

Housing Options and Care Leavers

Improving Outcomes into Adulthood

July 2015

This Inform briefing provides an overview of information, policy and legislation and outlines the importance of good housing and accommodation options that improve outcomes for care leavers. We summarise research evidence about leaving care at a young age, and the positive impact on young people of ‘staying put’ in continuing care placements. Major policy initiatives and legislation are discussed: the *Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers* (Scottish Government, 2013a), *Staying Put Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2013b), and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We present new evidence about housing options and transitioning from care from two sources: the *Throughcare and Aftercare National Survey of Scotland’s Local Authorities* (McGhee et al., 2014) and follow-up survey of the Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers carried out by CELCIS.

Leaving care at a young age: The evidence base

The age at which looked after young people leave care in Scotland remains a key factor in ensuring a successful transition and achieving positive outcomes into adulthood. Care leavers continue to become independent and are expected to look after themselves much sooner than their same-age peers; the average age for leaving care still remains between 16 and 18 years of age, whilst the average age for leaving home in Scotland is around 26 years (Scottish Executive, 2002; Stein 2006; SCCYP, 2008). Increasing numbers of young adults are remaining longer within the family home (ONS, 2013).

Young people who remain in care up to the age of 16 have, are usually unable to return home to live with their families, and so tend not to have the continuing source of emotional, social and

financial support that most young people their age receive in their transition to early adulthood (Cashmore and Paxman, 2006). However, care leavers are often expected to manage multiple changes at the same time: moving accommodation, often moving neighbourhoods and leaving school. This has been shown to exacerbate poor outcomes for care leavers, including poorer educational outcomes, employment destinations, economic activity, housing and health (Wade, 1997; Wade and Dixon, 2006; Broad, 2007; Stein, 2012).

Young people leaving care are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, and studies suggest they are more likely to experience housing instability due to their vulnerability and more limited economic and social resources (Cashmore and Paxman, 2006; Mayock, Corr and O'Sullivan, 2008). A recent study in Scotland found that formerly looked after young people are significantly and disproportionately more likely who become homeless (Harleigh-Bell, 2014). This pattern of transience and movement is not uncommon for care leavers, often mirroring the level of instability experienced through multiple care placements (Cashmore and Paxman, 2006).

The extreme chaos which many young people in care have experienced in their early lives is likely to have left them with a range of conflicting feelings and emotions (Ward, 2014). This legacy and the challenges it can bring means that many care leavers:

...probably had to traverse the most arduous developmental process...then move on to have their outcomes measured against some normative ideal with very little accommodation of difference (Horrocks, 2002, p335).

Even when ongoing guidance and support are available, unresolved childhood trauma significantly affects care leavers' ability to access or make the best use of the support on offer (Burgess, 2007). In comparison with the general population, care leavers, therefore, experience disadvantage, social exclusion and indirect discrimination (Stein, 2006; McMuray et al, 2011).

The importance of Staying Put

Probably the single most influential factor in improving outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers is the age at which they transition from care to interdependence (Broad, 2007; Stein 2012).

The benefits of positively delaying transitions for young people are well-established (Wade, 1997; Scottish Government, 2004; Broad, 2007; SCCYP, 2008; Stein, 2012). Young people who stay longer within the care system tend to have better educational outcomes (Wade, 1997), which can lead to improved employment prospects and economic stability, both areas where care leavers generally fare more poorly than the rest of the population.

Those who leave care at a later age are more likely to have a successful transition to adulthood, including being in settled, safe accommodation (Stein, 2010). Leaving good quality care at a later age provides young people with greater stability, promotes their education, health and wellbeing, and provides a supported graduation to living more independently (Stein, 2010). Formal research and evaluation has tended to come from England, and at present has been confined to exploring staying put within foster/family placement settings (Munro, Lushey, Maskell-Graham and Ward, 2012). Staying put arrangements have been systematically tried, tested and developed over several years and evidence suggests that it has positive outcomes for young people; however, the pace towards full-scale, widespread implementation of staying put, even within foster care settings, has been slow.

