



HM Government

Keep On Caring

Supporting Young People from Care to
Independence

July 2016

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Ministerial Foreword

A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as a good parent would have for their own child. It means providing them with the stability and support they need to make progress; and helping them to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire them to set ambitious goals for themselves. It means celebrating their successes, but also recognising that they will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. It also means supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while letting them know that they have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough.

Earlier this week, the Secretary of State and I published our strategy for supporting all of our most vulnerable children and young people – *‘Putting Children First’*. This strategy sets out specifically and in more depth what it means to put care leavers first.

I know, from my own family, that care leavers will have faced many challenges in their lives and are likely to need much more support than other young people as they make the transition to adulthood. Yet, in most cases, care leavers are not only making that transition at a much younger age than their peers, but they also typically get far less support from their corporate parent than other young people get from their birth parents. That is why I am determined to ensure that the state and wider society play a much stronger and more active role in improving care leavers’ life chances. For me, it’s the hallmark of a compassionate society, something our country has in bucket-loads.

This strategy calls for a revolution in the way that we think about supporting young people coming out of care. It asks local and central government to up their game as corporate parents, using the level of support that we expect a reasonable parent to provide for their child as the benchmark for how they should approach their role. And it provides a call to arms for wider society to better support care leavers, through engagement with the ‘care leaver covenant’ that we plan to launch later this year.

It identifies three key ways in which we will drive improvements in leaving care services:

Firstly, it sets out how we will use the Innovation Programme to rethink how services are delivered and what support is provided, with a strong focus on finding new and better ways of helping care leavers develop the social networks that will sustain them not just in the years immediately after leaving care, but throughout their lives. We will also support new ways of delivering services, for example through Trusts, which have a clear and specific focus on improving care leavers’ life chances.

Secondly, it sets out how we will strengthen the culture of corporate parenting, both locally – through our planned legislative measures – and through changes to central government policies, so that they better respond to care leavers’ unique status and circumstances.

And finally, it sets out how we will support and challenge local areas, so that all deliver to the standards of the best.

By delivering the commitments outlined in this document, and applying the same reform principles and methods to care leavers that we are for the rest of children's social care, we can begin to drive the necessary improvements to the quality of support received by young people leaving care. But this does not mark the end of our ambition. We will continue to work across government during the remainder of this Parliament to make the life chances of care leavers something to celebrate, not denounce. If we keep on caring we can, together, give them the optimism and the future they deserve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Edward Timpson', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Edward Timpson
Minister of State for Children & Families

SUMMARY

The government is passionate about improving the lives and life chances of care leavers. Young people leaving care constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, and both government and wider society have a moral obligation to give them the support they need as they make the transition to adulthood and independent living.

There has been much good work done over the past few years to improve that support, including the actions set out in the first cross-government care leaver strategy published in 2013¹, and the introduction of the Staying Put duty in 2014, which is already helping many care leavers to continue living with their former foster carers beyond age 18.

However, outcomes for care leavers remain much worse than for their counterparts in the general population and the quality of leaving care services provided by local authorities remains variable. The care leaver cohort is also changing, as more children enter care at age 16 and over, and with more unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) entering the care system. These changes present new challenges for service providers.

This document sets out a vision for the further reform of support for care leavers based on innovation, system reform, and the embedding of corporate parenting responsibility across society.

The strategy makes a commitment that the government will use the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to rethink transitions to adulthood for young people in the children's social care system, with a focus on developing new ways to provide care leavers with the personal support networks they need to thrive; piloting 'Staying Close' – a variant of Staying Put for those leaving residential care; and testing out alternative models of delivery for leaving care services through the use of Trusts, Mutuels and other arrangements. It gives a clear commitment to test payment-by-results approaches, and commits the government to create the first care leaver-specific Social Impact Bond. And it also provides a commitment to support and test approaches that empower care leavers to have a greater say in the design and delivery of services.

The document goes on to identify and describe how the State, as corporate parents, will support care leavers to achieve 5 key outcomes.

¹ [Care Leaver Strategy. A cross-departmental strategy for children leaving care](#), 2013

The first of these is that all young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently. The actions that we will undertake in order to achieve this include:

- setting out in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent;
- creating a new care leaver covenant;
- introducing a new legal duty on local authorities to consult on, and publish information about, services for care leavers; and
- extending existing entitlements so that all care leavers will be able to access support from a local authority Personal Adviser to age 25.

The second key outcome is improved access to education, employment and training. In order to achieve this the government will:

- promote the take up of supported internships, including through the provision of targeted information to Personal Advisers;
- meet the training costs for care leavers undertaking apprenticeships up to age 25;
- support care leavers' access to, and achievement in, further and higher education, employment and apprenticeships;
- guarantee a place on the National Citizen Service to every child in care or care leaver aged 16 or 17; and
- consider how best to improve access for care leavers to employment opportunities in government departments and their agencies.

The third key outcome is that care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure. We will help to achieve this by:

- committing to introduce 'Staying Close' provision for young people leaving residential care;
- continuing to fund local authorities to support Staying Put arrangements;
- providing support for the implementation of the Supported Accommodation Framework;
- raising awareness of care leavers' unique status and their entitlements among prison and probation staff through the provision of additional training; and
- increasing the funding local authorities will receive for supporting former unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The fourth key outcome is improved access to health support. In order to achieve this we will:

- through a new Expert Group, produce care pathways, quality standards and models of care for looked after children and care leavers with mental health problems;
- use the new Mental Health Services Data Set to inform the future delivery of services to care leavers; and
- improve accountability regarding the local provision of health services, for example through Care Quality Commission and Joint Targeted Area inspections.

The fifth and final key outcome that we wish to promote through this strategy is that care leavers should achieve financial stability. We will help them to do this by:

- exempting care leavers from changes to eligibility for housing support for 18-21 year-olds in Universal Credit;
- reviewing the case to extend the exemption to the Shared Accommodation Rate of housing support within Universal Credit, for care leavers to age 25; and
- ensuring, through our review of the Personal Adviser role, that care leavers are able to access advice and support to help them manage their money.

In addition to identifying and implementing specific measures to improve outcomes for care leavers, this strategy makes it clear that the government has a significant role to play in driving reform and improvement. Partly, this will involve promoting and sharing best practice, through the creation of the new Children's Social Care What Works Centre, and our work with the 'Partners in Practice' group of local authorities. We will also continue to support and challenge local authorities and, where failure is found and services are found to be inadequate, we will intervene.

Finally, it is important that we should have effective means of measuring the impact of actions that we will be undertaking through this strategy. The Department for Education (DfE) will continue to publish care leaver outcome data annually and, for the year ending March 2016, will also publish data for 17 and 18 year-old care leavers for the first time. Work will also be undertaken to explore how data can be shared more effectively between relevant government departments. To ensure that care leavers' voices are heard more powerfully in the formulation of government policy, a new national care leaver advisory group will be created and facilitated by the DfE. And to ensure that the implementation of this strategy is managed effectively, a senior group of Whitehall officials will meet twice yearly to review progress and goals.

1 INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Leaving Care Support

- 1.1 Before the Leaving Care Act (2000)², there was no statutory framework in place for care leavers, with each local authority determining what level of support it provided. With no nationally-set expectation about what was an adequate level of support, many care leavers received only minimal assistance. The 2000 Act introduced, for the first time, requirements on local authorities to: assess the needs of the young person once they left care; appoint a Personal Adviser for them; and develop a pathway plan. This support was available to care leavers up to age 18, or to age 21 if the young person was in education.
- 1.2 In 2008, the Children and Young Persons Act³ introduced provisions that required local authorities to provide assistance to care leavers in education (including a £2,000 bursary for those in higher education); and extended support from a Personal Adviser to age 21 for all care leavers; and to 25 if they remained in education.
- 1.3. During the last Parliament, there were three further key developments to improve the quality of support that care leavers receive:
 - The first cross-government care leaver strategy was published in 2013⁴. It recognised the need to work coherently across government to address care leavers' needs in the round; and introduced a number of changes to policies and practices so that care leavers were better supported. These included measures to better identify care leavers so that they could receive tailored support. For example, Jobcentre Plus introduced a 'marker' so that care leavers could be identified and offered additional help, such as access to the Work Programme from day one of unemployment;
 - The 2014 Children & Families Act⁵ introduced the 'Staying Put' duty. This requires local authorities to support young people to remain with their former foster carers to age 21 where both the young person and carer want the arrangement to continue – allowing those young people to enjoy continuity in their care arrangements and a more gradual transition to adulthood; and

² [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act, 2000](#)

³ [Children and Young Persons Act, 2008](#)

⁴ [Care Leaver Strategy – A cross-departmental strategy for children leaving care, 2013](#)

⁵ [Children and Families Act, 2014](#)

- The introduction of a new inspection framework for children’s social care in 2014⁶, which for the first time had a specific judgement on the quality of leaving care support.

Our Vision

- 1.4 We are determined to bring about the widest reaching reforms to children’s social care in a generation. We want a system staffed and led by the best trained professionals; dynamic and free to innovate in the interests of children; with less bureaucracy; new checks and balances designed to hold the system to account in the right ways; and new ways to intervene where services consistently fail some of the most vulnerable in our society. Our strategy – *Putting Children First* – published on 4 July 2016, sets out how we will achieve this.
- 1.5 The best children’s social care services in England deliver truly excellent help and support to children and young people. These services do not just improve their circumstances; they transform them completely. But whilst there is much excellent practice out there, evidence from Ofsted inspections points to continued variability in the quality of work with children and young people.
- 1.6 We do not underestimate the pressures that children’s social care faces: increased fiscal constraint; higher demand for services; and new threats to our children and young people as they become targets for radicalisation, child sexual exploitation or gang culture. But we know that these challenges are far from insurmountable. Ofsted’s analysis shows that the pattern of inspection outcomes is not about how deprived an area is, or even the amount of money being spent on children’s social care – some of the lowest performers are in fact the highest spenders. Ofsted’s inspections this year show that, regardless of context, providing outstanding services *is* possible, and ‘good’ is a standard that any local authority can achieve and maintain⁷.
- 1.7 To support this innovation and drive for excellence, by 2020 we want to see a more diverse range of children’s social care organisations, operating over new geographical areas, supported by meaningful data and an inspection regime that supports high-quality evidence-based front line practice. And crucially, the performance of these new organisations must be driven by challenging, sharp and practice-focused accountability. Our most vulnerable children and young people deserve nothing less.

