering the justice systems. Young people detained under PACE (The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order (1989) can find themselves in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre because there is not an appropriate range of accommodation available for them. It is clear that all the recommendations made by the Youth Justice Review (see Graham et al., 2011) must be implemented.

11. Reduce barriers to young people's access into employment. Care experienced young people caught up in the youth justice or justice systems are considerably disadvantaged by the requirement to disclose their criminal records, often creating obstacles to employment that could and should be avoided. Reviewing and amending the Independent Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme would go some way to allaying confusion and achieving better outcomes for care leavers.

12. Prioritise the rehabilitation and reintegration of care leavers leaving custody.

The Youth Justice Review noted the difference between the approaches of services once a young person becomes 18 years old, and the need for a full and proper handover to adult custodial services. Exit planning from the outset will help to ensure appropriate accommodation and support is in place post-release. Encouraging and providing education or training opportunities will help to ensure better outcomes on release.



Access All Areas (NI) challenges, supports and makes recommendations to ensure that government fulfils its duties as a corporate parent.

INTRODUCTION

// The state cannot and should not be a forever parent for care leavers. It can and should be a better and more thoughtful parent for care leavers as they make the transition through the final stages of development of adolescence, from 15 through to 25, and remain a vigilant, if more distant, parent to its care leavers throughout their first crucial decade after leaving care”.²

Young people leaving care typically transition from care much earlier than their non-care experienced peers who are more likely to leave home in their mid-to-late twenties. Many struggle on their journey towards becoming independent adults and continue to experience problems that lead to much poorer outcomes than the general population. They are often living with multiple and complex needs.

Outcomes for care leavers are determined by a number of interlocking and cumulative factors, which include their pre-care experience and the quality of in-care, transitional and aftercare experiences. Promoting positive outcomes involves comprehensive personalised interventions through their life course, first while living in care and then in the early years after they leave care (Stein, 2012).

We recognise throughout this report the range of positive activity underway in Northern Ireland, relating to work with looked after children and care leavers. Access All Areas (NI) challenges, supports and makes recommendations to ensure that government fulfils its duties as a corporate parent. It is based on our shared organisational experience and practice, co-working with the statutory sector, academia, and similar initiatives undertaken in England, Access All Areas (NCAS, 2012) and the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (CELCIS, 2015).

² NCAS website http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/All_Areas

The perspective taken by the coalition was that all care leavers are potentially vulnerable but there are those with additional struggles and challenges who require further and concentrated efforts to be made on their behalf. The needs of these young people are captured throughout this report and highlighted as current areas of policy and practice concern.

As part of the development process we undertook direct consultation with young people. Their views and experiences are also reflected through our coalition member's extensive and ongoing engagement with young people in a wide range of projects.

What young people value most is the quality of the **relationships** they build both within and through their care journey and with other services that further support them during the transition from and after care including education, housing, health and welfare. Being involved in the decisions that affect them is also central to ensuring the most vulnerable are enabled to achieve the highest possible engagement with the services and supports they require.



IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

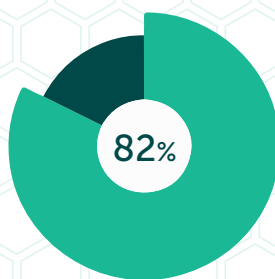
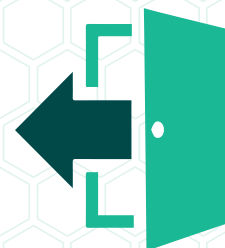


There are **2,890** children in care, representing an increase of 15% over five years between 2011 and 2016.

1,475

young people were eligible to access care leaver services from Trusts (including 459 (31%) children aged 16/17 years and still in care).

(Source: HSCB, 2016)



The vast majority of care leavers **(82%)** in Northern Ireland leave care because they have reached 18 years of age.

There were **313** care leavers aged 16-18 in 2015/16.

(Source: DoH, 2017)



BACKGROUND

The Access All Areas campaign on behalf of care leavers in **England** was initiated in 2012, making the case that when the state takes on responsibility for parenting children it creates a unique long term relationship between the child and the state (NCAS, 2012). It further reasons that corporate parenting is not the sole responsibility of children's services but also of central government departments which have a critical role in supporting young people into 'real and sustainable independence' (p.5). Access All Areas England calls on central government departments to bolster support and remove the barriers which make the transition into adulthood for care leavers more difficult than necessary by 'care-proofing' generic policy. This requires government departments to assess the impact that departmental policies have on looked-after children, care leavers and those who support them. To date, the campaign has successfully influenced the actions set out in both the first cross-government care leaver strategy (HM Government, 2013) and the revised strategy (HM Government, 2016).

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (SCLC) (CELSIS, 2015) and the Agenda for Change campaign (CELSIS, 2014) draws on the principles of Access all Areas England, similarly calling for the care proofing and prioritisation of care leavers in government policy. SCLC aims to support corporate parents to deliver changes in action and practice to bring improvement and consistency to the care of these young people. It also offers clear guidance on how to meet the needs of young people who are often disadvantaged as a result of their care experiences. The Covenant and Agenda for Change are starting to be incorporated into and referenced in local corporate parenting plans.



In Northern Ireland (as of going to print) the term "corporate parent" was not defined in legislation, however in practice the Department of Health (DoH) takes the lead as corporate parent for children in care and care leavers, delegating its statutory functions via the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts). Annual statistical reports monitor and collate information on how Trusts are meeting these responsibilities. The Standards for Leaving Care Services (DHSSPS, 2012) requires that Trusts have a *"corporate parenting policy and strategy which defines the whole organisation's responsibilities to act as a good parent in ensuring best outcomes for children and young people who are looked after or care experienced"* (p.11). The standards also provide for collaborative working with other departments and agencies that hold responsibilities for areas such as education, housing and careers.

Since October 2015, a similar Access All Areas coalition has convened in **Northern Ireland** with the aim of highlighting the barriers continuing to face care leavers and to improve outcomes for care leavers by informing, supporting and complementing current activity.

In recent years systems and structures for supporting care leavers have been advanced considerably (Coyle & Pinkerton, 2012). This relates in particular to the strategic focus and mechanisms put in place for care leavers and vulnerable young people through the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB).

This approach has been a critical driver for improved coordination of interdepartmental and interagency collaborations and has resulted in greater investment and focus for care leavers. Notable too is the direction and actions arising from both the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) group on Looked After Children/Youth Homelessness 16+ (LAC 16+) and the Regional Reference Group on Accommodation and Support for Young Homeless Young People Leaving Care aged 16-21.

Key developments include improved processes for gathering statistical information, production of interagency protocols³, the growth of jointly-commissioned supported accommodation services, and the development of the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) scheme.⁴ Growing consistency and shared good practice across the HSC Trusts is aided through the work of the Northern Ireland Benchmarking Forum. At the heart of these undertakings is the principle of good corporate parenting and a conscientious, dedicated workforce.



PRIMARY LEGISLATION

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides the legislative framework for Northern Ireland's child protection system.

The **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002** amended the Children (NI) Order to enhance and strengthen the HSC Trusts duties to young people leaving care and in after care. As such the HSC Trusts are required to advise, assist and befriend young people with a view to promoting their welfare when they leave care.

Realisation of the **Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015** has the potential for the development of effective structures to ensure co-ordination between government departments, local government, and the voluntary and community sectors to achieve better outcomes relating to the well-being of care leavers.

When going to print, DoH had published for consultation the draft **Adoption and Children (NI) Bill**⁵ seeking views on a number of recommendations relating to care leavers, some of which are contained within this report, as well as views on introducing the term Corporate Parent into legislation.

³ For example: Regional guidance on financial arrangements for care leavers in further and higher education.

⁴ The GEM scheme gives the opportunity to young people in foster care to remain past their 18th birthday.

⁵ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/adoption-and-children-northern-ireland-bill>



POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Care Matters in Northern Ireland – A Bridge to a Better Future

(DHSSPS, 2007) was a strategic vision for improving services for children and young people in care or on the edge of care in Northern Ireland and was aimed at key stakeholders in the statutory and voluntary sectors, and carers.

