

Item **Note on the Government's new care leavers strategy, 'Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'**

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Purpose **For information**

Introduction

In July 2016, the Government published a new care leavers strategy, [Keep on Caring](#). To support a fundamental shift in the life changes of care leavers, the strategy focuses on three key areas:

- Developing new ways of supporting care leavers
- Making corporate parenting everyone's responsibility
- Driving system improvement

During consultation, care leavers raised five key issues and the strategy aims to make progress against these:

- Preparation and support for independence
- Barriers to accessing education, employment and training
- Lack of stability, safety and security
- Difficulties in accessing health support, particularly emotional health and wellbeing support
- Problems achieving financial stability

Below is a summary of the main points contained within the strategy.

Innovation and system reform

A new round of the DfE Innovation Fund has been announced, totalling £200m, with two priority areas of focus: rethinking children's social care – projects seeking to redesign the organisational systems and practice frameworks that underpin children's social care; and, rethinking transitions to adulthood for young people – projects seeking to develop and test new, more holistic ways of supporting young people making the transition to adulthood. The Innovation Fund will also support the:

- Development and commissioning of care leaver SIBs
- Piloting of 'Staying Close' arrangements
- Expansion of the PAUSE programme to work intensively with young women who have had multiple children taken into care

DfE will review the role of personal adviser (PA) and, via the Innovation Fund, test new approaches of support for care leavers such as: supporting continued relationships with former carers and professionals; mentoring; family-finding approaches (family group conferences to identify adults who are willing to make long-term commitments to support the young person); local area co-ordinators, working with care leavers to access community resources and support. In addition, employers will be encouraged to develop a PA apprenticeship.

The strategy reiterates the Government's promotion of different delivery models and partnerships with the voluntary sector. The strategy refers to city deals as an opportunity to explore different delivery models, e.g. a single care leavers service for Greater Manchester, and the creation of care leavers trusts and public service mutual as a means to increased freedoms and flexibilities.

There is a commitment to introduce 'Staying Close' as per Sir Martin Narey's recommendations and subject to evaluation, increase the number of local authorities adopting the New Belongings approach.

Embedding a culture of corporate parenting

The Children and Social Work Bill will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles applicable to all LAs and all LA services delivered to both children in care and care leavers. As part of the commitment to better support care leavers, support from a PA will be extended to all care leavers up to the age of 25. A voluntary care covenant will also be introduced allowing organisations to set out their commitments to care leavers. The Bill introduces a requirement for LAs to consult on and publish a local offer for care leavers, setting out their legal entitlements, the LAs policy on staying put and other non-statutory services specifically provided for care leavers.

Funding available to cover the training costs of apprentices aged 19-23 who are care leavers will be extended to all care leavers up to age 25.

New data is being collected which will provide a better understanding of the career progression of care leavers. For the first time, data is being collected on 17 and 18 year old care leavers (this will be available in October 2016). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has also included a care leaver identifier as part of HESA student record, this

will support better analysis, research and evaluation of care leavers who attend higher education.

To better support those who are unemployed, the Youth Obligation will be introduced from April 2017:

- From day 1 of their claim, 18-21 year olds will be required to take part in a three week 'Intensive Activity Period'
- If, after 6 months, they are not in work, on an apprenticeship or in work related training, they will be required to go on a mandatory work placement

The implementation of Staying Put will continue to be funded over the life of this Parliament and the £22m provided to LAs in 2016/17 will be used as the baseline for future funding. In the first year, 48% of eligible care leavers were still living with former foster carers three months after their 18th birthday.

The Ministry of Justice has established a National Care Leavers Forum within the National Offender Management Service. The Forum is exploring ways of ensuring local authorities are notified when a care leaver is moved to a different prison; and are notified in advance when a care leaver is released from prison, so they have time to put in place support available upon release. In addition, the Forum will explore ways in which direct work can take place with care leavers in prison to develop strategies to support them when they leave prison or probation services.

A national transfer scheme for UASC has recently been introduced and later this year, DfE intend to consult on revised guidance for local authorities on the care of UASC and trafficked children.

An Expert Reference Group (EAG), co-chaired by Alison O'Sullivan, has been established to produce care pathways, quality standards and models of care for looked after children and care leavers with mental health problems. The EAG will also consider transition to adult mental health services. A new Mental Health Services Data Set will collect a range of data regarding children and young people's access to, and outcomes from, mental health services, this will include children who are looked after.

The Care Quality Commission will shortly publish an overview report setting out their findings from the first 50 inspections of local health

services arrangements for promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers.

In April 2017, changes to Universal Credit will be introduced which remove the automatic entitlement to housing support for young people aged 18 to 21 who are out of work. Care leavers will be exempt from these changes. In addition, DWP and DfE will explore the benefits to care leavers of extending the exemption to the 'shared accommodation rate' of housing benefit to the age of 25 (therefore allowing them to continue to claim the higher one bedroom rate for self-contained accommodation). The Government intends to extend Local Housing Allowance Caps into the social rented sector, this will include the supported housing sector. Concerns have been raised about the implications of this, particularly for vulnerable people accessing supported accommodation (including care leavers). DWP and DCLG are currently undertaking a joint evidence review to better understand the implications of this policy and the review will be published shortly.

Driving System Improvement

The strategy references the What Works Centre for children's social care, Partners in Practice and the soon to be published evaluation of phase 1 of the Innovation Programme as way of promoting and sharing best practice across the sector.

The strategy also reiterates the Government's approach to addressing failure: where children's services are deemed inadequate and do not make sufficient progress towards improvement, a commissioner will be appointed to review whether services should be removed from council control (a commissioner will be appointed immediately where failure is persistent or systemic), and where this is considered to be the best option, services will be removed.

Measuring Progress

To gain a fuller understanding of the outcomes achieved by care leavers, the Ministry of Justice and DfE have a one-off data sharing agreement to link pupil level data to prison, probation and police data, this should be achieved in 2016. A separate agreement is in place with HMRC, DWP and BIS to explore the link between educational achievement and labour market outcomes.



DfE plan to establish a national care leaver advisory group, consisting of care leavers aged between 16 and 25, which will provide insights into the issues that affect their lives and inform the future development of the strategy and policy.