⁶ [Inspecting local authority children’s services: framework](#), 2014, Ofsted

⁷ [Ofsted Social Care Annual Report](#), 2016, Ofsted

1.8 This vision applies just as much to the services and support that we provide to young people leaving care as it does to other parts of the social care system. The measures we introduced during the last Parliament have been important in driving up the quality of support that care leavers receive, but they have not resulted in the fundamental shift in care leavers' life chances that we want to see. To achieve that change, we believe that we need to focus on three key areas:

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

Developing new ways of supporting care leavers

1.9 We do not believe that we can achieve the 'step-change' that is needed simply by providing more of the same. That is why we want to stimulate new thinking about how we help care leavers to make successful transitions to adulthood – both in terms of how services are delivered, and what support is provided.

1.10 We want to explore whether there are different models of delivery that can achieve better outcomes for care leavers. We can see the potential benefits of, for example, local services for care leavers being delivered via a Care Leaver Trust – a new organisation with a culture and objectives entirely focused on care leavers. A Trust model could provide an environment where there is greater scope to innovate; and greater flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of their care leaver cohort. Trusts could also operate across a bigger geographical area, providing a more consistent offer across neighbouring local authorities and result in more effective commissioning of services.

1.11 We also want to explore different ways of helping care leavers to develop the social networks that will sustain them during their transition to adulthood and beyond. Personal Advisers play an important role in helping care leavers to achieve their goals, but cannot always provide all the support that care leavers need. In the next section of this document we set out a range of alternative models that provide new ways of meeting the practical and emotional needs of care leavers that we believe will provide greater continuity of support.

Making corporate parenting everyone's responsibility

1.12 We know that there are many individuals and teams working in local authority leaving care services that are committed to supporting children in care and care leavers in a way that any other parent would. In some local authorities, like Trafford, that commitment starts at the top of the organisation and permeates through all of its services. But, in many other areas, there are examples of one

part of the council helping care leavers while another part of the organisation is acting in a way that undermines that work. We will **introduce a set of corporate parenting principles** that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.

- 1.13 We also want that corporate parenting responsibility to extend beyond what is provided by local authorities, so that government departments and their agencies, charities and private sector organisations play their part. Later sections of this document set out examples of how policies of individual government departments have been adapted to recognise the challenges faced by care leavers. And **we will introduce a ‘care leaver covenant’** that will enable organisations to make commitments to care leavers in a way that is most appropriate for them.

Driving system improvement

- 1.14 As the spread of Ofsted judgements about leaving care services illustrates, there is significant variation in the quality of support that care leavers receive. It is important that government takes an active role in highlighting best practice and sharing what works, as well as providing strong challenge where services are not good enough. The final section of this document sets out how we will do this.

What are we trying to achieve?

- 1.15 To achieve our ambitions for care leavers, we need to use the three drivers of improvement listed above to make progress against five key issues that care leavers raised during our consultation events:
- Not being adequately prepared or supported to deal with the challenges of living independently;
 - Barriers accessing education, employment and training;
 - Lack of stability, safety and security;
 - Difficulties in accessing the health support they need, in particular help to maintain their emotional health and well-being; and
 - Problems achieving financial stability⁸.

⁸ Source: Between January and March 2016 DfE officials led a series of consultation events with care leavers. See also page 17.

- 1.16 Many of these issues are inter-related. Problems with money are often exacerbated by the fact that many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). And the lack of a stable, safe place to live can impact negatively on a young person's emotional health and put them at greater danger of a number of safeguarding risks, such as sexual exploitation or involvement with gangs. This reinforces the need for a cross-government approach. The measures that local authorities and government departments have agreed to take forward are set out below under the five key outcomes that we are seeking to achieve.
- 1.17 As the following paragraphs illustrate, achieving those outcomes depends not just on what happens when young people leave care. The quality of care they receive earlier in their lives is also crucial. That is why, alongside this care leaver strategy, DfE has also published recently a wider children's social care policy paper, setting out what we will do to transform the children's social care sector⁹; as well as the report of Sir Martin Narey's review of residential care¹⁰.

How well is the system working at present?

- 1.18 Making an overall assessment of the quality of support that care leavers receive is not straightforward. In particular, it is challenging because of the significant variation in the quality of support provided at a local level – which is reflected in both the outcomes that care leavers achieve and in the spread of Ofsted judgements about leaving care services.
- 1.19 Our consultations with care leavers also illustrated a wide range of personal experiences. For example, some care leavers reported that their Personal Adviser had been the key person who had helped them to successfully navigate the challenges of living independently, while for others, support from their Personal Adviser had been limited and ineffective¹¹. It is also challenging because the nature of the cohort is constantly changing, making the drawing of comparisons with care leavers' outcomes in previous years less reliable.
- 1.20 This next section provides an overview of the current position, drawing on: the information we have on the cohort (and how it is changing); the national outcome data that DfE publishes annually; Ofsted reports and judgements about the quality

⁹ [Putting children first – Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care](#), Department for Education, 2016

¹⁰ [Residential care in England, Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care](#), Sir Martin Narey, 2016

¹¹ Source: Between January and March 2016 DfE officials led a series of consultation events with care leavers. See also page 17.

of local delivery; and feedback from the care leavers we consulted on the strategy while it was being developed.

A changing cohort

1.21 Around 10,800 young people left care aged 16 or over in the year ending March 2015, an increase of over 40% in the last decade. There are an increasing number of young people who enter care aged 16 or over, accounting for 16% of all those who entered care in the year ending March 2015, compared to 12% in the year ending March 2011. Changes to the law which require young people on remand to become looked after, along with the impact of the Southwark Judgement – which means that 16 and 17 year-olds who present as homeless also become looked after children – have both changed the nature of the cohort of care leavers that local authorities must support. And local authorities are looking after increasing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and supporting more care leavers who are former UASC¹².

Care leavers' outcomes

1.22 Care leavers' outcomes are not determined solely by the quality of leaving care support that they receive – although this is clearly an important factor. But Care leavers' experiences before and during care are also important determinants of their outcomes, which means that comparisons between the outcomes of care leavers and other young people in the general population are of only limited value when making judgements about the quality and impact of the support that is provided when young people leave care.

1.23 The lasting impact of the events and circumstances that led to a child being taken into care; the high incidence of Special Educational Needs (SEN) among care leavers (around 60% of children in care for 12 months have SEN, compared to 15% of children in the general population)¹³ and emotional health problems (around half of children in care have a Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score that is borderline or cause for concern)¹⁴; the impact of placement moves while in care (including the resultant change in school that often occurs) – all contribute to low attainment, with only 14% of children in care achieving 5 good

¹² Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

¹³ Statistics about care leaver cohort taken from the Department of Education's [Statistical First Release Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2015](#)

¹⁴ Statistics about care leaver cohort taken from the Department of Education's [Statistical First Release Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England](#), 31 March 2014

GCSEs in 2015, compared to 53% of non-looked after children¹⁵. Leaving school with few qualifications adversely affects care leavers' progress into further or higher education, apprenticeships or skilled jobs.

- 1.24 As well as these historical factors, care leavers also face the added challenge of having to cope with the demands of living on their own at a young age: having to manage finances, maintain a home and manage their lives independently, often without the support from families that most of us take for granted. That is why it is incumbent on the state as the corporate parent to do as much as it can to give care leavers the support and opportunities they need to succeed. While we cannot mitigate the impact of all of the disadvantages that care leavers have experienced, we can ensure that as a society we do as much as we can to help care leavers overcome them.
- 1.25 Notwithstanding these points, the fact remains that the data on care leavers' outcomes is stark and there has been limited improvement over time. In the year ending March 2015, local authorities were 'in touch' with, and provided data to DfE on, 88% of care leavers. This is an increase from 84% in the year ending March 2014¹⁶. In many of the cases where no information was provided, this was because the care leaver had either refused contact, or had told the local authority that they no longer required support. Nevertheless, the wide variation in local authority performance on keeping in touch indicates that more needs to be done to maintain contact with care leavers in some areas.
- 1.26 In the year ending March 2015, 39% of 19-21 year-old care leavers were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) – an increase of 1 percentage point compared to the previous year. Of these, over a third were NEET due to either a disability, or because they were a young parent. Six percent of 19-21 year-old care leavers were in Higher Education; and a further 18% were in other types of education. Twenty-three per cent were in employment or training, an increase of 3 percentage points on the previous year¹⁷.
- 1.27 There is no national data that reports on care leavers' longer term outcomes, but research consistently shows that care leavers are over-represented in studies on people in custody, homelessness and other negative outcomes¹⁸, although those

¹⁵ Statistics about care leaver cohort taken from the Department of Education's [Statistical First Release Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2015](#)

¹⁶ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

¹⁷ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

¹⁸ Department of Education, National Audit Office *Care leavers' transition to adulthood*, July 2015

studies normally include people of all ages and so are not focused on the current cohort of care leavers.

Ofsted judgements on the quality of leaving care services



1.28 The two tables above¹⁹ show the spread of Ofsted judgements for both the 'care leaver sub-judgement' and 'overall effectiveness' judgement from inspections Ofsted has conducted under its Single Inspection Framework. They show that two-thirds of leaving care services, and three-quarters of overall effectiveness judgements were judged to either 'require improvement' or to be 'inadequate'. Although more care leaving services (36%) were judged 'good' or 'outstanding' than social care services overall (25%), the picture as a whole shows that the quality of care leaving support that local authorities provide needs to improve significantly.