DoH has indicated its intention to publish a draft **Looked After Children (LAC) strategy** for public consultation in 2017, which will update Care Matters.

DE published the **draft Children and Young People's Strategy (2017-2027)** for public consultation in late 2016. This new strategy will expand upon the previous ten year strategy and seek to realise the definition of children's well-being as contained within the Children Services Co-operation Act 2015.

A further significant development for care leavers is contained within the **draft Programme for Government** (NI Executive, 2016), which awards specific recognition to the vulnerability of care experienced children and young people.

Building on progress to date and in the spirit of shared learning and cross-sector collaboration, the coalition aims through this report to add value to and play a decisive role in informing and supporting policy and practice development for all care leavers.

It is hoped this report will garner the support and engagement of government departments and associated agencies - in their role as corporate parents - and encourage them to embed the six overarching recommendations contained in section one of Access All Areas (NI) into future care leaver policy and practice.

In section two, further recommendations are contained within the four aftercare policy and practice areas: housing, accommodation and support; education training and employment; health and well-being; and youth justice.



SECTION ONE: OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTIONS FOR ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AS CORPORATE PARENTS TO SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS

Although the lead department for care experienced children and young people is the Department of Health, the role of corporate parent extends far beyond a single department. There are responsibilities and opportunities for every government department and their associated agencies to ensure that care leavers fulfil their potential. This will require collaboration, innovation, and wider system and services reform.

1

DELIVER FULLY RESOURCED STATUTORY SUPPORT FOR ALL CARE LEAVERS TO AT LEAST AGE 25

The state as a corporate parent has a moral and unique responsibility to ensure care leavers are appropriately supported through the transition from care into adulthood, to at least age 25. Policy and public services should provide the positive support that any good parent might give to ensure each child's potential is reached and opportunities are maximised.

Becoming an adult today is a more gradual and varied transition process than ever before, with families often investing considerable financial and emotional resources for longer periods into supporting their children into early adulthood. In contrast, support systems for care leavers tend to fall away at an earlier age. As they move towards independence they have to navigate multiple changes and challenges.

"Do not make a difference in support between care leavers who are not in education or training"



and those who are... all care leavers should have access to support to age 25 not just the ones in education or training” (Young Person 17).

In Northern Ireland, beyond the age of 21 an inequity of access to leaving and after care services exists. Care leavers who are in education or training can access extended support (up to age 24) but otherwise this is not available. Policy development in Northern Ireland is currently out of step with developments in England and Scotland. In Scotland the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 was amended to ensure that additional support can be available to all care leavers up to age 26. In England through the Children and Social work Bill 2016, services are available to age 25.

2

CARE– PROOF ALL GOVERNMENT POLICY

Corporate parents must recognise the vulnerability of care leavers and assess the impact that policy will have on them and those who support them. Care leaver’s experience of adversity, trauma and interrupted development may impact well into their adult lives. Corporate parents should therefore treat them as a ‘protected group’, with the potential impact of policy changes measured through Equality Impact Assessments.

Care leavers are typically more exposed to greater adversity compared to the general population. Many will have earlier negative experiences of poor parenting, including maltreatment and social disadvantage (Stein, 2012). Often combined with chaotic care histories, there are those who will continue to experience a range of difficulties as they transition through care into adulthood (Stein, 2012). Notable risk factors include being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), homelessness, early parenthood and contact with the criminal justice system (Simmons & Thompson, 2016).

Corporate parenting is the collective responsibility of all government departments and their associated agencies, including at a local level. On that basis responsibility to help reduce potential negative effects of policy on care leavers falls to all corporate parents. Ensuring that new and existing policies are ‘care-proofed’ and positively support care leavers - rather than create barriers - means putting in place measures to remove any obstacles faced by young people as they enter adulthood.⁶

⁶ For care proofing the cross-departmental Care Leaver Strategy in England (HM Government, 2013, p.23) provides examples of core questions to be considered by all policy makers.

3

PUBLISH DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION TO AGE 25

The impact of actions has to be effectively measured and supported through improved data collection and data sharing between relevant government departments, statutory bodies and community and voluntary sector organisations.

The extent of data available to policy makers is critical for making informed decisions and for assessing impact. In Northern Ireland there is a need for more detailed disaggregated data collection and analysis across areas affecting children's lives (UN, 2016). While DoH publishes statistics on outcomes for care leavers to age 19, extending the scope to at least age 25 would help to inform continuous improvement within service provision.

Data should also be disaggregated and shared according to care status and across additional relevant government departments, notably the departments of the economy, education, justice, and communities.

Enhanced data collection and tracking of care leavers will more effectively capture pathways information and outcomes, highlight areas of good practice and indicate where additional supports need to be targeted.

4

FIRMLY ESTABLISH 'CHAMPIONS' FOR CARE LEAVERS

Retention of a lead departmental role with responsibility for implementation of policy and practice improvements for all care leavers. Strengthen the voice of young people further through the introduction of an All Party Parliamentary Group for looked after children and care leavers.

The HSCB arrangements for a commissioning lead in respect of vulnerable young people aged 16 plus and care leavers, has driven a range of successful interagency and inter-departmental achievements and initiatives including the production of regional guidance, development of employability programmes and supported accommodation for care leavers. Going forward, the needs of care leavers will continue to require at least the same if not more energy and scrutiny of how policy and practice impact on care leavers lives,.

In Westminster the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for looked after children and care leavers⁷ aims to ensure the voices of young people with experience of public care are heard by government.

⁷ APPG for looked after children and care leavers see <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/looked-after-children-and-care-leavers.htm>

5

STRENGTHEN RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION

Government departments and agencies with responsibility for corporate parenting take a rights based approach to delivering supports and services to care leavers throughout their journey in, from and after care. Make provision for the meaningful participation and engagement of care leavers by strengthening existing/or creating new forums to enable care leavers to influence policies, practice and services, which impact on their lives.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is visible in many policies relating to children and young people both in, and leaving care, in Northern Ireland. The Convention puts the best interests of young people clearly at the centre of policy and practice. Adopting a rights-based approach across government departments will enable and ensure a collective responsiveness to young people for whom the state has responsibility.

Aside from the work that both voluntary and statutory agencies do to enable and encourage participation, the Voice of Young people in Care (VOYPIC) is a recognised platform for young people's voices to be heard.

However much is to be achieved by further strengthening the meaningful and regular engagement of all care experienced young people and in particular those who are "seldom heard" and considered harder to reach. Corporate parents need to resource and support existing structures and/or create new ones to ensure that young people effectively influence services and policies across all platforms that impact on their lives. This could be aided by the development of a participation strategy.⁸

6

ENSURE THE NEEDS OF PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE GROUPS WITHIN THE CARE LEAVER POPULATION ARE ADDRESSED

Inter-alia care leavers with a disability, mental ill health, care leavers who are young parents, homeless, in the justice system, in rural communities, unaccompanied separated young people, from minority groups, and young people misusing substances.

In its concluding observations that Committee recommended the UK State Parties, including Northern Ireland, '*strengthen its awareness-raising and other preventive activities against discrimination and stigmatization, and, if necessary, take temporary special measures for the benefit of children in vulnerable situations*' (UN, 2016, para. 21(c)). Throughout the concluding observations the need for special attention of vulnerable children is highlighted.

Care leavers are a group facing specific and unique challenges on their journey from care into adulthood. Within the care leaver population are young people whose circumstances and needs require additional support, which is reflected within and throughout this report.

⁸ See DCYA (2015) National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015–2020.

SECTION TWO: AFTERCARE POLICY AND PRACTICE AREAS

ACTIONS FOR ALL CORPORATE PARENTS TO SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS IN HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND YOUTH JUSTICE.





1. HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition to adulthood. Care leavers often face particular difficulties with accommodation including: finding and maintaining appropriate, safe and affordable accommodation on a low income; taking sole responsibility for managing a household; and being at increased risk of homelessness.