‘Readiness’ and moving on

When young people do move on, it is essential that they are able to do so gradually, maintaining positive supportive links with carers, and mirroring the way in which most young people are supported when leaving the family home. Asking ‘Would this be good enough for your child or young person?’ as we are asked to do in *These are Our Bairns* (Scottish Government, 2008) is as valid and important for care leavers as it is for all other looked after children and young people; this includes consideration of how ready care leavers are to move on:

‘Readiness’ is the ability of looked after young people and care leavers to care effectively for themselves, and it covers a range of important, developmental areas: secure, positive social & support networks (including biological and extended family, if appropriate); practical skills and knowledge; engagement in education, training or employment. In each of these the young person must demonstrate the ability to make healthy life decisions. (Scottish Government, 2013)

When care leavers are ready to move on, they are more likely to feel and be settled and safe in their accommodation, and this, in turn, is associated with increased wellbeing and engagement in education, employment or training (Stein, 2010).

Ensuring care leavers are, and remain, in ‘settled, safe accommodation’ requires a continual process of support which meets their holistic needs. Agencies and workers, and where possible, family, friends and mentors, need to support care leavers to: *choose an appropriate time to leave care; to be well prepared; choose suitable accommodation; be and feel safe; generate an income or receive financial assistance* (Stein 2010, p3).

The following support helps care leavers to make a positive transition (Stein, 2010):

- Housing and children’s services need to identify problems with accommodation early on, have clear contingency arrangements - including sufficient emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness - and specialist accommodation for young people with higher support needs.
- Care leavers want and benefit from support services matched to their needs, including leaving care services, out-of-hours support, mentoring and positive family and kinship contact. Care leavers also need practical support with moving and setting up in accommodation.
- Effective service provision requires good communication between leaving care services, adult services and accommodation providers and carers; it should include the young person in decision making (Stein, 2010, p1).

Central to supporting transitions is relationship-based practice, and looked after young people's experience of a positive and ongoing sense of connection and belonging with their carers and care placement (Care Inquiry, 2013; Scottish Government 2013; IRISS, 2015).

Underpinning this is the explicit recognition that decisions about when young people leave care should **not** be based only on chronological thresholds and, they must be *encouraged, enabled and empowered* to stay put (Scottish Government, 2013b, p13) until they are well prepared, both practically and, more importantly, emotionally to make a positive and sustained transition. When young people do move on, it should be in gradual and supported, with realistic timescales which better reflect the experiences of the general population.

Policy and Legal Context

In response to the finding that the average age of leaving care in Scotland remains between 16 and 18 years of age (SCCYP, 2008; Duncalf, Hill and McGhee, 2013; Scottish Government, 2013), there is heightened Government recognition of the need to ensure that looked after young people remain in stable, supportive care placements until they are better equipped for interdependent living. The publication of several key policy documents across the UK positively locates the Scottish approach within a broader recognition that if we are committed to improving long-term outcomes for looked after young people, then we must ensure that they experience stable, consistent care for longer (Munro, Maskell-Graham and Ward 2010; HSCB, 2009; UK Government, 2013; Scottish Government, 2013; Welsh Government, 2012).

Housing Policy for Care Leavers

In Scotland, *Staying Put Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2013b) and the *Housing Options Protocols Guidance* (Scottish Government, 2013a) are part of the recent drive to provide stability in accommodation and combat homelessness for young people leaving care. They bring home the need for safe, settled and sustainable accommodation as a foundation for achieving positive outcomes across a range of measures. These positive outcomes include the ability to engage with and sustain education, training and employment opportunities, as well as the fundamental benefits to health and wellbeing that having safe and stable accommodation provides.

The idea of delaying the exit of young people from care settings until they are ready is not new. But the *Staying Put Scotland* guidance takes this idea further, demanding genuine needs-led assessment and the promotion of consistent, positive relationships (which transcend both settings and roles). The *Staying Put* guidance emphasises the importance of young people being *encouraged, enabled and empowered to stay put*, and that when they do move on it is in a gradual manner, when they are equipped with the necessary practical skills and are emotionally ready and capable.

The *Housing Options Protocols* (Scottish Government, 2013a) guidance is designed to be read in conjunction with the *Staying Put Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2013b) guidance and sets out six key principles of good practice which local authorities and corporate parents should use to ensure positive outcomes for care leavers. These principles reiterate the importance of:

- Connection and belonging, and positive relationships for care leavers' development
- Care leaver readiness for moving on and caring for themselves
- Corporate parenting and the provision of opportunities and supports that any good family would provide
- Care leavers' active involvement in planning and making decisions about their own future.
- Sharing information appropriately and in a timely manner to ensure the most effective and well co-ordinated support is offered to care leavers
- Equality and diversity, meeting the needs of each individual care leaver and addressing the impediments associated with socio-economic disadvantage

The principles reflect the reality that looked after young people and care leavers are not a homogenous group, and effective solutions and services cannot be delivered in a 'one size fits all' manner. Effective and positive solutions should be reached through a robust person-centred approach which is flexible enough to accommodate the evolving, and often complex, needs of young adults in transition.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 contains new provisions to improve corporate parenting and continuing care and aftercare for care leavers. Part 9 (Corporate Parenting) of the Act puts the concept and policy of 'corporate parenting' onto a statutory basis in Scotland, outlining the duties and responsibilities of relevant public bodies. The legislation identifies 24 public bodies as corporate parents and places clear expectations on them to be systematic and proactive in their efforts to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

An organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted.