1.29 The key messages from Ofsted inspection reports are that:

- The quality of pathway planning for care leavers is not good enough in around two-thirds of local authorities inspected, with a lack of clear, specific actions to drive care leavers' progress;
- Not enough is done to raise awareness among care leavers of their entitlements;
- In around half of local authorities inspected, not enough support was being provided to help care leavers to find and sustain education, training or employment;

¹⁹ Data provided by Ofsted

- In around a third of local authorities, care leavers did not have access to a suitable range of accommodation options; and
 - In too many local authorities, senior corporate parents did not consistently prioritise the needs of care leavers or have sufficiently high aspirations for them.
- 1.30 There were also a number of positive themes reported by Ofsted and many cases of good practice in individual authorities, or on particular aspects of leaving care support. In most local authorities care leavers themselves spoke positively about the support provided by Personal Advisers. In the best performing authorities, effective partnerships with Housing Services were providing care leavers with a range of independent and semi-independent accommodation options to reflect their different levels of readiness for independent living. And in the majority of recent inspections, Ofsted was identifying effective work being undertaken to improve local authorities' performance on keeping in touch with their care leavers.
- 1.31 Trafford and Kensington and Chelsea have shown that it is possible to provide outstanding support to care leavers. Their work is characterised by tenacious planning for young people's futures at all levels and across all key agencies. Young people particularly valued the caring and enduring relationships with Personal Advisers and from others that were responsible for their care and support. Significantly, in these local authorities, there is a strong track record of effective and ambitious corporate parenting of looked after children and care leavers.

Feedback from care leavers

- 1.32 During our many conversations with care leavers, a number of consistent themes emerged:
- Where they had developed a good relationship with an adult – a former foster carer, a member of staff at a residential home, an independent visitor or social worker – they wanted support to maintain those relationships once they left care, on an informal basis;
 - They wanted the professionals who support them to have high aspirations for them; and to encourage and support them to achieve their goals;
 - They reported that leaving care still felt like a 'cliff-edge', where they were suddenly responsible for managing budgets, running a home; and maintaining their participation in education or work on their own – with insufficient preparation for these challenges. The introduction of Staying Put was seen by care leavers as a positive way of smoothing out the process of transition to adulthood and provided for continuity of relationships and care arrangements;

- As well as not having been given the necessary life skills before leaving care, they also felt that the process of leaving care itself was often rushed and that planning for leaving care should start earlier. A number of care leavers wanted greater flexibility around the age of leaving care, to avoid their 18th birthday feeling like a 'point of no return';
- Care leavers said that they wanted more choice about where they lived and who supported them; and more information about the support that was available to them locally; and what they were entitled to from universal services such as Jobcentre Plus;
- They said that there were times when their emotional health and well-being was not positive, but when that was the case they found it difficult to access the support they needed. In particular, they found it difficult to access adult mental health services once they turned 18;
- A minority of care leavers reported that they felt scared – in particular when they did not feel that the place they were accommodated in was safe, either because of its location or because of the other people who lived there – or that they were vulnerable to a range of safeguarding risks, such as involvement in gangs, crime, or sexual exploitation;
- They said that they wanted to be empowered to do things for themselves and have opportunities to get on in life – but that there needed to be greater understanding among service providers about the different challenges they faced compared to young people their age in the general population – in particular that they often did not have the safety-net of a supportive family network;
- But overwhelmingly, the biggest issue raised by care leavers was one of isolation and loneliness; and the difficulty of navigating their way through their late teens and early twenties without a strong and stable social network to support them.

Developing the Strategy

1.33 In developing this strategy, we have taken account of the views of a broad range of individuals and organisations. Firstly, we have listened to what care leavers have told us. At eight separate consultation events we asked care leavers to think about their experience of leaving care and tell us:

- What were the most difficult challenges they had faced;
- In which areas they would have welcomed additional support; and
- In which areas did they felt well-supported and how this helped their transition to adulthood.

1.34 A summary of the key points that emerged from those discussions with care leavers is set out above. We also held discussions with the organisations that support care leavers, both individually and in a roundtable event that brought together all of the key voluntary sector bodies that work with these young people.

1.35 We were also keen to ensure that we properly understood the delivery challenges involved in providing services to care leavers and so have held detailed discussions with Ofsted (a summary of Ofsted's key findings in relation to leaving care support are set out above), as well as engaging with local authority colleagues who deliver leaving care services – through consultation with members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (an association with members from over 80 local authority leaving care teams) and through working with Mark Riddell (Manager of the outstanding Children in Care and Leaving Care team in Trafford) who has worked with DfE as a 'critical friend', throughout the development of the strategy.

2. INNOVATION AND SYSTEM REFORM

2.1 Care leavers have told us that we need a system that puts the development of meaningful, long-term relationships and social networks at its heart. The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme is central to achieving this. The programme is already supporting local authorities and other organisations to develop new approaches to children's social care, through an investment of over £100 million, encompassing 53 projects. So far the Innovation Programme has focused on three areas:

- Rethinking children's social work: These projects have started to show evidence that giving social workers and other frontline workers freedom and support to design services that they know children and families need can have a dramatic impact;
- Rethinking support for adolescents in or on the edge of care: providing integrated models of support; and
- Other innovative solutions outside these two priority areas: – providing the opportunity for the sector to drive reform where it is most needed or come to us with innovative ideas falling outside of the two priority areas.

2.2 In April this year, we announced a further £200 million investment to extend the programme²⁰. We will use the next phase of the Innovation Programme to make progress on two fronts:

- Deepening our understanding of the conditions needed for excellent practice and supporting more local authorities to rethink their whole practice system around them; and
- Building our evidence base and understanding of how we can best support young people making the transition to adulthood.

2.3 This focus on transition to adulthood in the second round of the programme provides us with the opportunity to work with local authorities and charities to find new ways to deliver services and support to care leavers that result in them achieving better outcomes. There are a number of areas where we are keen to test new approaches.

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-to-transform-life-chances-of-vulnerable-young-people>

Providing More Practical and Emotional Support

- 2.4 While we want all care leavers to benefit from high quality Personal Adviser support to age 25, we recognise that the support that care leavers currently receive is patchy; and even where it is good, Personal Advisers cannot always provide care leavers with as much practical and emotional support as they need. Just as social workers need to be supported to develop excellent practice skills, and given the freedom to work in innovative ways, so too do Personal Advisers.
- 2.5 **We are carrying out a review of the Personal Adviser role** to better understand how they spend their time and identify models of delivery that maximise contact time between them and the young people they are supporting, so that they can develop the trusting relationships that care leavers value so much. A second stage of the review will consider wider questions about the role, including: what skills, knowledge and qualifications are needed to perform the role effectively; how we can raise the status of the role; whether the name ‘Personal Adviser’ best describes what this important role encompasses; what are the routes into Personal Adviser work (including for care leavers); and whether there are enough opportunities for development training for those currently carrying out the role. Given how important it is that care leavers are able to manage their money effectively the review will also consider how Personal Advisers can best support them in this regard.
- 2.6 **We will also encourage employers to come forward to create a Personal Adviser Apprenticeship**, which would prepare people for the demands of this challenging role; and also open a route for care-experienced individuals to join the workforce and play a bigger part in the delivery of services to care leavers. We have had positive discussions with the employer that is leading the development of new children’s social care apprenticeships as part of the Trailblazer apprenticeship programme, and will announce further details in due course. We anticipate that the apprenticeship would be set at Level 3 (equivalent to A level) and would take between 12 and 18 months to complete.
- 2.7 **But we are keen to test out approaches that look beyond the Personal Adviser model**, drawing on other sources of support so that care leavers have a wider network around them.

“If it wasn’t for my independent visitor, I would not be where I am today – she raised my ambition and she has helped me by showing my opportunities, helping with applications. Most importantly she has stuck by me; even though the service ran out and still is here to this day!” Care Leaver.

2.8 Examples of the sort of approaches we want to invest in include:

- Supporting continuing relationships with former carers and professionals: during our consultations with care leavers, a number of participants spoke passionately about a key individual who had helped them in their childhood. For some it was a former foster carer, for others it was a member of staff at their former residential home; and for others still it was a social worker, or independent visitor. Staying Put allows for a continuing relationship with a former foster carer. But where Staying Put isn't the right answer, foster carers may still be able to provide ongoing emotional and practical support even if the young person does not still live with them – in the same way as parents do when their children leave home. And there is also the opportunity for continuing relationships between care leavers and other professionals they know and trust. We are keen to see projects that harness this potential support by helping those relationships to continue once the young person leaves care;
- Mentoring: Many local authorities will already have appointed mentors for care leavers, including adults with personal experience of the care system who have a unique understanding of the challenges that care leavers face in moving from care to independence. But we don't know enough about the successful features of the best mentoring programmes, which is why we are interested in identifying and scaling-up those interventions that have the most robust evidence of success.
- Family-Finding Approaches: Based on an approach first used in the United States, family-finding uses family group conferences to identify a range of adults, including family members and professionals who have known the young person during their childhood, who are prepared to make a life-long commitment to the young person. Each individual's contribution will differ, but in sum represents a robust package of support that the young person can draw on.
- Local Area Co-ordinators: We are keen to test an approach that has been used successfully in adult social care which involves area co-ordinators working with vulnerable adults to help them access community resources and support which, over time, reduces their reliance on statutory services and helps them to develop a supportive, community-based network of activities and personal contacts. This could be particularly beneficial to care leavers with a disability, who may need ongoing adult social care support to help them achieve positive outcomes.

Delivering Services Differently

2.9 **We also want to free-up local authorities to deliver services in new ways and in partnership with the voluntary sector.** New models can:

- refresh leadership and attract strong and ambitious people to organisations where new ways of doing things are needed;
- provide a sharper focus on children’s social care as a whole or on aspects of the system;
- enable existing strong organisations to innovate more easily and to create a distinctive culture of excellence; and
- bring together different areas and organisations in robust structures which go beyond collaboration and into integration.

2.10 **City Deals** in particular provide an opportunity to test out new approaches and we are working closely with Greater Manchester to explore the possibility of delivering a single care leaving service across the 10 Greater Manchester authorities, using Trafford’s leading-edge service to drive an improved offer to all care leavers. This sort of innovation opens up new opportunities to commission services in a way that: provides greater value for money; creates greater flexibility in placing young people in accommodation in neighbouring boroughs; and has the potential to create a more consistent offer that reflects best practice across all participating authorities.

2.11 **Care Leaver Trusts, which give those working closer to the frontline the freedoms and flexibilities to operate more innovatively and creatively, represent an approach that we are keen to support through the Innovation Programme.** Trusts could provide the opportunity for new bodies focussed entirely on improving care leavers’ life chances, harnessing the power of the voluntary sector to provide the networks and relationships that we know are key to a successful transition.