POLICY CONTEXT

The legislation most relevant to care leavers' accommodation needs is the Children (NI) Order 1995 (Article 21) and The Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002, which places a duty on HSC Trusts to assess and meet the needs of young people who are or have been looked after.

Young people who become homeless are eligible for assistance under Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 and under the Housing (NI) Order 1988. Regional Good Practice Guidelines (2009 and updated in 2014) developed by the HSCB and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) aim to coordinate and define roles and responsibilities for responding to the needs of young homeless people aged 16 to 21.

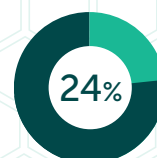
The Supporting People Programme - administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive - funds housing related support services for vulnerable people to maintain their independence in either supported accommodation or in their own homes through floating support. Care leavers avail of both types of service.



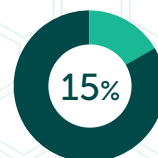
At 31 March 2016, 1,475 young people were entitled to access leaving and aftercare services in Northern Ireland; 459 were 16 or 17 year olds still in care. Of the 1,016 young people who had left care:



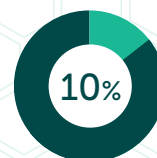
were in a tenancy arrangement



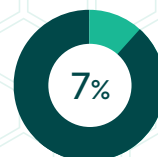
continued to reside with their former foster carers



were with parents or siblings



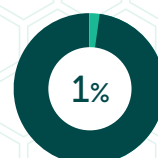
had returned to live with relatives friends



were in supported accommodation

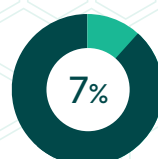


were in student accommodation



were in supported lodgings

(Source: HSCB, 2016)



Of children and young people under the age of 18 who were discharged from care, 7% moved from care to live independently

(Source: DoH, 2016)

1.1

Encourage, enable and empower all young people to remain in positive care settings until they are ready to leave

Young people in care typically move into independent accommodation in the community at a much earlier stage than their non-care experienced peers. For some this comes at an age and time when they do not feel ready, when they feel they have little choice about where they move to and when their preparation for adult life is not always sufficient.

In recent years the quality and range of accommodation options available to young people transitioning from care in Northern Ireland has grown and developed. Examples include the GEM scheme (where young people can remain in their foster placements up to age 21⁹) and the development and expansion of jointly commissioned supported accommodation projects including Supported Lodgings.

GEM is a welcome initiative because it means young people in foster care do not have to leave their homes at age 18. Under these arrangements nearly a quarter of care leavers remained with their foster carers in 2015/16 (HSCB, 2016)¹⁰. GEM is available to young people in or moving into education, training or employment. Although there is some flexibility within the criteria, in practice there has been limited use of its application to date.

Young people in **residential care** do not usually have the option to remain in their care placements. They typically leave care aged eighteen years or younger. **Supported accommodation** can be provided for young people as part of a transitional arrangement from care for a period of up to two years.

During our consultation, practitioners and young people regularly echoed appeals for early and improved preparation. Aside from meaningfully

involving young people throughout their care leaving process, suggestions included ensuring that an assessment of preparedness is carried out before they leave care to determine their readiness.

In Scotland, since 2013 **extended care** has been available to care leavers up to the age of 21 in both residential and foster care (Scottish Government)¹¹. Having the opportunity to remain in positive care placements can be particularly important for more vulnerable care leavers. Flexibility within the criteria for extended care in both residential and foster care has to be visible and utilised in practice to encourage and enable any young person who would benefit from extending their care placements to do so.

Young people who remain in care longer do better (Stein & Morris, 2010). Despite this, many young people with multiple complex/high risk needs move prematurely from care, a factor associated with poorer outcomes in adult life. Typically they move to unregulated placements including generic adult temporary accommodation, Bed and Breakfasts or jointly commissioned supported accommodation.

Young people with multiple, complex needs require additional targeted attention both within care to prevent a premature exit, and when they leave care they need bespoke accommodation and support solutions ideally within the care accommodation continuum.

In reality, any young person can struggle with the transition from care, therefore across the care/accommodation continuum availability of a range of short term emergency, respite and return accommodation options may prevent young people exiting care early and avert future housing crisis.

⁹ Or beyond where it is in keeping with the Trust's statutory duty to continue to support young people beyond 21 years in education and / or training.

¹⁰ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/nict-15-16.pdf>

¹¹ Scottish Government (2013). Staying Put Scotland - Providing care leavers with connectedness and belonging. Guidance for Local Authorities and other Corporate Parents: Supporting looked after children and young people to remain in care, as part of a staged transition towards adulthood and greater independence.

1.2

Ensure that care leavers have access to a range and choice of appropriate accommodation, housing and support based on their unique needs and circumstances

All involved in housing allocations should consider this –

‘Would I want my son or daughter to live here?’”

(Young Person 19)

Care leavers have a number of vulnerabilities, not least of all being alone and young, feeling unsafe due to their age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability etc. They may be subject to unwanted attention/harassment or even exploitation. The right housing in the right place with the right support is vital.

Whilst young people are still in care, they need **person-centred planning, advice and guided support** to help them understand their housing and support options and to find a tenure type that best suits their unique individual needs and capabilities (including their ability to share accommodation).

Options may include supported or shared housing, single occupancy, private rented and social housing. At all times suitability, affordability and safety must be the primary considerations.

Whilst a range of supported options is now available, options remain limited for some **young people with additional needs**.¹²

Supported accommodation is a positive and effective option for many care leavers including those who have high support needs. It can however fail to meet the needs of a small but significant group of young people who are exiting care with a multiplicity of more complex needs¹³. Despite the best efforts of many, young people’s supported accommodation within the context of the **current commissioning framework** is at present ill equipped to provide for these young people. Such placements often serve to disrupt the stability of other young people living there and result in placement breakdown. Subsequently, with the absence of any current suitable alternatives, these young people, who

arguably have the greatest need for on-going care (Munro et al., 2012) can find themselves as vulnerable 18 year olds living within generic adult homeless accommodation.

Care leavers also face challenges in securing affordable appropriate homes within the **community**. They must apply for social housing through the homelessness route. They may be awarded full duty applicant housing points but they also must compete with others to accumulate points to acquire social housing. This current system is less than appropriate and fails to allow for proper planning and provision of adequate of support.

“When you apply for housing you have to put down the area most likely to get a result, not the best or most suitable area for you”
(Young person 18)

Increasingly, **demands on social housing** means that many young adults must seek accommodation within the private rented sector which can present significant challenges. Issues can include security of tenure, the quality and affordability of available accommodation; the capacity to secure necessary deposits and access to discretionary housing benefits to help meet rent costs. In addition some young people may risk losing a stable home when their exemption to the shared accommodation rate of housing benefit ceases at age 22 and they find the deficit in rent means they can no longer afford their accommodation.

Additional obstacles arise if **tenancy problems and failures** are viewed to be the care leaver’s own fault. In this event they may be designated as “intentionally homeless”. Young people

¹² Such as young people with intellectual and mental health disability (Kelly et al., 2016) and those exiting the justice system.

¹³ Includes very challenging/ high risk behaviours.

make mistakes but with few alternatives to fall back on, it is necessary that discretion is applied in considering tenancy breakdown and a presumption of intentionality is not automatically assumed. Alternative accommodation options such as emergency respite or return accommodation within a care continuum/accommodation framework will prevent young people entering the homelessness route.

Recent years have seen an increase in the numbers of young people making a **late entry into care**. Vulnerable 16 or 17 year olds presenting as homeless may become “looked after” if it is not in their best interests to return to family. As for all separated young people they need to have access to independent advice and advocacy to ensure they understand and consider all their options and receive the package of support that best meets their needs. The associated guidance¹⁴ should be monitored to review its effectiveness.



1.3 Support care leavers to maintain long term housing stability

As a group, care leavers experience multiple disadvantages and need to have established supports in place and be afforded exemptions, mitigations and discretion to help them to achieve and maintain housing stability and general wellbeing after leaving care. For example welfare reform presents particular challenges for care leavers therefore corporate parents must ensure that exemptions and mitigations are applied and independent expert advice is provided.

