

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill:

House of Commons Report Stage

Improving support for care leavers

Summary

This briefing provides information about amendments that aim to improve support for care leavers.

Young people who have grown up in foster care or children's homes have, on average, much poorer outcomes than their peers. This Bill offers a unique opportunity to transform their life chances. There are currently over 80,000 children in the care system in England and every year around 13,000 young people leave care.

1. 1 in 3 care leavers become homeless in the first 2 years after they leave care
2. 38% of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment, or training.
3. 57% of care leavers say that managing their money was difficult when leaving care
4. Following the cost-of-living crisis - 82% of care-experienced young people said they were struggling to afford food all or some of the time¹.

There are currently two amendments tabled by MPs for Report Stage that would help improve support for young people when they first leave care. We ask that all members of the House support them:

- **Amendment NC3 would introduce a National Offer for care leavers. This should ensure greater consistency in the support care leavers can access – irrespective of where they live.**
- **Government amendments OPC 18,40,30,41,29,42,43 and 24 would mean that a wider range of state institutions and government bodies share responsibility for addressing the unique challenges faced by care leavers when delivering their services.**

Please consider adding your name to these amendments and speaking in support of transforming care leavers' life chances.

1. Support for Care Leavers in the Bill

On 11 February 2025 four care leavers supported by the charities Barnardo's and BECOME gave evidence to the Education Select Committee and explained how challenging their experience of leaving care had been. You can view their contributions [here](#) which set out clear calls for change.

“[I had] to move overnight in my second year of A levels to this student flat, I didn't know anyone, I didn't know the area, I didn't know the people, then to be told to pay service charge! I wasn't working at the

time...that wasn't my focus I wanted to just study... I wanted to go to university" (Louise, care-experienced young person supported by Barnardo's).

"For the first couple of months, I had to pay £580 per month in rent and when I had to reduce the hours that I worked in order to study for A levels, I could not afford the rent. I remember being on the train to college realising I could not afford it. I started crying. Was this what it was going to be like from now on?" (Lamar, care-experienced young person supported by BECOME)

The Bill as drafted contains some provisions which should improve care leavers' access to housing and reduce the risk of homelessness. This includes the extension of Staying Close to all areas of the country. This scheme, which is currently being piloted in a number of local authorities, provides care leavers with more tailored accommodation support when they first leave care including elements such as providing move-on accommodation and personalised practical and emotional support, often from trusted figures.

However, to significantly improve outcomes we need to widen the support available across many areas, including education, employment and benefits. Failing to provide care leavers with sufficient support results in too many falling through the cracks, facing problems like unemployment, homelessness, poor mental health and involvement with the criminal justice system. It also creates a higher long-term bill for taxpayers. Research estimates that the costs to the state of poor outcomes for care leavers, is around £1,816m¹.

Strengthening provision in the Bill would give care leavers the best possible chance to flourish in early adulthood, whether in education, training or employment – thus setting them up for happier, healthier lives. It would also save the state money in the long term from reductions in terms of social security and other support services.

2. Amendment to Introduce a National Offer of Support for Care Leavers – Amendment NC3 tabled by Helen Hayes MP

This amendment would for the first time introduce an obligation on the Secretary of State to produce this "national offer" of support for care leavers. It would do this by placing minimum standards on local authorities outlining what support care-experienced young people should be offered.



"I feel that a lot of people who are not care-experienced get a lot of help from their parents – their parents will sit down and help them. The government need to realise that care-experienced young people struggle, we don't have the luxury of having family to support us."

Kylie, care-experienced young person

Once enacted there would need to be detailed conversations on what such an offer would include, and the amendment makes provision for consultation with care leavers and others who represent their interests on what it should include. However, we believe that specific areas that could be covered are:

- Free prescriptions,
- Free bus travel
- Help with rent deposits and guarantors
- Access to leisure facilities
- Increasing the benefits that young care leavers can claim when they are out of work specifically by allowing them to claim the over 25 rate of universal credit
- Greater support for care leavers who go to university

To make sure that local authorities have the money to fund a comprehensive offer of support we would also recommend that the Spending Review includes a specific allocation for this purpose. The exact amount needed would depend on the content of the minimum offer, but we recommend allocation of £500m over the three years to help facilitate this¹.