2.12 We are also keen that local authorities, and the staff that work in them, should consider what scope there is to establish **public service mutuals** to deliver services to care leavers differently. One example of a mutual model which is already transforming the delivery of children’s services is Achieving for Children – a social enterprise working across the London Boroughs of Kingston and Richmond.

2.13 **Social impact bonds** (SIBs) are designed to help reform public service delivery by allowing social sector organisations to participate in ‘payment by results’ contracts. SIBs improve the social outcomes of publicly-funded services by making

funding conditional on achieving results. Investors pay for the project at the start, and then receive payments based on the results achieved by the project. Rather than focusing on inputs or outputs, SIBs are based on achieving social ‘outcomes’. The outcomes are predefined and measurable.

- 2.14 Working with local commissioners, voluntary and community sector organisations and social investors, we believe that there is significant potential for SIBs to improve the way that care leavers are supported as they make a transition to independent living, and particularly to support their sustained participation in employment and training. **We will, therefore, make funding available from the Innovation Programme to support the development and commissioning of care leaver SIBs over the rest of this Parliament to test new approaches to support care leavers.** In order to enable bidders to submit expressions of interest, we will be running an additional bidding round into the Innovation Programme in the autumn in which organisations interested in running a care leaver SIB will be able to apply for funding to help to pay for its set up and to provide outcomes payments.

Providing a stronger offer for those leaving residential care

- 2.15 Care leavers have told us that having a safe, secure and stable place to live is essential if they are to sustain education, training or employment; experience positive emotional health and well-being; and avoid safeguarding risks. The *Staying Put* duty, introduced in 2014, requires local authorities to provide support so that care leavers can continue to live with their former foster carers. However, there has been no equivalent provision in place for young people leaving residential care.
- 2.16 Sir Martin Narey considered this issue in his recent report on children’s residential care²¹. As he noted, young people leaving children’s homes require as much support, if not more, than their counterparts who have been looked after in foster care. He was clear that the need for nurturing, consistent relationships does not stop when young people leave care; and that more needs to be done to avoid a cliff edge for those leaving residential care.
- 2.17 His report recommended that the government should introduce ‘*Staying Close*’ – an alternative to *Staying Put* – designed specifically for young people leaving residential care. This would allow young people to live independently, but in a location very close to the children’s home they lived in previously. They would

²¹ [Residential care in England, Report of Sir Martin Narey’s independent review of children’s residential care](#), Sir Martin Narey, 2016

continue to have the support of the same team and same key worker, and would be able to visit the home frequently, to experience the continuity and more gradual transition to independence that those leaving foster care enjoy when they move into a Staying Put arrangement.

- 2.18 In response to Sir Martin's specific recommendation, **we are making a commitment to introduce Staying Close for young people leaving residential care**. As Sir Martin also recommends, we are first going to pilot variations of the scheme, through opening a specific stream of the Innovation Programme, in order to understand the costings, practicalities and impact of this measure.
- 2.19 Later sections of this document say more about the work we have been doing with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) more widely to ensure that accommodation for care leavers is both suitable and affordable.

Empowering Care Leavers to Provide and Design Services for Themselves

Being empowered was a strong theme in our consultations with care leavers. It is also judged to be a key component of many of the most interesting innovations that are currently being taken forward in the sector.

The 'HOUSE Project' in Stoke has involved setting up a housing co-operative led by young care leavers using homes owned by the council.

Care leavers lead the co-operative and have access to a purpose-designed skills and training programme to help them do this (and to build skills related to the co-operative), building their capacity, social skills and employability in the process. Young people are able to retain their tenancy as long as they want to. As they move out of the co-operative, but want to keep their home, new local-authority owned houses are released to the co-operative to maintain the stock of 10 tenancies for care leavers.

As well as helping care leavers with their accommodation needs, the project gives them the opportunity to experience the control, ownership and pride in doing things for themselves that have been missing from their lives.

- 2.20 The New Belongings programme is another example of care leavers themselves being empowered to drive change in the services they receive. A national group

of care leavers was paid as consultants to work with care leavers in the local area they were supporting, to audit what care leavers thought about the services they received and to work with the senior managers in the council to develop a stronger local offer. This DfE-funded programme worked with 29 local authorities over two years and many of the participating authorities continue to work together in clusters to share practice and what works. **Subject to the outcome of the independent evaluation of New Belongings, we are keen to expand this approach – which puts care leavers in the ‘driving seat’ – to an increasing number of local authorities.**

Preparing care leavers for the challenges of living independently

“When leaving care I was not ready or prepared for what lay ahead for me. Living in my own flat at the age of 18, I felt alone and unsupported. I always came across as older for my age so I think it was assumed I would be ok. However I was far from ok.” Care leaver.

2.21 Care leavers consistently tell us that they were not sufficiently prepared for the realities of living independently. In particular, they report experiencing difficulties in relation to budgeting, household maintenance and how to access universal services. Many local authorities already provide support of this kind and **we are interested in how we might use the Innovation Programme to scale-up approaches that have been successful.**

Supporting care leavers who are young parents

2.22 Section 3 of this document sets out the universal and targeted services that are in place to support care leavers who are parents to give their children the best start in life. However, for a minority of care leavers with complex problems, getting pregnant and subsequently having their children taken into care can become a pattern that requires a different response. Programmes such as PAUSE, which originated in Hackney and has been extended to six other local authority areas supported by funding from the DfE Innovation Programme, work intensively with young women in this situation to prevent repeat pregnancies and subsequent removal of their children into care. **We want to extend approaches like PAUSE into new areas to break this inter-generational cycle of care.**

3. EMBEDDING A CULTURE OF CORPORATE PARENTING

- 3.1 Everyone in society has a responsibility to help those who have been in care to overcome the difficulties that they experienced in their childhoods, so that they can lead successful lives – it is not something that government alone can achieve.
- 3.2 As this section will show, government departments and their agencies can play a vital role by shaping their policies so that they give care leavers a helping hand. The voluntary sector plays a unique role, providing opportunities for care leavers to develop skills, confidence and resilience through their programmes for vulnerable young people. Private businesses can offer care leavers opportunities to gain work experience or to take up apprenticeships; and individual volunteers, including those who have a care experience themselves, can act as mentors or champions for care leavers.
- 3.3 But more than anything else, the local help and support that care leavers receive from their local authority leaving care team is critical to whether care leavers make the transition from care to independence successfully.
- 3.4 This section sets out the action we will take to help care leavers to overcome the problems identified in Section 1:

Outcome 1: Better prepared and supported to live independently

“Over the past year the best thing for me has been my support worker with all the support she has given me I feel like you have built up a good relationship with her and I feel like if I have any queries I can always go to her about them so it has been nice to build up a good relationship with someone who I can trust.” Care Leaver

- 3.5 We want the legislative framework that applies to leaving care services to ensure that care leavers are given the high quality support they need to succeed. Building on the Staying Put duty that was introduced in 2014, we are introducing three new legislative provisions in the Children and Social Work Bill²² to add to the entitlements that care leavers already benefit from.

²² <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/childrenandsocialwork.html>

Corporate Parenting Principles

- 3.6 For the first time, we will set out in law what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent, through a set of corporate parenting principles that guide how local authorities should act when providing services and support to the young people leaving their care. The principles will apply to all of the services that the local authority provides – not just the Children’s Services department – so that, for example, Housing Services (including those delivered by district councils) and Leisure Services also deliver their services to care leavers in a way that: promotes their best interests; responds to their wishes and feelings; helps them to make the best use of local authority services; promotes high aspirations and the best possible outcomes for them; provides them with stability; and supports their transition to adulthood. These principles will apply to both children in care and care leavers.
- 3.7 The principles will embed in every local authority what we, and Ofsted, have already seen in the best performing local authorities like Trafford, where from the Chief Executive down there is a commitment within the council to giving care leavers the best possible chance to succeed, including ring-fencing apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers and giving them free access to the borough’s leisure centres.
- 3.8 Other authorities are thinking hard about what it truly means to be a corporate parent, looking at it through the lens of what any reasonable parent does to give their child the best start in life. For many of our young people that means providing some financial support when they first live independently and are in a job at the bottom of their career ladder. So, for example, North Somerset has taken the decision that its care leavers should not have to pay Council Tax until they reach age 22. **We would encourage all local authorities to consider how they can support their care leavers like this, using the flexibilities at their disposal.** Further examples are provided later in this Section.

Care Leaver Covenant

- 3.9 The corporate parenting principles will apply to local authorities. But we want other public, private and charitable bodies to be able to set out how, as members of civil society, they too will make a commitment to support care leavers. **So we will introduce a new voluntary care leaver covenant that organisations can sign up to in a way that makes sense to them. We plan to launch the covenant during ‘care leavers’ week’ in October 2016.**
- 3.10 The covenant will provide an opportunity for central government departments to set out the services and support that they offer care leavers. **The Cabinet Office, for example, has already made a commitment that every child in care or care**

leaver aged 16 or 17 has a guaranteed place on the National Citizen Service programme.

- 3.11 The voluntary and charitable sectors already play a key role in both supporting individual care leavers to develop skills and confidence, as well as providing support materials that allow frontline practitioners to develop ways of working with care leavers that take account of their unique experiences. We want to harness all this energy and enthusiasm, working in partnership with voluntary sector and charities to promote the covenant and to encourage others to get behind it.
- 3.12 We will also use the covenant to build on successful work with employers who have provided opportunities to care leavers, such as those provided by the Marriott Hotel chain through the 'From Care2Work' programme, funded by DfE. But the role of businesses could potentially go beyond offering work opportunities and we will be exploring how the private sector could help to make the transition to adulthood and independence easier for care leavers.