Care leavers in England are three times more likely to have had a benefit sanction applied than compared to the general working age population¹⁵



Supportive networks tend to contract (Munro et al., 2012) when young people move into the community, making them very reliant on their corporate parent family but also **susceptible to isolation**. It is important that future support needs are considered early in the care and pathway planning processes and then prioritised throughout.

Valuable support networks for care leavers are those based on the development of trusted relationships and positive attachments. These include positive family connections, former foster carers, children’s home staff, personal advisors and social workers but there are **limitations on professional support** due to workloads and obligations to young people “coming behind”. Care leavers also place value on befriending and mentoring services.

Formalising and resourcing former foster carer support as well as extending access to mentoring, befriending services and aftercare activities up to age 25 would help facilitate meaningful support for young people.

¹⁴ The REGIONAL GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE (2014) details how the Health and Social Care Trusts and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will work together in a co-ordinated way to ensure that vulnerable young people aged 16-21 receive a joined up service and that their housing and support needs are assessed and responded to appropriately.

¹⁵ The Costs of being Care free; The Children’s Society 2016.

“It’s important to have someone to call and see me. Project workers and social workers don’t have enough time. They have other young people coming behind us” (Female, 19)

Floating support services are particularly helpful for young people leaving care. However for a young person with complex needs¹⁶, extending their time in care to prepare them for greater levels of independence is arguably a better approach than moving into the community too early. Later on, floating support can help to maintain independent tenancies.

To ensure young people can benefit most from floating support services, discretion should be applied in extending time limits and in supporting transitional arrangements such as co-working arrangements when young people are moving from one service to another.

Local councils also have a critical role to play in integrating care leavers into communities. When young people leave care, many move into areas they are unfamiliar with. Local councils operating in partnership with key statutory, voluntary and community agencies can create strategies to help care leavers feel that they belong within their communities.

¹⁶ Including young people who fall below the thresholds of adult services for mental health and intellectual disability services but continue to have complex needs.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Encourage, enable and empower all young people to remain in positive care settings until they are ready to leave.

Actions:

- Apply a wide ranging and flexible approach for extended care across all placement types and where applicable review criteria to ensure full and inclusive access for all young people who would benefit.
- Place the GEM scheme on a statutory footing to ensure its long term sustainability and investment.
- Increase crisis accommodation and create respite and return accommodation options within and across the care continuum accommodation framework.
- Before young people move on from care, ensure they have an assessment of their readiness to leave care and they have been given advice and guided support to help them understand the reality of their housing options.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Ensure that all care leavers have access to a range and choice of appropriate accommodation, housing and support based on their unique needs and circumstances.

Actions:

- Review and address accommodation options for care leavers with disabilities and those exiting from justice and mental health facilities.
- Develop specialised transitional accommodation and support options for young people with high risk/complex needs as part of a comprehensive systemic response to the needs of this group across all relevant departments.
- Review housing policy and practice around allocation and homelessness with explicit recognition of the vulnerability of care leavers.
- Ensure all young people at risk of homelessness have access to independent advice and advocacy as standard.
- Develop robust mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of local joint working arrangements developed under the Regional Good Practice Guidance to meet the needs of young people at risk of homelessness.

Support care leavers to maintain long term housing stability.

Actions:

- Ensure that Health and Social Care Trusts prioritise the future support needs of young people early and throughout the care and pathway planning process and where necessary, resource appropriately.
- Apply discretion within Floating Support services for vulnerable young people to include the provision of transitional supportive arrangements, and to extend service delivery as required to a minimum of age 25.
- Develop protocols with key statutory, voluntary and community agencies in each district council area to support care leavers within communities.
- Ensure current and pending welfare reforms take cognisance of the distinct needs of care leavers and that this group is prioritised within support structures and mitigation packages.



2. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Care leavers are more likely than the general population to be 'not in education employment or training' (NEET). For care leavers, improving their education attainment is an important pre-cursor for future employment, general well-being and social inclusion.



Significant efforts have been made in recent years to establish initiatives and protocols that support and maintain care experienced young people in education, training and employment, however challenges remain for corporate parents.

Raising further awareness of the barriers faced by care leavers as well as the role of corporate parenting will help to strengthen care leaver's position within the education system and beyond. Commissioners and departments with responsibility for providing training and employment support services to their corporate children must facilitate them to maximise all available support and take up of entitlements.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Children (NI) Order 1995 places a requirement on HSC Trusts to advise, assist and befriend young people when they leave care. The Children (Leaving Care) (NI) Act 2002 strengthened leaving care provisions to include pathway planning to provide for continuity of support to a young person leaving care.

Standards for Leaving Care Services Northern Ireland (DHSSPS) 2012 sets out the minimum requirements for leaving care services. Trusts must evidence that young people are being offered a variety of training, employment, prevocational and volunteering opportunities to meet their needs. HSC Trusts are required to evidence protocols between the Trust and a range of agencies to ensure equal access to training and employment.

Regional Guidance on Arrangements to Support Young People to Engage in Education Training or Employment (2009) introduced components dedicated to improving education, training and long term employment opportunities for care leavers. It also set out partnership agreements with Careers Service between what was previously the Department for Employment and Learning and HSC Trusts.

Personal Education Plans (PEP) are an ongoing written record of a child or young person's school progress. PEPs were introduced in 2011 for children in care to plan and support their education and learning.

Cross departmental and interagency working groups have been convened and facilitated primarily by the HSCB to develop protocols and guidance to support care experienced young people's pathways into education, training and employment.

2.1

Increase understanding of and respond to educational barriers faced by care experienced young people.

Being in care is not in itself detrimental to educational outcomes but children do not appear to benefit academically from being in care (O'Higgins et al., 2015). From an education attainment perspective they are **out-performed by their non-care experienced peers**. Despite a steady increase in the number of care experienced children and young people achieving five GCSEs or more, a discrepancy remains with the general population.

In Northern Ireland, initiatives to support young people in education include Fostering Achievement, the Tick the Box campaign¹⁷ and PEPs.

A **PEP** should be completed for every looked after child. A third (34%) of care leavers aged 16-18 in 2015/16 had a completed PEP and of those, only 34 per cent had a review of their education plan during the previous 12 months (DoH, 2017).¹⁸

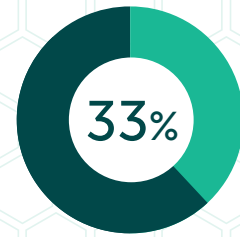
Reasons for care experienced children and young peoples' **poorer levels of achievement** may include coping with trauma and emotional difficulties; lower levels of attendance; or difficulty maintaining school placements. In addition,

higher proportions of care experienced young people have a disability, including those deemed to have mild to moderate levels of intellectual disability.

Advocates for **care leavers who have been in special education** suggest that increasing the expectations and aspirations for these young people is vital otherwise they are more likely to leave school with no qualifications and subsequently much less likely to access employment or participate in meaningful further education.¹⁹

The last placement or current accommodation of a young person appears to have a significant effect on attainment of educational qualifications - for example, 82 per cent of care leavers who were previously in foster care placements achieved GCSEs or other qualifications, compared to a third (34%) of those in residential care (DoH, 2017).

Improved educational outcomes for care experienced young people could be assisted by **raising awareness and delivering training** within and across the education system on the role of corporate parenting and on the impact that being in care can have on young people's educational outcomes.



In 2015/16 a third of all care leavers (33%) left care with no qualifications, compared with 1% of general school leavers. 21% left care with 5 GCSEs (grades A*-C) or higher, compared with four fifths (81%) of general school leavers.

(Source: DoH, 2017)



15% of care leavers were disabled compared to the general population (6%). A disproportionate number of care leavers have specific educational needs; 1:5 (20%) had a statement of special educational need. Within the general school population 5% had a statement of special educational need.