(Updated Guidance - April 2016).

Part 11 (Continuing Care) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 positively delays the age at which young people move toward more interdependent living by giving new rights to formerly looked after young people to remain in positive care placements until their 21st birthday, thereby providing a legislative footing for the principles of *Staying Put Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2013b). Further, Part 10 (Aftercare) of the Act enables care leavers to request advice, assistance and support up to their 26th birthday.

The underlying implication of much social policy is that young people do not reach full adulthood until the age of 25. For example, benefit and grant rules make it clear that there is an expectation that young people can remain financially dependent upon their parents until age 25. For care leavers, the challenge is to ensure that their corporate parents acknowledge, embrace and discharge their duties fully and meaningfully, in keeping with the core and spirit of the Act.

Scottish Care Leavers Covenant: Agenda for Change

The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (CELCIS, 2015) aims to support the implementation of this recent legislation and policy which has given powers and responsibilities to corporate parents to support care leavers into adulthood. The Covenant represents the ongoing work of a cross-sector

Alliance of key stakeholders including Barnardo's Scotland, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice, Quarriers, Life Changes Trust, Who Cares? Scotland and the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. It builds on the work of the UK *Access All Areas* policy initiative (NCAS/Catch 22, 2012) and fully endorses its two key principles:

- **Care-proofing policy:** Explicit recognition of the vulnerability of care leavers as young adults, prioritisation of them in policy documents and mandatory impact assessments in all public policy areas where care leavers may be affected.
- **Establishing a positive default bias for care leavers:** Ensuring an automatic entitlement to provisions and services for care leavers, up to their 26th birthday. Where discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access, these are exercised in favour of care leavers.

To embed these principles, the Alliance proposes an 'Agenda for Change' which identifies a range of actions and practice changes across a number of inter-related policy themes that relevant corporate parents need to undertake to implement the policy and legislation and improve outcomes for care leavers. These identified actions are informed by research evidence, current practice and the voices and experiences of looked after young people and care leavers, including ensuring that:

- Effective local housing options protocols for care leavers are in place in all local authority areas and Community Planning Partnerships
- Care leavers should not have to present as, or be considered 'homeless' to access the full range of accommodation options
- Measures are in place to provide support to all care-experienced young adults until at least their 26th birthday

The Alliance aims to engage all Corporate Parents and other relevant stakeholders at both national and local level to endorse and sign up to the *Scottish Care Leavers Covenant* whereby they commit to implementing the 'Agenda for Change' and make real the changes required to improve services, practice and outcomes. Putting *Staying Put Scotland* and *Housing Options Protocols* guidance into practice, in conjunction with the new Act, will enable considerably

increased numbers of young people to benefit from the stability and consistency of the care and support they receive.

Throughcare and Aftercare National Study (McGhee et al, 2014) and Housing Options Protocols Survey

This section presents new, previously unpublished evidence from the *Throughcare and Aftercare National Study* (McGhee et al., 2014) and from CELCIS' recent follow-up survey of the *Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers*. Both reveal further insight into the significant difficulties faced by care leavers when transitioning from care.

The national throughcare and aftercare (TCAC) research (McGhee et al., 2014) provides detailed findings about TCAC provision in Scotland, but in this briefing we report on additional information about housing and accommodation. Of 32 local authorities, 27 TCAC teams (or similar) took part in the national research through surveys and / or interviews. Further information about methodology can be found in the main report (McGhee et al., 2014).

A follow-up survey about the *Housing Options Protocols* (Scottish Government, 2013a) was carried out by CELCIS in October 2014, one year after the introduction of the guidance. The survey was sent to Senior Housing Managers in all 32 local authorities, including managers in Registered Social Landlords (RSL) in local authority areas. In total, 37 individuals took part, covering a range of local authorities and RSLs. The majority of participants were housing managers or policy officers (n=35); the remaining two participants were TCAC team leaders. Of these participants, 14 fully completed the survey and 23 partially completed the survey.