Care Leaver Local Offer

- 3.13 One of the most common concerns raised by care leavers is that they are not aware of either their legal entitlements, or the wider support that is available to them locally. **Our second legislative change, therefore, will be to place a requirement on local authorities to consult on, and then publish a local offer for care leavers.** This will complement the local offer already in place covering the education, health and social care services available for children and young people who have Special Educational Needs or are disabled.
- 3.14 Many local authorities already have forums that allow care leavers to feed back views on their leaving care support; and to find out more about what support is available to them. And many authorities also consult their care leavers about what additional support they would find helpful. Our legislation will formalise that process where it currently happens and extend it to every local authority, so that every care leaver in the country is aware of the support that they can expect.
- 3.15 As well as setting out care leavers' legal entitlements, including its policy on Staying Put, the local offer will describe the other non-statutory services that the local authority leaving care team provides specifically for care leavers, such as health drop-in sessions. It will also set out how relevant universal services could support care leavers' transitions to adulthood, such as careers advice services for all young people. The requirement to publish the local offer will bring greater transparency and allow local authorities to learn about services that are being provided in other local areas.

Extending support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25

- 3.16 At present, all care leavers receive support from a local authority Personal Adviser to age 21. The Personal Adviser helps the care leaver to make the transition to independence, using a 'pathway plan' to identify the steps the young person needs to take to achieve their goals; and how the local authority will support them to do so.
- 3.17 If a care leaver remains in or returns to education, support from their Personal Adviser continues up to age 25. But other care leavers, including those who are (NEET), are not currently entitled to continuing support. **In recognition of the extra vulnerability of those who are NEET and the fact that many young people in the wider population continue to get support from their parents until their mid-twenties, we are extending support for all care leavers to age 25.** We will provide additional funding for local authorities to implement this new duty.

Outcome 2: Improved access to education, training and employment

“Instead of saying that all care leavers should be in education, employment or training, they should say, step-by-step, let’s look at ways of doing it.....if we don’t do that stuff (education and training) then we just continue the stereotype. We need to be encouraged to challenge the stereotype!” Care Leaver

- 3.18 For the period ending March 2016, we are collecting data on 17 and 18 year-old care leavers for the first time (to be published in October 2016). Combining this with the data that we already collect on 19, 20 and 21 year-olds will give us a much clearer picture of care leavers’ career progression as they leave care and move towards independence.
- 3.19 What we do know about the activity of 19 to 21 year-old care leavers in the year ending March 2015 is that, at this stage in their journey: 6% are in HE; 18% are in other types of education; 23% are in training or employment; and 39% are NEET, of which around a third are NEET due to disability or young parenthood²³.
- 3.20 We want to help all care leavers to reach their full potential, whether that is going to college or university, taking up an apprenticeship or getting a skilled job. That will require a range of approaches: supporting those with high potential to achieve,

²³ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education’s [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

as well as removing barriers for those who have either fallen behind or need extra support to remain in education or training.

- 3.21 While we have introduced a number of recent reforms to improve the educational attainment of children in care – including making it a statutory requirement that local authorities appoint a Virtual School Head to raise attainment of looked after children; and providing £1,900 a year extra to schools to support the progress of every Looked After Child on their register, through the Pupil Premium Plus – it is still the case that only 14% of children in care achieved 5 good GCSEs in 2015, compared to 53% of non-looked after children²⁴.
- 3.22 This limits the options open to care leavers when they leave school and requires us to think creatively about how we provide the opportunities for care leavers to catch up on education that they have missed out on; and to develop the essential knowledge and skills that will enable them to make progress. This provision must be flexible enough to respond to the needs of individual care leavers (for example through allowing the length of courses to be extended so that additional support can be provided).

Work-based Learning

- 3.23 The government has asked Lord Sainsbury to review technical education, including the needs of young people who are not ready to access a technical qualification at age 16 (or older if their education has been delayed). The government's response to this challenge will be set out in 'The Skills Plan', which will be published shortly.
- 3.24 Care leavers with Education, Health and Care Plans or statements of SEN who need more help to make the transition from education into employment can access supported internship study programmes. Based primarily at an employer, they are tailored to the individual needs of a young person to equip them with the skills they need for the workplace. The young person and the employer will receive support from an expert job coach throughout. **We will provide Personal Advisers with more information on supported internships so that they can be promoted to care leavers who would benefit from this sort of intensive support.**
- 3.25 The government is committed to reaching 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. Under apprenticeship frameworks, funding for the costs of training is covered for all 16-18 year-olds. The same level of funding is in place for

²⁴ Statistics about care leaver cohort taken from the Department of Education's [Statistical First Release Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2015](#)

apprentices aged 19-23 who are care leavers. As an incentive to employers to recruit more care leavers, and in line with wider government policy, **we will now extend this further to all care leavers up to age 25**. This provision will also be in place for apprenticeships delivered under standards (the new employer-designed, higher quality apprenticeships). The introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017 will mean that the way apprenticeships are funded will be changing. We will publish more information about the new funding arrangements shortly.

- 3.26 We have been asked throughout the development of this strategy document whether we can require companies bidding for public procurement contracts to offer apprenticeships for care leavers. Under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015²⁵, account can already be taken on a case by case basis of wider social benefits, including workforce composition, within the tendering process where these link sufficiently to the subject matter of the contract in question. **We have recently been successful in including apprenticeships and skills development considerations as a whole in government procurements with a value of £10 million and above.**
- 3.27 We are also aware that the Children's Commissioner's office will shortly be publishing a report on widening access to apprenticeships for children in care and care leavers. We welcome this and will give careful consideration to its recommendations so as to try to find new ways of increasing opportunities for children in or leaving care to take up apprenticeships.

Further Education

- 3.28 For many care leavers, their progression route from school will be to a further education (FE) college. All 19-23 year-olds are entitled to free education and training to achieve their first full Level 2 or 3 qualification, and all adults are entitled to free English and maths up to Level 2. Care leavers are a priority group for financial support through the 16-19 Bursary Fund administered by FE colleges, to help with the costs of studying and to help support care leavers' retention in learning. Following our recent reforms to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system, those care leavers with SEN and Disabilities who need longer to complete and consolidate their education, are now able to maintain their Education, Health and Care Plans until the age of 25 where needed, so that they get the support that they need to achieve their education and training outcomes.

²⁵ [Public Contracts Regulations, 2015](#)

3.29 The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) is funding the Learning & Work Institute (LWI) to **deliver a programme of work to support care leavers' access to, and achievement in FE, employment and apprenticeships**. This will include:

- The development of an existing BIS guide for care leavers into an interactive resource which provides care leavers and their Personal Advisers with essential information about: what courses are available and their progression routes; sources of advice and support (including financial support); and case studies, all of which would support pathway planning for care leavers;
- Working with employers and others to identify effective approaches to enable care leavers to gain experience of the workplace and progress towards employment/apprenticeships, possibly through traineeship opportunities. The outputs will include case studies and a resource for employers;
- Promoting and sharing examples of best practice in engaging and supporting care leavers to succeed in FE.

3.30 We know that many care leavers' lives begin to become more settled when they reach their late teens and early twenties and it is only at this point that they feel ready to return to education. To support care leavers up to age 21 who wish to catch up on the education they may have missed out on when they were younger, Income Support/Universal Credit is available to care leavers who take up full time study in non-advanced education (i.e. secondary level education). Because Universal Credit work related requirements are tailored based on individual characteristics, care leavers who take up full time study will not have requirements applied.

"It's really important to give Care Leavers a chance to go to university when they are a bit older. When we first leave Care, just sorting out our life is the first priority - finding a home, a job, learning to function independently, finding friends, building a community, perhaps marriage and/or having kids-- all those things tend to come first when you don't have 'roots'. For many of us it's important to get these essentials sorted first, and then we can think about furthering our education." Care Leaver

3.31 The data we collect does not currently tell us how many care leavers have taken advantage of this opportunity; or allow us to evaluate the impact of this provision, but we are committed to continuing to work with DWP to provide this evidence. DWP is willing to explore what more can be done in the benefits system to support those wishing to return to education beyond age 21 and up to age 25.

Higher Education

- 3.32 The government is committed to widening access to higher education (HE) for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including care leavers. A key driver for widening participation is through 'access agreements' that are agreed by the independent Director for Fair Access (DfA). The DfA has agreed 183 access agreements for 2016/17, which **include plans for universities to spend more than £745 million on measures to improve access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds**. Support for care leavers in access agreements has grown considerably over the years, with around 80% of access agreements including specific action on supporting care leavers.
- 3.33 The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) **has included a Care Leaver identifier as part of the HESA student record, which will support better analysis, research and evaluation for care leavers**. This will also enable more robust monitoring of sector performance in supporting care leavers, including through access agreements. **The government has also funded a National Network for the Education of Care Leavers**, which provides HE activities and resources for care leavers, children in care and the people who support them, which can be accessed at: <http://nnecl.org/about/background>.

Employment

- 3.34 Care Leavers will often need extra help to find work. Jobcentre Plus has introduced a 'marker' that allows care leavers to be identified on their system and receive additional help. We want to ensure that as many care leavers as possible benefit from the support that is available, and **we will continue to work with DWP to explore the potential for better sharing of data, both between DfE and DWP analysts to support better tracking of care leavers' long-term outcomes; and between local authorities and local Jobcentre Plus offices, to support better joint working**.
- 3.35 The benefits of that improved joint working at a local level is evident in the arrangements in Barnet, known as 'The Barnet Hub Model', where, funded by the Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund, a Jobcentre Plus Work Coach is co-located in the local authority leaving care team, along with a care leaver charity called Drive Forward, who deliver an intensive, 1-2-1 employability programme. This model, which began in late 2014, has already helped over 70 care leavers into work. DWP has run a number of events to raise awareness of this model across the Jobcentre Plus network.

Barnet Care Leaver Hub Case Study

Kemi was placed in care at age 14. When she left college at age 18, staff at the Barnet Care Leaver Hub supported Kemi in finding full time work.

“Upon graduating from college at age 18, I met Patricia, my Jobcentre Plus work coach at the Barnet Care Leaver Hub. Patricia was a breath of fresh air, nice, calm and welcoming to my situation. I felt I could talk and engage with her and in doing so I saw my confidence grow. Patricia introduced me to Sam from the Drive Forward team and together they helped me work on my CV. They became a driving force in making me proactive with my job searches and with their help and support I am now working full time.

I can only say ‘thank you both’ for making all this possible, your interaction and commitment at the Hub not only makes me a success but is commendable. The support Patricia has given me goes far beyond anything I have received before; she’d call to check how work is going, advising me on financial matters and reminding me that rent has to be paid as always. Thank you Patricia and Sam.”