(Source: DoH, 2017)

¹⁷ Fostering Achievement Scheme works with foster carers and primary educators to provide bespoke educational support and resources to looked after children in foster care; Tick the Box encourages young people who have spent time in care to Tick the Box on their UCAS Form to unlock extra support while attending university or further education.

¹⁸ see DoH, 2017

¹⁹ Barnardo's Disabled Children and Young People's Participation Project.

2.2

Recognise and respond to unique needs of care experienced young people within educational, training and employability programmes.

School education and mainstream educational provision is most desirable for looked after children and young people (Stein, 2012). However formal training or college settings are not always the most appropriate learning environments for some young people who have experienced chaotic lives. They may struggle with group learning and confidence, have poorer social and people management skills and may be contending with a variety of complex issues whilst undertaking training, education or employment.

Needs led, person centred solutions within enabling learning environments require extending and expanding opportunities and support available, for example:

- Expanding the provision of educational support to age 25.
- Provision of transitional²⁰ support to care leavers within relevant employability and training programmes and in mainstream education.
- Extending training credits for care experienced young people to 3 years.
- Retaining Essential Skills Level Two training within Pathways and supportive employability programmes.

"Special education and training programmes are very important to young people who have struggled in mainstream - not all young people can cope with exams so essential skills is important but not all young people can cope with college settings"
(Young Person, 24)

It is important that **careers advice** reflects young peoples' pathway plans and when needed, provides up to date information on the equivalency of all levels of essential skills qualifications in order to pave the way for further education or employment.

Standards for Leaving Care (2012) stipulates that HSC Trusts must evidence the protocols they have in place to **ensure equal access** for all young people to appropriate training and employment opportunities. Indeed, each Trust has a dedicated employability service with the purpose of creating a culture and infrastructure that offers a range of opportunities for care leavers.

Current and on-going work being undertaken by the Trusts includes providing ring-fenced placements; training and employment within the Trusts; and progression in work on social clauses in procurement and apprenticeships.

In the **voluntary and business communities**, a number of agencies provide pre-vocational and employment programmes²¹ that support care leavers. These include schemes²² which seek to improve connections and opportunities for care leavers within the business community.

As corporate parents, government departments are also in a unique position to follow the lead of Trusts in offering training and employment opportunities to care leavers. Within the **guidance on apprenticeships**, care leavers need to be included as a vulnerable group requiring additional support and discretion.

²⁰ For example transitional support, (delivered by Include Youth as part of its Give And Take prevocational employability scheme), supports young people on a needs led basis before, during and after transition from alternative education programmes into mainstream education training or employment. Young people engage on a voluntary basis.

²¹ For example: Prince's Trust; Include Youth (Give and Take); Start 360.

²² "Aiming Higher" is a partnership project between Include Youth with Business in the Community, matching young people with experience of care with business mentors. Advocates note that there is not always a guarantee that HSC Trusts will make up the short fall.

2.3

Corporate parents collaborate to reduce financial barriers and obstacles to engaging in and sustaining pathways into employment.

All care experienced young people – and particularly the more vulnerable care leavers – face greater challenges and barriers to **entering and sustaining employment**, one of these being delayed pathways to education.


Financial stability is always an issue for care leavers, especially when they are trying to catch up on or maintain training, education, apprenticeships or employment on top of running independent households. Either singularly, or in combination, clothing, travel, housing or childcare costs could prevent a young people from completing a programme.

Lost educational opportunities may have resulted in care leavers not achieving at secondary level education. Access to Income

Support and Housing Benefit (Universal Credit) up to age 25 would ensure that care leavers who have missed out can complete their education.

To **maximise access to support and financial entitlements**, identifying care experienced young people in Jobs and Benefits agencies would be helpful. Measures should be taken to address concerns that young people may have about stigma and labelling. Sharing of personal data must be with informed consent and comply with data protection requirements.

Corporate parents have a responsibility to **channel financial support or to top up benefits** to help young people to maintain financial and housing stability whilst engaging in apprenticeships, training programmes or commencing employment. It is a matter of fact that young people with additional needs require additional resources to support them into adulthood. However any initial outlay, as any good parent might invest in their children, will be outweighed not only in terms of economic benefits in the longer term but also in terms of social justice (Simmons & Thomson, 2016).



It is a matter of fact that young people with additional needs require additional resources to support them into adulthood.

An example of support would be a **dedicated governmental funding stream** for organisations delivering alternative ETE programmes to care leavers to draw down discretionary financial help (for example with childcare costs/ clothing for work) which would help young people experiencing financial hardship to continue training and or secure employment.

Benefits and allowances should not be reduced or sanctioned for care leavers who are trying to find the pathways into employment that are appropriate for them. This creates unnecessary hurdles and financial disincentives for young people who may have experienced seriously disrupted journeys from childhood and through care. If we are serious about supporting young people to navigate the twists and turns into employment, steps must be taken to **infuse flexibility into the systems** and make sure young people are not worse off financially for trying²³. Mandating young people onto Steps to Success prevents them from participating in or completing person centred programmes that would best meet their needs. Such policies must be reviewed.

²³ Care experienced young people over 18 in receipt of Job seekers allowance would receive substantially less on a training programme (e.g. Training For Success). Advocates note that there is not always a guarantee that HSC Trusts will make up the shortfall. Young people who are mandated to attend "Steps to Success" cannot be offered a training credit for Training for Success as there is no mechanism available to release them from Step to Success unless they find employment.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Increase understanding of and response to educational barriers faced by care leavers.

Actions:

- Review and address the educational support needs of care leavers who typically struggle when progressing through education, training or employment - in particular those in special education, those in residential care and those who are living independently.
- Research the reasons and impact of suspension and expulsion from school of children and young people in care.
- Monitor and report on the implementation and impact of PEPs and the effectiveness of the guidance for practitioners who have to plan and implement them.
- Develop and deliver corporate parenting training across all professionals working in schools/colleges to understand the experiences of young people within the care system and the impact that being in care can have on their educational pathways and opportunities.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Recognise and respond to unique needs of care experienced young people within educational, training and employability programmes.

Actions:

- Expand provision of educational support to age 25.
- Provide transitional support to care leavers within relevant employability and training programmes, and in mainstream education.
- Extend training credits for care experienced young people to 3 years.
- Retain Essential Skills Level Two training within Pathways and supportive employability programmes.
- Ensure that all young people have access to comprehensive and holistic careers advice that reflects their care and pathway plan and includes up to date accurate advice on essential skills equivalency, where relevant.
- All Government departments to offer opportunities to care leavers for employment, training and apprenticeships.
- In Guidance on apprenticeships - ensure care leavers are included in groups requiring additional support and discretion, and fully fund care leavers for the duration of the apprenticeship.

Reduce financial barriers and obstacles to engaging in and sustaining pathways into employment.

Actions:

- With the informed consent of care leavers, promote and implement the identification of care leaver status in Job Centres, Social Security Agency, Careers and Further and Higher educational facilities in order to maximize support and financial entitlements.
- Target financial support or top up benefits to support young people to maintain financial and housing stability whilst engaging in apprenticeships and training programmes or commencing employment.
- Extend the provisions of income support and housing benefit (Universal Credit) for any care leaver up to age 25, seeking to complete secondary level education.
- Ensure sanctions are not applied or benefits reduced if a care leaver changes direction in pathways towards employment (such as enrolling in Training for Success or Further Education).
- Provision of a dedicated governmental funding stream for organisations delivering alternative ETE programmes to care leavers, particularly those not yet ready to engage with mainstream providers, to draw down discretionary financial help for care experienced young people in need and hardship to enable their continued engagement in training and employment.



3. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Due to early adverse experiences, many care experienced young people are at risk of developmental, emotional and physical health problems (McSherry et al., 2015). At the time of leaving care, it is not unusual for the physical and mental health problems of young people to increase (Stein, 2012).



Health and wellbeing are intertwined and often reflect how young people are managing other aspects of their lives. The fact remains care leavers have to navigate multiple changes and systems at one of the most challenging periods of their lives (Wade, 2014).