Findings: Challenges

The findings presented here represent a combined analysis of results from the national TCAC study and housing options survey (HOPS). Findings from both the HOPS survey (largely representing the housing sector) and the national TCAC study (representing the TCAC sector) highlighted significant difficulties resulting from poor care leaver readiness and lack of appropriate resources within local authorities and RSLs. In terms of poor care leaver readiness, participants highlighted three critical areas:

- **Loneliness and isolation**

Participants stated that care leavers typically feel lonely and scared, and are often isolated in their own tenancy. Feelings of loneliness and isolation were exacerbated for young people who had been used to group living, and if the tenancy was in a new area where they had no family or friends to support them. Poor transport links which made travel complicated, time-consuming and expensive, contributed to isolation. Young people became dissatisfied with their lives on leaving care; this affected their ability to cope, and ultimately affected the likely success of the tenancy.

- **Relationship breakdown**

Relationship breakdown with family members and partners was highlighted as a cause of homelessness amongst care leavers. Young couples (care leavers) with children could split up, leaving one of the parents homeless. Abusive partners were also cited as a cause of homelessness among care leavers. Homelessness could also occur when young people returned to the family home after being looked after in residential or foster care. Family living situations could break down, quickly or over the longer term, leaving the young person homeless.

These examples highlight that even though care leavers may appear to be settled with support from partners and families, problems can still occur. In part, this can be because care leavers may not have developed skills to deal with relationship issues including arguments or domestic violence.

- **Need to build independent living skills**

Young people who leave care at a young age struggle to live independently. They may have difficulty paying rent or bills, and may break tenancy agreements through damaging or neglecting property. In their new-found freedom, young people may have parties and not be capable of, or interested in safeguarding themselves from others who pose a risk. Maintaining a home, cleaning, budgeting, cooking and DIY can be difficult for care leavers to manage. It was

also mentioned that, although typically aware of their rights, lack of understanding about how to meet their responsibilities meant care leavers could struggle to maintain a tenancy.

At organisational level, several areas of difficulty were outlined, some of these reflecting the need for improved joint working. Other difficulties in providing good support were connected to a lack of financial resources, and housing availability; worker expectations, however, were also important. Key difficulties are:

- **Expectations**

Participants suggested that, in many areas, expectations that care leavers will move on from care when they are aged 16 or 17 years persist amongst workers and young people. These expectations are highly normative and thought to be a significant contributor to care leavers' moving on too early and before they are ready. Pressure to move young people on can influence workers who want to free up spaces for other children and young people in need of a placement.

- **Finance and Welfare Reform**

Welfare reform in general is affecting our ability to afford the range of housing support services we would like to provide and will continue to hamper the ability of all vulnerable young people in future, not just care leavers. (Housing Manager)

Local authorities have fixed budgets and face increased financial pressure from rising accommodation costs and lack of a corresponding increase in budget from Government. Placing authorities often feel a pressure to move young people on to cheaper alternatives. For example, some forms of homeless accommodation are significantly cheaper than a Children and Families residential or foster placement.

- **'Out of Authority' Children and Families' Placements**

Participants stated that 'out of authority' residential school placements or foster placements can be problematic, and poor planning can lead to homelessness if care leavers cannot access accommodation in their preferred area. For example, if the receiving, rather than placing, local

authority does not wish to provide accommodation in the area where the young person was placed, they can struggle if they have to return to their original authority where they may have limited connections and support networks.

• **Poor Availability of Housing Options**

In the majority of local authorities, lack of suitable accommodation and poor quality housing were highlighted as problems. In a number of local authorities the geographical spread of available housing was not equal; some towns and cities had good levels of provision and other towns had limited or poor options for care leavers. Rural areas could be particularly affected by poor accommodation options. Emergency and temporary accommodation, when it was required, could be difficult to access, with low availability.

Lack of respite and supported accommodation was identified as especially problematic. This type of accommodation is thought to be critical for helping care leavers to learn independent living skills and receive emotional support, and equally to support care leavers when their tenancy is at risk of breaking down.

Poor accommodation options prevented continuity of care for care leavers and disrupted young people's community connections with family and friends.