3.36 To support all young people aged 18 to 21 who are unemployed, the Youth Obligation will be introduced from April 2017. This will mean that:

- From ‘Day 1’ of their claim, 18 to 21year-olds will participate in a three-week Intensive Activity Period of support, learning job-search and interview techniques; and structured work preparation. They will be encouraged to apply for an apprenticeship, or take up work experience opportunities, sector-based work academy placements and other work-related training;
- If they are still claiming benefit after six months, and are not in work, on an apprenticeship or participating in work-related training, they will be required to go on a mandatory work placement to give them the skills they need to get on in work;
- Tailored, flexible support will be provided to those in work, but who need to increase their earnings.

3.37 Recognising that there will be some care leavers who need to address complex barriers in order to achieve sustainable employment and transform their life chances, Universal Credit is complemented by Universal Support. Universal Support is there to help people make and maintain their Universal Credit claim, and will assist people with their financial and digital capability throughout the life of their claim. Through Universal Support, DWP is transforming the way job centres work as part of their local communities to ensure they more effectively tackle the

barriers faced by harder to help people and get them into sustainable employment. DWP are considering how best to broaden this approach to help claimants with multiple, complex barriers into sustainable employment.

- 3.38 DWP introduced the Youth Engagement Fund (YEF) in April 2015, to deliver support to young people aged 14-17 years for up to three years. Two out of the four YEF projects target support on young people who are in care or on the edge of care. The aim is to enable young people to succeed in education or training, improving their employability and reducing their longer-term dependency on benefits as well as their likelihood of offending.
- 3.39 The new care leaver covenant will provide a way of expanding employment opportunities for young people leaving care. We know that many local authorities already offer opportunities for care leavers when they are recruiting to traineeships and apprenticeships. We would encourage all local authorities to do so. We also acknowledge that government departments and their agencies could play a greater role in offering work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships and jobs to care leavers and we will consider and discuss with stakeholders how best to ensure that this happens in practice.

Outcome 3: Experiencing stability and feeling safe and secure

“Because I am worried about moving out and having to live on my own without a choice in the matter, people who are not in care get to stay with their parents until they feel ready to move out and I feel that I am nowhere near ready to leave but I don’t have a choice in the matter.” Young person in care

A safe and stable place to live

- 3.40 Local authority Children’s Services are responsible for accommodating 16 and 17 year-old care leavers. Statutory guidance²⁶ states that this accommodation must be safe, secure and affordable; and the guidance was updated in 2015 to make clear that ‘Bed & Breakfast’ (B&B) accommodation should only be used in exceptional circumstances and for no more than two working days. Ofsted reports that the use of B&B is rare in nearly all local authorities that it has inspected.
- 3.41 The majority of young people remain in care until 18 and are either in foster care or residential care. However, for some young people in care and all care leavers aged 16 or 17 who do not return home to their family, they are normally housed in

²⁶ [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)

a range of different types of accommodation settings, including: supported lodgings, semi-independent accommodation, foyers, supported housing and hostels. Much of this provision is good quality and provides the sort of stepping-stone provision, with support, that care leavers need to transition successfully to independent living.

- 3.42 However, during our consultations with care leavers, we also heard examples of poor quality alternative accommodation, some of which had placed care leavers at risk of exploitation, or had led to deterioration in their emotional health and well-being; or to them experiencing problems with drugs or alcohol. It is vitally important, therefore, that local authorities commission accommodation services in ways that ensure that providers are equipped to respond to young peoples' complex needs and operate in accordance with local safeguarding arrangements.
- 3.43 When care leavers turn 18, Children's Services are normally no longer legally responsible for accommodating them unless they are in a Staying Put arrangement (see below). However, there remains a key role for local authority leaving care teams to continue to work closely with Housing Services colleagues to ensure that 16 and 17 year-old care leavers remain in suitable accommodation when they turn 18, using the sort of options listed above; or, if they are ready, to help them to secure and maintain an independent tenancy. Helping care leavers to understand the options available in their local housing market and to prepare for the challenges of maintaining their own home are a key part of the pathway planning process.

Staying Put

- 3.44 For those who leave care at age 18 from foster care, the option now exists for them to move into a 'Staying Put' arrangement where both they and their carer want to continue living together. Staying Put provides the sort of gradual transition to adulthood that is enjoyed by the majority of young people in the general population. It provides continuity of a supportive relationship and care arrangements and we want to maximise the number of eligible care leavers who do Stay Put.
- 3.45 In the first year following the introduction of the duty on local authorities to support Staying Put arrangements, nearly half (48%) of eligible care leavers were living with their former foster carer 3 months after their 18th birthday²⁷. **We will**

²⁷ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

continue to provide funding to local authorities to implement Staying Put over the life of this Parliament, using the £22m provided in 2016/17 as the baseline. We also want to review the implementation of Staying Put and will work with the sector to iron out any implementation issues that the review identifies.

Staying Close

3.46 As highlighted in section 2, in response to Sir Martin Narey's recommendation in his recent report on children's residential care in England²⁸, **we are making a commitment to introduce Staying Close for young people leaving residential care.** Staying Close – similar to the Staying Put arrangements which exist for children in foster care – will enable young people to live independently, in a location close to their children's home with ongoing support from that home. As Sir Martin recommends we are going to pilot variations of the scheme first, through opening a specific stream of the Innovation Programme, in order to understand the costings, practicalities and impact.

Preventing homelessness

3.47 During the year ending March 2015, our data show that over 90% of care leavers for whom information was provided were in suitable accommodation. Less than 1% were recorded as being in Bed & Breakfast accommodation. Around 4% were in custody and 1% were recorded as having no fixed abode or were homeless²⁹. Where care leavers over 18 are homeless, in recognition of their vulnerability they are given automatic priority need within the homelessness legislation until age 22. Care leavers above the age of 21 who are vulnerable as a result of having been looked after also have a priority need. Care leavers are also a priority group within statutory guidance on the allocation of 'social housing'.

3.48 Whilst the legislation provides a crucial safety net, our priority is to stop homelessness happening in the first place. Government is investing over £500 million more over this Parliament to prevent and tackle homelessness. Local housing authorities are required to produce a strategy setting out how they will prevent and tackle homelessness in their area. As part of this process, they should work with Children's Services to consider the needs of care leavers who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

²⁸ [Residential care in England, Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care](#), Sir Martin Narey, 2016

²⁹ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's [Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England \(including adoption\) 2014-15](#)

3.49 This focus on prevention fits well with the approach that has been promoted in the ‘Supported Accommodation Framework’³⁰ for care leavers developed by Barnardo’s and St Basils, with funding from DCLG. We have been working with local authorities to bring Children’s and Housing Services together to focus on solutions to the housing problems that care leavers experience, using the Framework to guide that work; **and DCLG has committed funding to continue to support English local authorities to implement the Framework in 2016/17.**

NB: Issues related to the affordability of housing are covered in a later section on achieving financial stability.

Keeping care leavers safe from harm

3.50 A combination of care leavers’ previous experiences and their current circumstances can put them at greater risk of exploitation. The Home Office (HO) is leading work to help prevent children and young people from being recruited into gangs, being sexually exploited and/or abusing drugs or alcohol.

3.51 The exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults is often a feature of urban street gangs. Children in care and care leavers are at higher risk of being groomed and/or coerced into moving or selling drugs around the country (known as ‘county lines’). It is important that those looking after vulnerable young people understand about ‘county lines’, how to recognise it and how to prevent and protect young people from being targeted and exploited by gangs.

3.52 The Home Office’s approach to Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation was published on 13 January 2016³¹ and sets out the six key priorities for tackling this issue: tackling county lines; protecting vulnerable locations; reducing violence and knife crime; safe-guarding gang-associated women and girls; promoting early intervention; and promoting meaningful alternatives to gangs. The Home Office will work with DfE and DCLG to identify what more can be done to highlight the risks and tackle this issue locally, including identifying and spreading best practice.

3.53 The number of recorded child sexual abuse offences has increased rapidly over the last two years. Research regularly finds that children in care and care leavers are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse/exploitation. For example, based on submissions provided, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England’s enquiry into sexual exploitation in gangs and groups found that 21% of identified victims were in the care system. And we know from local intelligence that

³⁰ [Care Leavers Accomodation And Support Framework](#), Barnardo’s, 2015

³¹ [Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation](#), Home Office, 2016

children's homes are being targeted by perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. We know from speaking to local practitioners and victims that a person does not stop being vulnerable as soon as they turn 18. It is important that young people have access to support when leaving care.

3.54 The Home Secretary launched the report 'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation' in March 2015³². This report sets out a national response to the failures seen in Rotherham, Manchester, Oxford and elsewhere, where children were let down by the very people who were responsible for protecting them. The Government has made significant progress since the report was launched:

- We have prioritised child sexual abuse as a national threat in the Strategic Policing Requirement³³, setting a clear expectation that forces should safeguard children, share intelligence and best practice and collaborate across force boundaries.
- We have delivered additional funding of £10 million in 2015-16 for further specialist teams in the National Crime Agency to tackle online child sexual exploitation, enabling a near doubling of their investigative capability.
- We have delivered a £7 million uplift in funding in 2015-16 for non statutory organisations which support victims and survivors of sexual abuse and confirmed continuation of this £7m fund in 2016-17.
- We have launched a new national whistle-blowing helpline, operated by the NSPCC, for any employee who wants to raise a concern about how their organisation is dealing with a concern about a child. This offers a new, additional, confidential route and will help shine a light on problems and help authorities to spot patterns of failure in order to address them quickly.
- We have piloted joint official health, police and education inspections in a series of six inspections which will be completed by July. This series of inspections will focus on the quality of frontline practice in dealing with child sexual exploitation.

3.55 The Home Office will continue to work closely with the DfE to ensure robust measures are in place to tackle child sexual exploitation including victimisation of children leaving care.