The period marking the transition from care therefore is a clearly evidenced time of vulnerability.

POLICY CONTEXT

Health and wellbeing of young people in and leaving care is provided for in the provisions of the Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Children (Leaving Care) (NI) Act 2002 which include pathway planning to provide for continuity of support to a young person leaving care.

The Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (Northern Ireland) (2006) called for the reform and modernisation of services for those with mental health needs or learning disabilities, and their families. The Bamford Action plan (2012 - 15) identified that the mental health needs of vulnerable children and young people in Northern Ireland should be targeted, including the care experienced who have a 'disproportionate need' for CAMHS support.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy "Delivering Together" published by DoH in 2016 references the health needs of looked after children and young people and acknowledges the interlocking nature of good health and wellbeing across life domains and the need to extend support to aid care leavers in independent living.

The CYPSP LAC 16+ group broadly addresses the health and wellbeing needs of care experienced children and young people within its action plan 2014 -17.

3.1

Expand services and support to meet and promote the health and wellbeing of all care experienced young people to age 25.

At the point when services need to be particularly proactive at supporting and helping young people to manage and resolve a multiplicity of issues, including retaining or gaining access to health services, **once the young person turns 18** and becomes an adult, many services²⁴ will cease or change despite his or her on-going vulnerabilities.

Young people themselves **may struggle to engage with services**. In part, and particularly for the more vulnerable young adults²⁵, barriers such as poor confidence, stigma related anxieties, chaotic disorganised lives or simply accessibility can prevent them engaging with even general health provision such as GPs and dentists, let alone more specialist provisions such as mental health or sexual/ reproductive health services. Young people in foster care and rural communities may not have the same access to some of the information and support services they need.

With little awareness of the unique needs of care leavers, adult services may discharge patients for non-attendance. Amongst **the more vulnerable young people within the care leaver population** are inter-alia those who have been sexually exploited, belong to the LGBT community, are unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) or former separated young people, young parents, and disabled young people. Each of these specific groups of care leavers face additional challenges (Stein, 2012).

For example, **disabled care leavers** were noted to have low levels of engagement with and access to disability and mental health services (Kelly et al., 2016).

UASC face very real fears about what will happen to them next if upon approaching their eighteenth birthday their immigration status remains undetermined. A number of different legal scenarios can arise for these young people including situations where some UASC care leavers have no access to social housing, welfare benefits or employment. The uncertainty of their situation can be exacerbated many times over if they been trafficked, exploited or have arrived in the UK seeking protection from war and violence. They are also likely to experience language, cultural barriers and racism. Separation from their family members in addition to the experience of trauma will have had a major impact on their mental health and general well-being.

Care experienced young people are also more likely to become **young parents** (Stein, 2012). Of Northern Ireland's care leavers, 11 per cent were parents with just under a third being lone parents (DoH, 2017). For many, being a parent is a positive experience. For others however it can bring a number of difficulties and sometimes their own care histories and experiences can create a barrier to seeking the available help²⁶ that new parents need.

Care leavers who experience **discrimination, stigma** such as within the LGBT community (Stein, 2012) and those who have suffered **sexual exploitation** (for whom specific services end at age 18) may find it harder to come forward for or accept support for services particularly relating to sexual health.

²⁴ For example: CSE, LAC Therapeutic, CAMHS, residential care.

²⁵ Such as young parents, UASC, transient young people, LGBT young people, those vulnerable to sexual exploitation and those with intellectual or mental health difficulties.

²⁶ For example Family Nurse Partnership.



Of Northern Ireland's care leavers, **11%** were parents with just under a third being lone parents.

(Source: DoH, 2017)

The **CYPSP LAC 16+ group** identifies the health and wellbeing needs of looked after children within its action plan (CYPSP, 2016). An additional objective would be to include holistic responses to target the explicit health and wellbeing needs of young people after they leave care and up to the age of 25, with a focus on the needs of the hardest to reach and more vulnerable.

The availability of a **LAC nurse service** for children in care is an example of a service that could be extended and modified to promote the health of care leavers. This would be a resource to leaving and after care teams, carers, providers and young people themselves, again explicitly targeting the needs of the more vulnerable groups who struggle to engage.

3.2

Promote and improve effective services to address care leavers' mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Young people in care have a **higher prevalence of mental health problems** than the general population. Around three quarters of the looked after population across the UK have mental health problems either approaching or in the clinically significant bracket (Wade, 2014).

Although **waiting times** can be lengthy, care experienced children and young people are prioritised for CAMHS in Northern Ireland (McSherry et al., 2015). LAC therapeutic services specifically aimed at supporting care placements are available in each of the HSC Trusts.

Early adulthood is very much a time of mental health vulnerability with risk taking behaviour - including self-harm and diagnoses of emotional problems - on the increase and showing no sign of dissipating (McSherry et al., 2015). Despite this both therapeutic and CAMH services end at age eighteen.

An overriding concern for care leaver advocates and practitioners is that **CAMHS is significantly different to Adult Mental Health (AMH) services**. CAMHS offers a diverse range of services while AMH services are focused on addressing patients who are experiencing severe and enduring mental illness. Not all young people experiencing emotional health and wellbeing issues have a diagnosable mental health illness that will meet the thresholds for AMH services, but many require a continuing service.

Recommendations to **extend the upper age limit of CAMHS** for care leavers have come from several quarters (NCAS, 2012; McSherry et al., 2015). There is support for extended CAMHS or an alternative service for 17- 25 year olds to address the gaps between CAMHS and adult mental health services. Such models do exist - for example CAMHS operates to age 25 in the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation, and one HSC Trust in Northern Ireland has a mental health worker within the 16 plus service (McSherry et al., 2015).

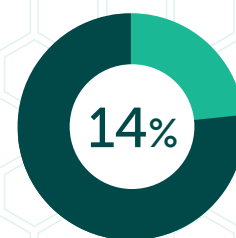
When adult mental health is the correct pathway for young people, the **transition from CAMHS to AMHS** has been long identified as a concern (Leavy & McGrellis, 2014)²⁷. A high degree of flexibility and person centred planning is required to manage the transfer (Coppens et al., 2015).

A frequent call from staff and carers is to take action through **early mental health intervention** when emotional and behavioural problems first emerge, in order to avoid escalation. These concerns led Barnardo's NI and the NSPCC (2016) to recommend in their Children's Charter that mental health be assessed on entry into care and monitored throughout. This is particularly important at times of transition. These calls resonate with research recommendations that emphasise the need for investment in early intervention services aimed at enhancing the mental health of care leavers (Kelly et al., 2014). Consistently, there is concern relating to the needs of care leavers engaging in substance misuse and those presenting with a combination of both substance misuse and mental health problems. Young peoples' mental health needs cannot be assessed whilst they are in substance misuse crisis.

Perceived **gaps in substance misuse service provision** includes a need for more flexible out-reach; crisis and out of hours support to both young people and those caring for them; arrangements for young people presenting with co-existing mental health and substance misuse problems; and detox facilities.

Specialist service models such as DAMHS²⁸ (available in two of the five HSC Trust areas) address the underlying mental health of young people misusing substances but currently extend only to age eighteen. These types of services could be developed and expanded to reflect the needs of this small but significant group of care leavers, whose substance misuse may relate to underlying trauma.

Specialised service provision also needs to be **matched with increasing staff and carer knowledge**. Training in attachment, trauma, mental health and self-harm should be delivered and continuously updated in settings providing services to care leavers including foster care, joint commissioned services, floating support, supported lodgings and hostels.



Mental health concerns were reported in relation to **212** (14%) care leavers.



There were **137** new referrals of young people to mental health services during the year.



94 young people were receiving treatment for self-harming.

(Source: HSCB, 2016)

²⁷ Leavey & McGrellis note that 'some young people are lost to services or struggling to move between services; the needs of others notably particularly those learning disabilities, neurodevelopmental disorders (ASD, ADHD) are not catered for within adult mental health'.

²⁸ Drug and Alcohol Mental Health Services within CAMHS.

3.3

Corporate parents take steps to reduce isolation once young people leave care.