• **Poor practice**

Participants highlighted a range of issues which were barriers to effective working towards improving options and outcomes for care leavers. Poor practice was thought to exist in the following areas:

- Some practitioners do not follow policy, procedures or recommended practice
- Reluctance of some social work teams to include housing colleagues in the planning stage for young people leaving care
- Housing staff not understanding the needs of care leavers, and not prioritising their need for support
- Historic lack of trust between housing and social work services affecting joint working

- Use of the homeless route to secure accommodation for care leavers (thereby missing the advantages of planning)
- Giving care leavers new tenancies when previous tenancies have failed (perhaps without addressing the underlying issues)
- Difficulties in encouraging some social workers to consider a range of options, not only council-owned tenancies
- Joint working and sharing of options across authorities and RSLs

- **Data collection**

Data collection and tracking of care leavers could be difficult for social workers because care leavers move frequently. This could mean that episodes of homelessness were missed and that care leavers subsequently lost out on opportunities to receive support. Difficulties can arise in providing support, as young people do not have to declare their prior looked after status, so housing authorities may not have accurate numbers of the care leavers that they provide services to. Additionally, if care leavers report being homeless to another authority, this will not be recorded by the responsible (placing) local authority.

Without good data and up-to-date information, TCAC and housing teams may miss important opportunities to provide support to care leavers. By failing to identify these issues, the scale of the problem and patterns of homelessness (such as sofa-surfing, hostels, frequency, duration and location) are unknown, which hinders the provision of tailored services.

Impact of Housing Protocols for Care Leavers (Scottish Government 2013a)

In the *Housing Protocols for Care Leavers* survey, we asked participants whether this guidance had influenced policy development in their authority or RSL. Of the 14 responses, five participants indicated that the national protocols had informed local policy, two suggested the protocols had had some influence and seven stated that they had not had any impact. This result is somewhat disappointing, however, it highlights that more work needs to be done to ensure that this new guidance is used in the future. Of the participants who stated that the guidance had had some impact, different messages from the protocols had been used by participants to

inform their policy, such as: reiteration of the need to meet corporate parenting duties via an integrated working approach; one local authority area had developed a holistic approach to housing, including widening of housing options, taking into consideration care leavers' needs and aspirations:

Attention and exploration of other housing options, not just focused on securing a council tenancy has influenced how our housing options team deal with these cases - focus now on individual aspirations and needs. However, our social work colleagues are less keen to explore other housing options with care leavers and still view council accommodation as the only long term solution. (Survey Participant)

Another area planning to review their housing policy in the near future reported that *Staying Put will influence any changes*. In a further local authority, a participant stated that the national protocols *prompted us to draw up a specific policy re care leavers*. Another participant commented that the national protocols had provided further support that the homelessness route was not appropriate for care leavers and the need to support young people into their mid-20s:

It reiterates that young people leaving care should not enter the homelessness system, a policy this Authority has had for some time. It also recognises that young people may require assistance up to the age of 26 years. (Survey participant)

Findings: Good Practice and Policy Solutions

In addition to the significant challenges identified by participants, we also learned about many examples of good practice. Most good practice examples featured a holistic approach to support and housing provision. There were several examples of good practice aimed at encouraging children and young people to stay put, for example:

- In a number of areas, Children's Hearings were beginning to make recommendations for longer-term and continuing placements as young people approached care-leaving age, rather than suggesting that young people leave care.

- Mediation work with young people, parents and extended family and kinship carers had helped families resolve problems and keep young people in the family home, preventing potential homelessness. Working with families and encouraging them to engage with services could be difficult. One social work team had dealt with this through a policy of persistence in meeting with young people and families when waiting for young people to return for scheduled home visits. The aim of this approach was to demonstrate ‘stickability’, to show families that they would continue to be supported until the family situation was stable.
- Increased use of supported carers was another approach used to ensure care leavers either continued living with foster carers or had a placement with support prior to moving on to independent living.

Critical to the success of these approaches were new expectations around moving-on dates and the associated value that staff placed on ensuring that young people remained in care longer before moving on to independent living. Young people were encouraged to view care placements as long-term, and were informed by staff that they could leave care when they were ready. Part of this approach in one authority was a care leaver consultation service provided by a homeless outreach team. Outreach staff offered consultations to young people aged 16 plus currently living in residential care, to help them think about independent living and the responsibilities and issues they would have to deal with. This service, which was valued by residential staff and young people, was thought to have prevented homelessness for a number of young people.

Several local authorities had broadened the housing options available for care leavers in their areas. Supported accommodation had been newly developed or built in a number of authorities, and in other areas, plans were in place for this type of accommodation. This was intended to increase the overall amount of accommodation available for care leavers, as well as to provide necessary support to enable young people to develop independent living skills. Providing support to those who were already living independently was addressed in some areas; in one area, for example, a respite flat was developed *to provide a safe and supported haven for young people in the community where their living arrangements were in danger of breaking down* (HOPS Survey Participant).