³² [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation](#), Home Office, 2015

³³ [Strategic Policing Requirement](#), updated 2015

Supporting care leavers in the criminal justice system

- 3.56 We know that both children in care and care leavers are over-represented in the criminal justice system. The Prison Reform Trust's inquiry³⁴, led by Lord Laming, has examined why that is the case, including whether they are more likely to be criminalised for relatively minor incidents of criminal damage or aggressive behaviour that would not normally result in police involvement if they occurred in a family home. **We have welcomed the Prison Reform Trust's interest in this issue and will consider the findings from Lord Laming's inquiry alongside the recent report from Sir Martin Narey on residential care for looked-after children, and the forthcoming report by Charlie Taylor on the youth justice system.**
- 3.57 The Ministry of Justice is reforming the prison system so that offenders, including care leavers, can get the skills and qualifications they need to make a success of life on the outside. Central to the reforms is giving prison governors greater autonomy. Governors will have a greater role in determining rehabilitation services, providing the opportunity to innovate and tailor education and training approaches to the needs of offenders.
- 3.58 In September 2015, the Secretary of State for Justice announced that Charlie Taylor would be conducting a review of the youth justice system³⁵. The review is examining how children who offend are rehabilitated in the community and in custody, and whether the system remains fit for the challenges posed by today's young offenders. An interim report was published in February setting out emerging proposals for secure schools for young offenders remanded or sentenced to custody, and an ambition for a more devolved youth justice system.
- 3.59 In 2013, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) appointed a National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Care Leaver Champion – Teresa Clarke, Governor of Swinfen Hall Youth Offending Institute – and has built on this by putting in place a network of regional leads for custodial and probation services.
- 3.60 MoJ has also established a National Care Leavers' Forum within NOMS, bringing together key stakeholders to co-ordinate efforts to support care leavers in prison and probation. The forum has agreed five priority areas upon which its work will focus; identification, recording, entitlements, support and wider awareness. The Forum's efforts have resulted in new data fields being added to prison and probation systems to enable recording of care leaver status. **To ensure care**

³⁴ [In Care, Out of Trouble, an independent review Chaired by Lord Laming](#)

³⁵ [Written Statement to Parliament, Youth Justice, September 2015](#)

leavers receive the support they need, regional training events are being held to raise awareness of care leavers' unique status and their entitlements among prison and probation staff.

- 3.61 The NOMS care leaver forum provides a way of developing better joint working arrangements between local authorities, prisons and probation services. Local authorities are required to continue supporting care leavers while they are in prison and should visit them to see how they are getting on and to update their pathway plan. This has not always happened consistently. Last year we revised guidance to local authorities to make clear that those in custody who were pursuing a course of education should continue to be entitled to Personal Adviser support, up until age 25.
- 3.62 **The Forum will continue to explore ways of improving communication channels, so that local authorities are updated if a care leaver is moved to a different prison; and are notified in advance when a care leaver is released from prison, so that they have time to put a package of support in place when they return, including a place to live.** The Forum will also explore how best to integrate pathway and sentencing plans so that they are coherent and so that Personal Advisers can work together with those in prison and probation responsible for the young person's progress.
- 3.63 **As part of its commitment to better support the care leavers it looks after, NOMS will through the Forum pursue avenues for enabling direct work with care leavers in prisons which supports them to develop strategies that will help them to succeed when they leave prison or probation services.**

Supporting refugee and other foreign national care leavers

- 3.64 Unaccompanied children arriving in the UK are immediately transferred into the care of a local authority. The crisis in Syria and events in the Middle East have seen an unprecedented number of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe. Some have gone on to reach the UK via northern France, including many who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).
- 3.65 Local authorities are therefore looking after increasing numbers of UASC and supporting more care leavers who are former UASC. There were 3,206 asylum claims from UASC in the year ending March 2016, a 57% increase on the year ending March 2015³⁶.

³⁶ [Home Office Immigration Statistics, January to March 2016, Asylum Data, Volume 3](#)

- 3.66 This increase has placed pressure on some local authorities with high numbers of UASC in their care. That is why **we are introducing a national transfer scheme, underpinned by powers in the Immigration Act 2016. From 1 July 2016, the Home Office has also significantly increased the funding local authorities will receive for caring for UASC and for supporting former UASC.**
- 3.67 Most UASC are granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or some other form of leave to remain in the UK (73% of initial decisions in the year ending March 2016)³⁷. Effective pathway planning for UASC should take into account the child's immigration status, support timely engagement with the Home Office to resolve any outstanding immigration issues, and look ahead to their long-term future in the UK or to the possibility that they will be expected to make plans to leave the UK and resume life in their home country if they have no lawful basis to remain here.
- 3.68 For those former UASC care leavers whom the courts agree do not need our protection, and who have no lawful basis to remain in the UK, the Immigration Act 2016³⁸ makes alternative provision for any accommodation, subsistence or other social care support the local authority considers they need prior to their departure from the UK. This could include, for example, support from a Personal Adviser. The DfE and the Home Office will be working together with local authorities and relevant non-governmental organisations on the development of the regulations and guidance required to implement these new support arrangements. **DfE will consult on revised guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied and trafficked children, later this year.**

Outcome 4: Improved Access to Health Support

“There should be more services to talk to when you just need help with your experiences – not necessarily CAMHS.” Care Leaver.

Mental Health

- 3.69 At our consultation events, care leavers reported a range of situations where they had experienced poor emotional health and well-being, but failed to get the support that they needed. For most, this was linked to feeling lonely and isolated, causing them to feel depressed, anxious or to have a lack of confidence. But some care leavers reported more serious cases of committing self-harm, suicidal thoughts or more serious personality disorders. Older care leavers reported

³⁷ [Home Office Immigration Statistics, January to March 2016, Asylum Data, Volume 3](#)

³⁸ [Immigration Act 2016](#)

particular problems accessing adult services, due to the higher thresholds involved.

- 3.70 We recognise that making the transition from being in care to living independently at a young age can be particularly challenging for care leavers who are receiving support to improve their emotional health and well-being, as it often coincides with a transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services.
- 3.71 The government set out its plans to improve our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in the 2015 report *Future in mind – promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing*³⁹. The report sets out that significant improvements can be achieved through better working between the NHS, local authorities, voluntary and community services, schools and other local services. It also makes it clear that many of these changes can be achieved by working differently, rather than needing significant investment.
- 3.72 **The Government is committed to implementing the vision set out in *Future in mind*, and is making available an additional £1.4 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament to support improvements to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services.** In October 2015, local areas in England were required to submit Local Transformation Plans (LTPs) for child and adolescent mental health, setting out how they will improve the emotional health and well-being of children and young people in their area, and support those with mental health problems, across the whole care pathway.
- 3.73 An Expert Group has been set up to produce care pathways, quality standards and models of care for looked after children and care leavers with mental health problems. This will consider the best way of improving outcomes for care leavers based on the evidence available. **Guidance will be produced for professionals working with care leavers and for commissioners responsible for their care.** The first meeting of the Expert Working Group, which will work with NHS England, Health Education England, and sector partners, will take place in July 2016. The Group will draw up care pathways and a quality standard and will consider the most appropriate models of care for these groups. Their work is expected to take approximately 18 months.
- 3.74 Transition to adult mental health services is something that the Expert Working Group will be considering. We are aware that some areas are already

³⁹ [*Future in mind - promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing*](#), Department of Health, 2015

reconfiguring their services. In Sheffield for example, a community psychiatric nurse is available to care leavers for consultation within the care leaver team to help them gain access to adult mental health if this is needed, as well as providing one-to-one support. And in Birmingham, services are being provided for children and young people with mental health problems up to the age of 25, to ensure continuity of care and to prevent people having to transfer to adult services automatically at the age of 18. The government encourages innovative local approaches to handling transitions. Whilst it has not mandated a 'one size fits all' approach, we are clear that the principles of good transition planning should be applied: built around the individual, commencing in good time and with strong inter-agency engagement.

- 3.75 **The new Mental Health Services Data Set will collect a comprehensive range of data about children and young people's access to, and outcomes from, mental health services, including for children who are looked-after.** These data will help inform future delivery of services to this vulnerable group of children and young people. In addition, we have asked the new Expert Working Group for looked after children to explore improving the use of information on outcomes for looked after children.

Wider health issues

- 3.76 Statutory guidance on *Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children*⁴⁰ requires local authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and NHS England to ensure that there are effective plans in place to enable looked-after children aged 16 or 17 to make a smooth transition to adulthood. The statutory guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies⁴¹ also require health and wellbeing boards to consider the needs of vulnerable groups (such as care leavers) in planning local services.
- 3.77 Since 2013, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has been inspecting local health service arrangements for promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers. **It will publish an overview report of the first 50 inspections shortly. CQC, Ofsted and the other inspectorates also commenced joint targeted area inspections** later this year.
- 3.78 A third of young people leaving care report problems with drugs or alcohol a year later; indeed, young women leaving care are particularly susceptible to

⁴⁰ [Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked-after Children](#), 2015

⁴¹ [Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies](#), 2013

problematic substance use. Any young person who is at increased risk of substance misuse, including those who are leaving care, should be provided with targeted prevention support, which focuses on reducing risks and strengthening resilience. Clear referral pathways into specialist substance misuse services should be in place for those young people who are assessed as requiring structured drug and alcohol interventions. Young people's specialist substance misuse services are available in every local authority, commissioned by local public health teams.

- 3.79 A quarter of young women leaving care are pregnant, and nearly half become pregnant within 18 to 24 months. To support all young mothers better, the number of health visitors has increased by almost 50% since May 2010. Health visitors deliver the Healthy Child Programme (HCP), a universal service for all families. As part of the HCP, health visitors will identify where families need additional support, and the HCP states clearly that one of the risk factors for experiencing additional problems is where one or both parents grew up in care.
- 3.80 For disadvantaged teenage mothers, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)⁴² offers an evidence-based, intense programme of supportive visits. The FNP supports many teenage mothers who have a care background. In October 2015, robust new evidence was published on the FNP programme's effectiveness at improving short term outcomes in England. The FNP National Unit is using this evidence to adapt and strengthen the programme so that it provides more flexibility, supporting nurses to tailor the intervention to client needs, in order to help local authorities to develop a service that meets the particular requirements of vulnerable families in their local area.

Outcome 5: Achieving Financial Stability

"It's hard for someone (coming out of care) to live on their own, pay bills etc. Someone's not going to say 'here's a tenner – I know you're in arrears with your electricity.'" Care Leaver

- 3.81 Most care leavers who spoke to us talked about the problems they had making ends meet. Paying rent, Council Tax, household bills and transport costs meant that many care leavers had difficulty managing their finances and they had often experienced debt and arrears.