“[Leaving care] can be very isolating...having someone to do things with is very important, having groups for care leavers to meet and do activities” (Young person 19)

Isolation is both a concern and a reality for many vulnerable care leavers post care.

Managing **single households on limited finances** brings its own difficulties and exclusions but certain groups of care leavers may be more vulnerable, including the disabled,²⁹ young parents, separated young people, transient young people, those leaving criminal justice or mental health facilities and young people emerging from episodes of serious substance misuse.

These young people report an **increase in social isolation and loneliness**. They have disengaged from friendship groups where substance misuse is common, leaving them more vulnerable and less likely to abstain for significant periods of time. Similar exposure to isolation is true for other vulnerable groups of care leavers. The absence of consistent supportive adult contact is often sorely felt.

Corporate parents have a responsibility to take all necessary actions to support care leavers' sense of inclusion and positive wellbeing. Serious consideration

must be afforded to extending and expanding availability of **befriending, mentoring, peer support and aftercare activities** until at least aged 25 to enable young people build and sustain natural supports.

The responsibility of HSC Trusts to **retain contact with young people post care** is vital. Even if they are not using leaving and aftercare services this will ensure young people know they can access support if and when they need it.

As noted earlier in this report **local councils** have a place in supporting the integration and wellbeing of care leavers within their communities, and could further support care leaver's wellbeing by offering free or reduced cost to leisure facilities.

The **impact of welfare reform** on the mental health of young people has been significant, with reports of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts increasing as a result of reassessments. As previously noted, prioritising care leavers for expert independent advice is very important.



²⁹ Diagnosed cognitive, physical or sensory impairment (incl. ASD and mental illness) & those awaiting or receiving disability/ mental health services but undiagnosed (Kelly et al., 2016).



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Expand services and support to meet and promote the health and wellbeing of all care experienced young people to age 25.

Actions:

- Provide an appropriate dedicated service such as extension of LAC nurse service or similar within 16 plus services to promote the health needs of care leavers up to age 25.
- Engage service planning mechanisms such as the CYPSP to specifically address meeting the health needs of care leavers up to age 25, particularly those with additional vulnerabilities and those at risk of being excluded or disengaging from health services³⁰.
- Ensure all care leavers, particularly the more vulnerable³¹, have access and support to engage with sexual health and information services.

³⁰ This would include groups needing additional support (for example, care leavers in transient living arrangements, UASC, LGBT, BME, those with mental health/ intellectual difficulties, (including young people who do not meet thresholds for adult services) and young parents particularly lone parents).

³¹ *ibid*

Promote and improve effective services to address care leavers' mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Actions:

- Ensure looked after children receive quality mental health assessment on entry into care, have their mental health monitored throughout care and receive early intervention when problems first emerge.
- Extend CAMHS or provide alternative specialist emotional health and wellbeing provision for care leavers to age 25 to address the gap between children and adult mental health.
- Ensure that, where transitions to AMHS are appropriate, they take place when young people are experiencing a period of mental health stability, do not coincide with periods of other transitions as in accommodation, education or training, and include flexibility for co-working arrangements for the period of transition³².
- Develop and refresh staff and carer knowledge such as attachment, trauma, and mental health first aid in settings that provide services and accommodation to care leavers
- Increase and expand the range of the substance misuse services to care leavers up to age 25 to include outreach provision, out of hours crisis and carer support and specialist facilities such as safe beds or detox provision.

Corporate parents take steps to reduce isolation once young people leave care.

Actions:

- Expand and extend befriending, mentoring and peer support programmes to care leavers more vulnerable to social isolation up to age 25.
- HSC Trusts retain proactive contact with all care leavers up to age 25 and make sure leavers are aware they can access support when they need it.
- Local councils consider the provision of free or reduced cost access to leisure facilities and events for care experienced young people.

³² see Coppens et al., 2015.



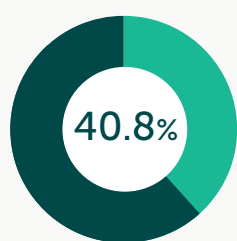
4. YOUTH AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

There continues to be a disproportionate number of care experienced children and young people within Northern Ireland's youth justice system and over representation of this population detained in custody.

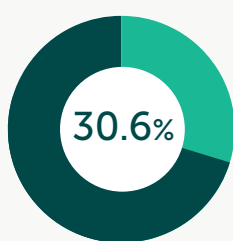
Care experienced children and young people often enter the criminal justice system as a result of their vulnerable backgrounds but also due to being a looked after child. Children living in care homes are more likely to be referred to the police for committing even minor offences that ordinarily would not have reached the criminal justice system if they were living in their own homes.

The over representation of children and young people with complex needs within the justice system was noted by Graham et al. (2011) (hereafter the Youth Justice Review). More recently, the Kelly et al. (2016) study of care leavers with mental health and intellectual difficulties found that over a third (40.8%) of their sample had received a police caution and nearly a third (30.6%) had received a conviction.

CARE LEAVERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTIES



had received a police caution



had received a conviction

(Source: Kelly et al., 2016)

POLICY CONTEXT

From a youth justice perspective aside from the provisions contained within the Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Children (Leaving Care) (NI) Act 2002 other relevant legislation and developments include:

- The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order (1989) (PACE) - the PSNI can refuse bail to a young person on the basis that they should be detained in their own interests, in a 'place of safety', which includes Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC).
- The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 amended the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 to reflect the best interests principle of Article 3 of the UNCRC.
- The Youth Justice Review (2011) assessed the arrangements for responding to youth crime and identified care experienced children and young people as being a group who are more likely to be caught up in the youth justice system than other young people.
- The Northern Ireland Law Commission (NILC) recommended that Article 39(1) (b) of PACE should be replaced and new bail legislation should be introduced including a requirement that bail must not be refused on the sole grounds that the child does not have any adequate accommodation. These reforms have yet to be taken forward. In 2015 the Criminal Justice Inspector for Northern Ireland (CJINI) reported that 41 per cent of the accepted recommendations of the Youth Justice Review had not been achieved.

4.1

Reduce the number of care experienced young people in the justice system.

I never got convictions [un]til I went into care ... I got 66 convictions in 2 years... wouldn't have been in here [prison] only I was in care. ...There should definitely be [a] different way to deal with it than phoning the police."

(Young person)

Reflecting on the **disproportionate number of care experienced children and young people within the youth justice system**, the Youth Justice Review (2011) highlighted the difficulties faced in managing this group of young people. The review concluded that the higher levels of custodial admissions of looked after children was largely due to how residential care homes managed children and young people in their care and recommended that there was a need to equip and support staff to deal with incidents, including the use of restorative approaches. The review also recommended that:

- an appropriate range of accommodation be developed for children currently being detained under PACE
- the use of PACE be reduced to an absolute minimum and
- care experienced children should no longer be placed in custody where this would not have been the outcome for children in the general population.

Under PACE, the PSNI can refuse a young person bail and detain them in Woodlands JJC if it is deemed to be in their best interests. This means that due to a lack of appropriate alternative accommodation, **PACE disproportionately affects care experienced children and young people.**



Over the past 5 years in Northern Ireland between
27% - 36%
of young people in custody were looked after children.

(Youth Justice Agency, 2016)

During the period 1st April 2015 and 31 March 2016, one hundred and thirty-three care leavers aged 16 or over were cautioned:

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 89 | 180 |
| were remanded | were convicted |



(Source: HSCB, 2016)

From October 2014 until September 2015, LAC children represented 40% of individual young people admitted under PACE (Children's Law Centre & Include Youth, 2016).

Guidance on responding to the **accommodation needs of homeless vulnerable** young people was agreed between the key agencies³³ and includes action to be taken in respect of 16 and 17 year olds who are care experienced and in the youth justice system.

Less positive and concerning developments include the withdrawal of funding for initiatives addressing the specific needs of care experienced children and young people within the youth justice system, for example, the Restorative Practice Service³⁴ and the removal of the Criminal Justice Officer who had provided a direct interface between DoJ and DoH and was responsible for monitoring all admissions to Woodlands JJC.