¹ Barnardo's (2025) [Our representation to the 2025 Spending Review | Barnardo's](#)

Further information

To help address the inequities care leavers face, the Children and Social Work Act (2017) requires local authorities to publish local offers of support for care leavers up to age 25 in their area. While this requirement is welcome, there is significant variation in the quality of the package between different local areas. There are pockets of good practice, with some areas working together to provide more comprehensive support than they could do for their area alone. For instance, the Greater Manchester Care Leavers Guarantee is a series of entitlements including free bus travel and council tax exemptions for care leavers². However, evidence still shows a lack of consistency of support across England. Examples of inconsistent support include:

- **Rent guarantor schemes** - a recent Freedom of Information request by NYAS found only 48 local authorities in England will act as a guarantor for a care leaver wishing to access privately rented accommodation³.
- **Council tax exemptions** - while many local authorities provide care leavers with an exemption from council tax around one in five local authorities do not⁴.
- **Free bus travel** - following Barnardo's Transport for Freedom campaign⁵ Manchester, Newcastle, Liverpool, the West of England and Cornwall all provide free or discounted bus travel to care leavers – however this still leaves many areas which don't offer this benefit.

In recent years, successive governments have recognised that central government plays a key role in providing support for care leavers. This has resulted in welcome initiatives such as the establishment of a cross ministerial board which looks specifically at how support for these young people can be improved across government. However, while this has led to some welcome improvements - such as the development of the civil service care leaver internship scheme - there has been a lack of progress in implementing tangible policies which would improve support for care leavers across the country, including in areas such as the benefits that young people can claim when they are out of work.

A report by the Education Select Committee⁶ published on 28 February highlighted how the current system of support for care leavers needed to be improved. It observed that currently care leavers face a confusing patchwork of entitlements when they leave care which is made more complex by the differing offers in each local authority and recommended that, to tackle this, a national offer of support should be introduced⁷.

“National Care Offer

(1) The Secretary of State must, within 18 months of the passing of this Act, publish a document (the “National Care Offer”) which sets out the minimum standards of information that local authorities must publish under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (local offer for care leavers).

(2) Before publishing or revising the National Care Offer, the Secretary of State must consult with persons that appear to the Secretary of State to represent the interests of care leavers.

(3) Where a consultation under subsection (2) results in recommendations to be made to the National Care Offer, the Secretary of State must

(a) make the recommended changes or otherwise implement the recommendations; or

(b) where not intending to make the recommended changes or otherwise implement the recommendations, publish a response to the consultation outlining the reasons for the Secretary of State's decision and the action that will be taken instead.”

² Greater Manchester (2019) [circulated-care-leavers-guarantee-booklet.pdf](#)

³ NYAS (2024) [Housing FOI Briefing - Oct 24](#)

⁴ Children's Society (2023) [Fight for a Fairer Start for Care Leavers | The Children's Society](#)

⁵ Barnardo's (2022) [Transport for Freedom - Barnardo's.pdf](#)

⁶ Education Select Committee (2025) [Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#)

⁷ Education Select Committee (2025) [Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#)

3. Amendment to extend corporate parenting bodies to a greater range of public bodies – Government amendments NC18, NC19, NC20, NC21, NC22 and NS1.

We strongly welcome the decision by the government to table amendments at report stage which will extend corporate parenting responsibilities to a greater range of public bodies. Together the amendments place a legal duty on named public bodies to be alert to the needs of, and barriers faced, by looked-after children and care-leavers under 25, and to take action considered appropriate to improve the poor outcomes they experience. This amendment means public institutions will have a much greater responsibility to work together collaboratively and with local in the interests of children in care and care leavers.

'I'm in Court and my whole life background is coming out, things like how I've been abused in care... they just make it like 'this guy, .. he's just a problem'.. 'get rid of him'...'

– AJ (18) care leaver

Further information

For children in care, and for care leavers up to the age of 25, the local authority takes on the responsibility of a 'corporate parent'. However, to thrive in adulthood, care leavers are reliant on support not just from their local authority, but from a much wider range of public bodies.

Unfortunately, we know that government agencies in areas such as health, housing and the criminal justice system can lack understanding of what it means to be care-experienced and the specific challenges facing this group.⁸ In some cases, professionals working in these institutions have little understanding of the impact of childhood trauma on a young person's reactions or behaviour. For example, a young woman supported by Barnardo's⁹ highlighted how she had become pregnant at the age of 13-years-old from non-consensual sex. She felt there was no support or understanding from the adults around her about how this affected her feelings about the pregnancy and parenthood.

Young people have also told us they are often perceived by professionals as 'adult-like' due to their care status. Evidence shows that Black children (who are overrepresented in care) frequently experience adultification¹⁰ and that Black children who are care-experienced are at higher risk of having their needs and vulnerabilities overlooked¹¹.

These findings were echoed in the 2024 report from the All Party-Parliamentary Group for Care-Experienced Children and Young People on extending corporate parenting principles across the public sector¹².