⁴² [Family Nurse Partnership](#), 2015

Financial Support

- 3.82 During the last Parliament, the Government introduced Junior ISAs (JISAs) for all children who are looked after for more than 12 months. JISAs are long term saving accounts which can be accessed by the account holder on their 18th birthday. At this point the account will mature into a standard (adult) ISA. Currently over 75,000 accounts have been opened.
- 3.83 Local authorities provide a range of financial support for care leavers. While they are 16 or 17, the local authority is responsible for all of the costs of accommodating them; and provides them with allowances to meet their day to day needs as they are generally not entitled to claim benefits. At the point at which they leave care, care leavers receive a 'leaving care grant' that helps them to furnish their first property. DfE recommends that this should be at least £2,000 and the vast majority of local authorities pay at least that amount. Where care leavers are in further education, they are a priority group for receipt of the 16-19 bursary of up to £1,200 a year; and if they go to University, the local authority is responsible for providing them with an HE bursary of £2,000.
- 3.84 Local authorities also support care leavers financially in lots of different ways. Earlier in this document we provided an example of a local authority – North Somerset – that does not require its care leavers to pay Council Tax until they reach age 22. Many local authorities provide care leavers with free travel passes if they are in education, employment or training. Others provide free access to all of the local authorities' leisure centres. And others still provide care leavers with help to buy clothes for interviews or with the costs of driving lessons where this will help their chances of finding work. We want all local authorities to be thinking creatively about how they can support care leavers in ways that reasonable parents would; and to set this out clearly in their local offers.

Housing Costs

- 3.85 Care leavers up to the age of 22 who rent privately, are currently exempt from a lower rate of Housing Benefit (known as the shared accommodation rate) which is usually applied to single people aged under 35. Instead, they are able to claim the higher one bedroom rate for self-contained accommodation, rather than the rate for a shared house or flat. Once they reach the age of 22 however, they are entitled to the shared accommodation rate unless one of the other exemptions applies. This could mean that some care leavers at age 22 may need to consider moving to a cheaper property, at a time in their lives when many of them are experiencing stability for the first time since leaving care. DWP and DfE will work together to explore if there is any benefit to care leavers from extending the exemption to the 'shared accommodation rate' to age 25, recognising that many young people in the general population are able to enjoy the stability of living in

the parental home until that age. We will also look at possible ways to collect the relevant data relating to the impact and cost of such a change.

- 3.86 The government plans to introduce changes in April 2017 that will remove automatic entitlement to housing support in Universal Credit in certain circumstances. This will only apply to those making new UC claims; who are out of work, and aged 18 to 21. This is intended to ensure that resources are targeted at those who are most in need, with an expectation that those who can should continue to live at home. This ensures young people on benefits face the same choices as those in work and unable to afford to leave the parental home. **The option to remain living in the family home clearly does not apply to care leavers and we have therefore decided that care leavers will be exempt from these changes.**
- 3.87 The government intends to introduce Local Housing Allowance caps, already an established feature in the private rented sector, into the social rented sector. The changes will take effect in April 2018 and will apply to new tenancies signed from April 2016 onwards (or April 2017 onwards in the case of supported housing).
- 3.88 The supported housing sector, most of which is part of the social rented sector, provides valuable support to some of our country's most vulnerable people, including care leavers. It helps them to lead independent lives or turn their lives around and is an investment which brings savings to other parts of the public sector – such as health and social care. The government has been clear that the most vulnerable will be protected and supported through welfare reforms.
- 3.89 We understand the concerns about the potential implications of the Local Housing Allowance cap; however, there is a need for more robust evidence about the sector, and so a joint evidence review by DWP and DCLG is underway. **Alongside this review, which is due to report shortly, we will continue to work with and listen to the supported housing sector in order to develop a long-term sustainable funding regime.**
- 3.90 We need to deliver a system that provides appropriate protections both for those living in this type of accommodation and those who provide it, whilst also making sure that the taxpayer is protected, the government's fiscal commitments are met and that we deliver value for money.

Advice and guidance

- 3.91 As part of care leavers' preparation for independence, it is important that Personal Advisers make those in receipt of benefits aware of what they need to do to continue to receive them. There are also many examples of effective local protocols between local authority leaving care teams and local Jobcentre Plus offices, which can help care leavers to understand the conditions around receipt of

benefits and ultimately remove the need to impose a sanction and ensure that they retain entitlement to benefit (including elements intended to meet their housing costs). Care leavers aged 18 or over who receive a sanction may qualify for a hardship payment. They should apply via Jobcentre Plus as soon as they receive their first reduced benefit payment.

- 3.92 Many care leavers will not be able to access advice about their personal finances from parents or family members in the same way that other young people can. It is therefore crucial that Personal Advisers are able to give them good quality information about managing their money, from budgeting to paying bills on time. Through our review of the Personal Adviser role we will consider how we can best ensure that Personal Advisers are equipped to carry out this role.

4. DRIVING SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

Promoting and Sharing Best Practice

- 4.1 We recognise the need to ensure that decision makers and front line practitioners working with care leavers understand what works – and what doesn't work – and use that knowledge to improve practice.
- 4.2 In the medium-term, we are establishing a new What Works Centre (WWC) for children's social care. It will be an authoritative source of evidence-based advice on what works. Like NICE, it will be able to say clearly which approaches are proven to be effective and should be used. The WWC will support wider reforms for the social work workforce, complementing and strengthening those reforms, in order to create an effective practice environment. We expect the WWC to play a role in harvesting and disseminating the learning from a wide range of interventions.
- 4.3 Before then, we will publish the evaluations of the projects funded from phase 1 of the Innovation Programme that relate to care leavers. We will also shortly be publishing the independent evaluation of the New Belongings project that was commissioned by DfE.
- 4.4 The DfE will continue to work with local authority delivery partners – primarily through the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum – to understand what new challenges local authorities are facing and to work with them to decide how best to address them.
- 4.5 In December 2015, the Prime Minister announced the Partners in Practice (PiP) initiative that will model excellence and innovation in the delivery of children's social care services. The aim is to foster deeper partnerships between the national and local government and to enable and support long-term improvement; the PiPs will be exploring greater freedoms in how they design and deliver their services; provide evidence about new structural models and innovations; and model best practice, share learning and support the wider sector.

Supporting and Challenging Local Authorities

- 4.6 It is important that central government, local authorities and children and young people know how well the care system is working, to share best practice and make improvements when needed. We know a lot about the characteristics of the looked after population but the data does not always give the information we need about the impact of the care system on children and young people, or the outcomes they achieve. To do this, we will focus on measuring the progress

made by children in care and care leavers, as well as continuing to understand their needs and characteristics.

Intervening in failure

- 4.7 We are strengthening our approach to intervening in councils where they fail to provide adequate services for children in need of help and protection, children in care, or care leavers:
- Wherever Ofsted find children's services to be inadequate, we will provide expert scrutiny to diagnose problems and support the council to produce an effective improvement plan within three months.
 - We would expect most of those councils to improve with support and challenge from experts, but councils' progress towards improvement will be reviewed every six months.
 - If these reviews find that insufficient progress has been made, we will appoint a children's services commissioner to review whether services should be removed from council control.
 - We will also immediately appoint a commissioner wherever council failure is persistent or systemic, with a presumption that the service will be placed outside of the council's control, unless the commissioner identifies good reasons not to do so.
 - Where a commissioner concludes that the council does not have the capacity or capability to make the required improvements, we will take action so children's services are removed from council control.

5. HOW WE WILL MEASURE PROGRESS

Outcome Data

- 5.1 DfE will continue to publish care leaver outcome data annually, through a statistical first release, based on data provided by local authorities. For the year ending March 2016, as well as data on 19-21 year-olds, we will also be publishing data for 17 and 18 year-old care leavers. While this data collection provides valuable information, DfE recognises that data collected by other Departments or providers offer the potential to gain a fuller understanding of the outcomes achieved by care leavers. A one-off data sharing agreement is in place with the Ministry of Justice to link pupil level data to prison, probation and police data. We expect the data match to be achieved in 2016. Conditional on the quality of the match and the benefits of the data share, we will consider if a more regular sharing of data would be justified.
- 5.2 A separate agreement is in place with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the DWP and BIS to explore the link between educational achievement and labour market outcomes. This will be used to improve the quality of destination measures. We will also explore the quality of outcome information this data sharing provides, for specific groups such as care leavers.

Ofsted Judgements

- 5.3 By the end of 2017, Ofsted will complete inspections in all local authorities under its inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers – *the single inspection framework*. This cycle of inspections will provide the most detailed baseline assessment of children's services to date.
- 5.4 Between June and September 2016, Ofsted will begin to consult on a new approach to the inspection of local authority children's services from 2018. The consultation will include proposals for a more risk-based and proportionate programme of inspection. It is expected that this programme will retain a sharp focus on the experiences and progress of care leavers.

The Voice of the Care Leaver

- 5.5 There are a number of regular surveys that capture the views and experiences of children in care and care leavers, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) 'State of the Nation' report and Ofsted's survey of children in care. We will review how children and young people's views change over time as a way of assessing the impact of the strategy.

- 5.6 We also recognise and support the need for care leavers to have a direct say in shaping and designing the policies that affect them. **To this end, the DfE will set up a national care leaver advisory group, consisting of care leavers aged between 16 and 25, which it will use to gain insight into the issues that affect their lives and to inform the future evolution of this strategy and the development of care leaver policy.**

Reviewing Progress

- 5.7 The Social Justice Cabinet Committee (SJCC) will provide Ministerial oversight of the strategy. The Minister for Children & Families will produce a progress update to SJCC each year on the implementation of the strategy, as well as possible refinements and updates to it, following the release of the care leaver data that DfE publishes annually in October.
- 5.8 A senior Whitehall officials' group (representing the eight government departments directly contributing to the strategy) will meet twice-yearly to review progress and set new milestones for the next period. A separate officials group will meet quarterly to ensure momentum is sustained; and one meeting per year will be an 'open' meeting at which care leaver representatives from the advisory group mentioned above and voluntary sector organisations will be able to ask questions about progress and next steps.



HM Government

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