Going forward, the implementation of the recommendations made by the Northern Ireland Law Commission and the Youth Justice Review will improve the situation for care experienced children and young people. As recommended by Youth Justice Review³⁵, the DoH is well placed to take the lead on developing better assessment mechanisms alongside more specialised interventions for those groups over-represented in the youth justice system.³⁶ Furthermore, in line with this report's overarching recommendations, data collection on care experienced young people's contact with the criminal justice system has to be improved between departments.

4.2 Reduce barriers to young people's access into employment.

It is widely recognised that a clear link exists between rehabilitation and reintegration on the one hand and the disclosure of criminal record information on the other.

Providing people who have previously offended with **stable employment** is one of the most effective ways to prevent re-offending. However the requirement to inform potential employers of the person's youth offending history acts as a barrier to accessing any form of employment.

Such barriers can only serve to further **alienate rather than integrate** young people who are already socially excluded.

Diversionary disposals should not be carried forward into adulthood. Since 2014, filtering and review arrangements³⁷ have been introduced and allow for the removal of (one) old or minor offence from an Access NI disclosure certificate in defined circumstances. Whilst positive, young people will still carry forward into adulthood diversionary disposals if they have several offences. Advocates report confusion around these processes and concerns about the impact on young people, particularly those who are more highly represented in the youth justice system, like care leavers and young people with complex needs (Carr et al., 2015).

³³ Regional Good Practice Guidelines on Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of 16-21 year olds.

³⁴ In 2015 Barnardo's NI Restorative Practice Service reported 22 of Northern Ireland's children's homes were comprehensively engaged in using restorative approaches within residential childcare. Training and implementation had commenced with six units in the Juvenile Justice Centre, when joint funding for this service was withdrawn in 2015.

³⁵ Youth Justice Review 2011 Recommendation 22.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ The independent Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme was introduced on 1st March 2016.

4.3

Prioritise the rehabilitation and re integration of care leavers leaving custody.

As noted by the Youth Justice Review many young people in the youth justice system are over 18 by the time their order or sentence is finished and will have gone on to be supervised by adult services. The Youth Justice Review highlighted the difficulties faced by **young people transitioning into adult services** when they turn 18.

“...the same problems apply in respect of young adults and require similar attention, but the level and type of support that is offered to a 17 year old as a ‘child’ is very different to that provided for those who are 18 and understood to be adults. It is important, therefore, that children’s services, including youth justice services, ensure a proper handover to adult services before withdrawing their support (p.81)³⁸.

In the earlier section on housing and accommodation, one of the major concerns was around the support given to care leavers aged 16 to 25. This is particularly pertinent when they have been involved with the criminal justice system.

Putting systems in place to identify care leavers (with informed consent) when they enter the criminal justice system up to at least the age of 25 will help to ensure that care leavers can **access all the available supports** they are both entitled to and could benefit from.

Prioritising and encouraging care leavers to avail of available supports before and after they are released from custody are actions that are likely to enhance their chances of employability. Examples of support and preparation include specialist education, training and pre-employability programmes.

Adjust³⁹ is one example of an evidenced based programme which provides a comprehensive support service engaging young people whilst in custody to produce realistic plans for release.

Upon release, **obtaining stable accommodation** is a critical first step on the road towards the ultimate goal of reintegration.

³⁸ Youth Justice Review 2011.

³⁹ Venturei Network (2016) reported 86 per cent of young people had not returned to custody.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

Reduce the number of care experienced young people in the justice system.

Actions:

- All agencies (particularly those providing accommodation) interacting with care experienced young people should be resourced and supported to adopt problem solving and restorative approaches.
- DoH should reinstate the role of Criminal Justice Officer to ensure there is an interface between DoJ and DoH with regard to the contact of children and young people with the criminal justice system, and in particular with those detained in custody whether through PACE, remand or sentence.
- Data collection should be improved between departments and their associated agencies with regard to care experienced young people's contact with the criminal justice system.
- The DoH should lead in developing better assessment, inter-agency information exchange and cross referral mechanisms alongside more specialised interventions for those groups over-represented in the youth justice system and in custody⁴⁰.
- An appropriate range of accommodation should be developed for care experienced young people detained under PACE.
- The use of PACE should be reduced to an absolute minimum and care experienced children and young people should no longer be placed in custody where this would not have been the outcome for children in the general population⁴¹.
- As recommended by the Northern Ireland Law Commission (NILC) 2012, Article 39 (1)(b) of PACE should be replaced with new bail legislation to include a requirement that bail must not be refused on the sole ground that the child does not have any, or any adequate, accommodation.

⁴⁰ Youth Justice Review (2011), recommendation 22

⁴¹ Youth Justice Review (2011), Recommendations: 8. 9. 19



Reduce barriers preventing young people from accessing employment.

Actions:

- Review the arrangements pertaining to the Independent Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme (2014) to assess the effectiveness and the impact on particularly more vulnerable young people such as care leavers and those with complex needs.
- Diversionary disposals should not attract a criminal record or be subject to employer disclosure.
- For those few young people about whom there are real concerns and where information should be made available for pre-employment checks in the future, a transparent process for disclosure of information based on a risk assessment that is open to challenge should be established.

Prioritise the rehabilitation and reintegration of care leavers leaving custody.

Actions:

- Identify care leavers (with informed consent) at the start of involvement with the criminal justice system - at least up to age 25 - to ensure they can access and maximise all provisions of support available to them.
- Young people should be prepared for release from the outset; for example, through day release for the purpose of education, training or employment.
- Prioritise, encourage and enable care leavers to access comprehensive support services providing in-custody and post-custody interventions.
- Provide appropriate accommodation and support for care experienced young people leaving the youth and justice systems.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services offered to children/young people up to the age of 18 years who are experiencing significant/complex mental health difficulties such as: suicidal thoughts, self-harming, depression, acute anxiety, eating disorders, trauma, ADHD/Autism.

Care leavers: Young People aged 16 - 21 (or up to 24 if in further or higher education or training) who have been in out-of-home care for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are in care on their 16th birthday.

Care leaver's status is sub divided as follows:

Eligible Child: is aged 16 or 17 and still looked after.

Relevant Child: is aged 16 or 17 and is no longer being looked after but was, before last ceasing to be looked after, an eligible child.

Former Relevant Young Person: is aged 18-21 (or 24 if in further higher education or training) and has been an eligible or relevant child before turning 18.

Qualifying Young Person: under 21 and at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered.

CYPSP: The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) is a multi-agency partnership that includes the leadership of key statutory agencies and community and voluntary organisations that have a responsibility for improving the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

DAMHS: Drug and Alcohol Mental Health Service under the umbrella of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Housing Benefit: Shared Accommodation Rate: The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) limits the amount of Housing Benefit that a single person under the age of 35 can receive to that which is applicable to a shared house. Care leavers are exempt from the SAR up until they are age 22.

Intentional homelessness: Deliberately doing or failing to do anything, the likely result of which is being forced to leave the accommodation which is available for occupation and which it would have been reasonable to continue to occupy.

Jointly commissioned supported accommodation: supported accommodation which is jointly commissioned and funded between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Supporting People programme and Health and Social Care Trusts.

Looked after child: A child in the care of the authority: or provided with accommodation by the authority for a continuous period of more than 24 hours.

REGIONAL GOOD PRACTICE

GUIDANCE (2014) agreed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Health and Social Care Trusts on meeting the accommodation and support needs of 16-21 year olds. The guidance details how the Trusts and the Housing Executive will work together in a co-ordinated way to ensure that vulnerable young people aged 16-21 receive a joined up service and that their housing and support needs are assessed and responded to appropriately.

Standards for Leaving Care Services

Northern Ireland (DHSSPS) 2012: The standards specify the arrangements, services and procedures that need to be in place and implemented to ensure the delivery of quality services for young people leaving care. These standards apply to HSC Trusts and those other agencies commissioned by a Trust to deliver leaving and after care services.