However, while a crucial step forwards, these amendments need to be more ambitious in their reach if they achieve the cultural change necessary to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. We believe that that following changes are necessary:

- **Make a greater range of public bodies subject to the new duty (amendment NS1).** The new duty applies to quite a limited number of public bodies – primarily central government departments, health and education bodies and the Youth Justice Board. There are several other public bodies whose actions contribute directly to worse outcomes for care-leavers in particular; housing associations, Job Centre Plus and the Police, Courts, Prison and Probation systems (beyond the youth justice estate). Extending corporate parenting responsibilities to these bodies could address many of the poor outcomes children in care and care leavers face for example increased risks of homelessness, higher rates of being not in education, employment or training, and the overrepresentation of care-experience people in the Criminal Justice System.

⁹ Barnardo's (2022) [Care Experienced Parenthood Report.pdf](#)

¹⁰ See for example [GBMH SEND Report v2.indd](#)

¹¹ Barnardo's (2023) [Double Discrimination - Black care-experienced young adults navigating the criminal justice system report.pdf](#)

¹² APPG care-experienced children and young people (2024) [APPG-Corporate-Parenting-Inquiry-Final-Report.pdf](#)

- **Remove the exemption provided for “decision relating to immigration” (NC19).** As currently drafted, the amendment excludes “*any function of the Secretary of State in relation to immigration, asylum or nationality*” from these new provisions. We strongly believe that this exemption should be removed. If this clause goes unamended, this will be the first piece of primary legislation relating to children since at least the UK's ratification of the UNCRC which distinguishes children subject to immigration control as somehow separate to other children –this fails to recognise that all children in the UK, regardless of how or why they are here, deserve to be treated as children first. The numbers in question are considerable, currently about 9% of children in care are unaccompanied asylum seekers¹³, but beyond this group there many hundreds more children in care across the UK who have uncertain immigration status due to being born into an international family¹⁴. These children face considerable challenges when leaving care, including the threat of removal to a country in which they did not grow up. Extending the duty to immigration functions should act as a catalyst to ensure greater collaboration between the Home Office and local authorities helping to achieve quicker decisions over immigration, and more trauma informed practice. This would help ensure all children in care facing uncertainty over their immigration status receive appropriate safeguarding and protection.
- **Provide for greater oversight of implementation (NC22).** To achieve the culture change necessary organisations will need support to adapt their policies and procedures as well as ensure staff working on the ground have the necessary training. However, while the new clause requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on implementation, it does not specifically provide for bodies subject to the new duty to be supported during the implementation process. In addition, as currently drafted, the Bill does not provide a route for a child or young person to complain or appeal if they believe a public body is failing to comply with their obligations. When a similar reform was introduced in Scotland, ‘Who Cares? Scotland’ was given responsibility for working with public bodies to develop implementation plans. We believe the Bill should include a clause to require the Secretary of State to appoint a specific body to provide advice, guidance and support to organisations, as well as investigate complaints of non-compliance. We believe that this role should be given to the Children’s Commissioner for England.

Action you can take

We are asking all MPs to consider adding their support to these amendments and hoping as many as possible will speak in support of this issue when the Bill returns to the Commons at Report stage.

Suggested questions:

- Will the Minister commit to reviewing how to ensure greater consistency in the support that care leavers receive of different local authorities with a particular focus on whether the introduction of a national offer of support – as proposed by Barnardo’s and supported by the Education Select Committee – would be the best way of achieving this?
- Will the Minister review the bodies currently included in amendments aimed at extending corporate parenting principles, so they apply to a greater range of public bodies including housing association, Job Centre Plus and the police, courts, prison and probation systems?
- What plans does the Minister have for ensuring that bodies subject to the new corporate parenting responsibly provisions receive the necessary training, support and advice to ensure the effective implementation of these provisions?

For more information and to discuss this issue further please contact Nicola Smith, Senior Policy Adviser, Barnardo’s at public.affairs@barnardos.org.uk. We would be happy to provide an oral briefing if this would be helpful.

¹³ Department for Education (2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions-reporting-year-2024)

¹⁴ Corum (2022) <https://www.coram.org.uk/news/news-least-one-ten-children-care-non-british-and-faces-uncertain-future-unless-immigration-status/>

About Barnardo's

At Barnardo's, our purpose is clear - changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people, and families are safe, happy, healthy, and hopeful. Last year, we provided essential support to 356,200 children, young people, parents and carers through 760 services and partnerships across the UK. For over 150 years, we've been here for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong. www.barnardos.org.uk