Increasing housing options included the establishment of ‘out of authority’ agreements to ensure

that care leavers could move out of the placing or responsible authority for work, education or family reasons. Agreements were made for young people who wanted to remain in the area following a Children and Families placement, and for those who wished to move to a new area after they had left care.

The housing application process was another area where local authorities had made changes to improve the process of leaving care. For example, to prevent homelessness, many local authorities automatically awarded care leavers the maximum number of housing points so that they received priority for housing.

The majority of local authorities now no longer use the homelessness route as the main process for care leavers to access accommodation. In one local authority, this did not mean that care leavers could not access supported accommodation for homeless young people, a valued service in the authority, but that a plan was developed for young people's transitions, rather than accessing the accommodation in an emergency which is what the homeless route is designed to be.

To ensure they were receiving appropriate support and managing well, regular monitoring of care leavers was introduced in local authorities. In one local authority, a monitoring and review service was set up for all young people who had their own local authority tenancy. This service works with all young people including care leavers to monitor and track the support offered, to understand young people's progress and needs, and to ensure that appropriate support is provided and coordinated between partners. In another local authority, the TCAC Team and Housing Options Team have *very regular formal and informal meetings at which care leavers are discussed on an individual basis, and we look for solutions tailored to the individual* (HOPS survey participant).

Positive joint working had made the process of allocating housing and support to care leavers a smooth process in one local authority. This authority indicated that they had spent time building relationships between housing and social services. The participant commented that the two services now had an excellent relationship, and through increased understanding of corporate parenting implications for both services, outcomes had improved for care leavers.

Conclusions

Secure, safe and stable accommodation is an essential building block for success and achievement, and has a direct impact on emotional health and wellbeing. It is particularly vital for looked after young people and care leavers who have in many cases experienced instability, transience and uncertainty in their lives. Leaving care too early presents looked after young people with significant challenges, and therefore the full and meaningful implementation of *Staying Put* and continuing care for all looked after young people should be a primary focus for all corporate parents. However, a much greater appreciation of the often complex and challenging journey that care leavers have to make compared to their non-looked after peers should inform practice across all relevant agencies with Corporate Parenting responsibilities. As such, we would recommend that the following key considerations and actions should be reflected in practice across all relevant areas:

- Managers in housing services should aim to ensure that designated housing staff are trained to fully understand the needs of care leavers, and be able to advise other staff or take on lead roles (in respect of care leavers). Similarly, managers in social work services (in particular throughcare and aftercare teams) should ensure that staff have an understanding of housing options and accommodation allocation protocols.
- Information sharing across all relevant Corporate Parents to ensure that key partners are aware of emerging accommodation needs in advance, to enable plans to be put in place to address gaps in provision, or give care leavers meaningful choice. This will ensure that local practice and policy is joined up, with housing and throughcare and aftercare staff jointly working to ensure the best possible housing and accommodation options and person-centred supports are available, based on the holistic assessment of need.
- As outlined in the principles section, young people and young adults who have been looked after should **not** have to present as ‘homeless’ to be provided with accommodation. This principle should guide the development of all Community Planning Partnerships’ Housing Options Protocols.
- Community Planning Partnerships should consider whether Bed and Breakfast or certain hostel accommodation is suitable for care leavers, in light of their vulnerability. In allocating accommodation to homeless households, local authorities in Scotland must already give proper consideration to the suitability of B&B and hostel accommodation for

certain vulnerable groups, including families with children. As a vulnerable group, care leavers should be afforded the same consideration, and we would advocate that **no** vulnerable care leaver should be placed in B&B accommodation.

- Housing and children's services need to identify problems with accommodation early on, have clear contingency arrangements, including sufficient emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness, and specialist accommodation for young people with higher support needs.
- Local authorities should have clear policies in respect of the financial assistance and support they provide to foster carers who offer extended placements and ongoing support to young people after they reach 18 years of age. The role, training and support needs of former foster carers and residential carers in providing ongoing personal and practical support to care leavers should be reviewed further and formalised.
- Issues of equality and diversity must be addressed; care leavers are not a homogenous group. They have individual needs and unique experiences; however, as a group they face significant disadvantage and have disproportionately worse outcomes than their peers. This requires Corporate Parents to take positive action to ensure that the developmental and support needs of care leavers are appropriately and adequately addressed to maintain their transition to adulthood and interdependence.

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