

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

DfE Charter for Care Leavers

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Summary

The DfE has issued a [Charter for Care Leavers](#) and [Care Leavers data pack](#), and the new Minister for Children and Families, Edward Timpson, has [written](#) to DCSs about improving outcomes of care leavers. The initiative should be of interest to all elected members, as well as officers responsible for care and leaving care arrangements.

Overview

The DfE has issued a [Charter for Care Leavers](#) and [Care Leavers data pack](#), and the new Minister for Children and Families, Edward Timpson, has [written](#) to DCSs about improving outcomes of care leavers. The initiative, which came towards the end of Care Leavers' Week, should be of interest to all elected members, as well as officers responsible for care and leaving care arrangements. Mr Timpson replaced Tim Loughton in the recent re-shuffle, and has a particular interest in care and related issues. He was previously a family law barrister and a member of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, and Chairs (though presumably will not in future) the All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) on Adoption and Fostering, and on Looked After Children and Care Leavers; his parents fostered more than 80 children, and he has adopted siblings.

In his letter to DCSs – which Mr Timpson asks them to bring to the attention of their Lead Member for Children's Services – he emphasises the importance of the setting up home allowance in helping young people make the transition to independent living, and highlights the recent reduction in the number of care leavers in employment, education and training, the slight reduction in the number living in suitable accommodation, and the 'very striking' wide variations between local authorities (LAs). It is the variation in outcomes that prompted publication of the data pack but, in an interview on the *Today* programme, Mr Timpson also drew attention to the difference in the levels of the setting up home allowance and urged LAs to give care leavers at least £2,000 (saying the figure for some is £500).

Briefing in full

The letter to DCSs, charter and data pack (summarised below) may be downloaded from the same DfE [webpage](#).

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Care Leavers in England data pack

Improving outcomes for care leavers is a key Government priority. Too many care leavers leave care with poor educational attainment and end up long term unemployed. However we also know that being in care can transform their lives and give them good life chance opportunities.'

The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the [statutory guidance](#) Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers came into effect in April 2011, and are based on best practice. The principles are that young people should:

- usually remain looked after until their 18th birthday unless there is a good reason to change their status
- be listened to in the development and implementation of their Pathway Plans
- be supported into education, training or employment
- be provided with accommodation which is suitable and safe
- be given information and advice, as well as practical and financial support to make the transition into independent living.

Key findings

The number of young people aged 16 and over leaving care has risen each year from 8,170 in 2007 to 10,000 in 2012. More than half (63%) of these young people were aged 18 and over at the time of leaving care; 19% were aged 16 and 18% were aged 17. The data are mostly presented graphically, with quite detailed information. Key findings include:

- 56% of the young people in children's homes leave care before they turn 18, compared with 37% of young people in foster care
- young people on care orders are more likely to leave care at age 18 than those who are voluntarily accommodated (who comprise more than four fifths of those leaving care at ages 17 and 16)
- destinations of care leavers aged 16 and over varied according to their age; 16 year olds were more likely to return home to their parents, whilst those aged 18 and over were more likely to move into independent living or adult social services care
- for 19 year olds who were looked after at age 16:
 - the number of 19 year old former care leavers rose from 4,730 in 2002 to 6,610 in 2012; LAs are in touch with a greater proportion of care leavers now than in 2002 (*most of the further analyses exclude those no longer in touch with their LA*)
 - the proportion in education rose between 2002 and 2011 from 24% to 39%, whilst the proportion in training or employment fell from 37% to 26%
 - in 2011: the proportion not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 35% (compared with 14.5% of 18 year olds in the general population); the proportion in higher education was 7% (compared with around a quarter in the general population)
 - the older a person leaves care, the more likely they are to be in education at age 19 (40% who left care at 18 or older compared with 26% who left care aged 16)

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

- those in education are more likely to have had stable care periods than those in other activities: 80% in education had a single period of care from 2008-2011 compared with 72% in training and employment and 69% who were NEET
- those in foster placements immediately before leaving care are the most likely to be in HE aged 19
- those who entered care due to socially unacceptable behaviour were the most likely to be NEET at age 19
- across LAs, the proportion who are NEET varies from 16% to 62%; within the total, the proportion who are NEET due to illness or disability also varies greatly
- care leavers are most likely to be living in independent accommodation (the distribution of accommodation types has changed little since 2002)
- 89% of care leavers aged 19 between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2012 were judged to be in suitable accommodation (the figure varied between LAs from 65% to 100%); those in education (including HE) were most likely (99%) to be in suitable accommodation whilst those who were NEET were least likely (88% for those NEET other than through illness or disability)

Key messages for local authorities

The document sets out key messages for LAs and questions they should be asking themselves. These include:

- too many young people are leaving care at age 16, particularly from children's homes; 26% move to independent living
- when young people leave their final care placement the LA must ensure that their new home is suitable for their needs
- LAs need to commission a range of semi-independent and independent living options with appropriate support
- 'Setting up home allowances' ('leaving care grants') are crucial in helping young people establish their identity and independence; they should be offered at a level that makes sure care leavers have what they need to set up safe, secure and stable accommodation
- is there enough focus on the young person's Pathway Plan to ensure that it is of high quality and written in a way which suits the young person? (Care leavers often feel they are written to meet the LA's own system and not for them)
- do care leavers have ready access to information about their entitlements, including the setting up home allowance?
- one of the key indicators of future economic well-being is the level of education and training that a person achieves; financial support and policies should encourage young people to remain engaged in education, take up training opportunities and undertake activities aimed at improving employability
- since 2011 looked after young people and care leavers should receive a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education; LAs have a duty to pay a HE bursary of £2,000 to any care leaver who started a course of higher education after September 2008
- LAs should actively work with the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), and should compare themselves with other local authorities. The NCAS [Benchmarking Forum](#) includes over 50 LAs who work together to tackle shared problems and share best practice. LAs should consider joining the Forum

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

- [Buttle UK](#) has developed a [Quality Mark](#) for higher and further education institutions who actively support care leavers during their period of study. Local authorities should ensure care leavers know about the Quality Mark and which institutions have reached the Quality Mark standard.

Charter for Care Leavers

The Charter is designed to raise expectations, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents; it sets out the promises that care leavers want central and local government to make. The Charter's key principles would remain constant throughout any changes in legislation, regulations, and guidance; and Charter urges LAs to use the principles when making decisions about young people's lives. The promises (which are all 'fleshed out' in the charter) are:

- to respect and honour your identity
- to believe in you
- to listen to you
- to inform you
- to support you
- to find you a home
- to be a lifelong champion.

Comment

This initiative is more than a routine 'government contribution' to Care Leavers' Week; it clearly reflects a strong personal commitment of the new Children's Minister. But, whilst agreeing that there is more that can be done and welcoming the opportunity to work with and learn from care leavers, the Chair of the LGA children and young people board Cllr. David Simmonds said "the government cannot place new financial expectations on councils at a time when they are imposing drastic cuts". And the problem of a growing list of priorities whilst resources are steadily diminishing is, indeed, all too obvious. Nevertheless, the data pack highlights significant differences between outcomes in different areas, and points to factors that can lead to improvements – not all of which imply increased costs.

The information in the data pack, and the hopes expressed in the charter, provide a useful basis for LAs to review their practices in respect of looked after young people as they approach independence.

External links

[Care leavers data pack](#), charter and letter to DCSs

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk