

NLCAS Policy Briefing

Care Matters: *Time for Change*

Introduction

We know that leaving home or care is not a linear process. Most young people leave and return several times before successfully leaving home. The arrangements for those for whom leaving home means leaving care need to better reflect this reality and to put into practice the ethos of leaving in a gradual and prepared way.

In *Time for Change*, the Government recognises the importance of 'continuing support' to care leavers, but in some areas the details of how local authorities will be able to change current practice remains unclear.

A full summary of the *Time for Change* proposals relating to care leavers is available at www.leavingcare.org. This briefing sets out NLCAS' views on these proposals.

Work-force support

All of the pilots to explore the proposals in the White Paper are crucial. We need them to look at how local authorities can keep an 'open door' for those young people who need to return to a more supported environment and how to ensure realistic contingency planning.

We would like models of more flexible working tested in the pilots; for example, a move away from a culture of 9-to-5 office hours to extended working hours and opportunities for meeting with young people at weekends (e.g., Sunday-dinner preparation).

Both foster carers and residential staff could have a role to play in supporting leaving-care services by assisting with this out-of-hours support, and there may be scope to formalise and recompense the current ad-hoc emotional support past carers often continue to provide.

Placements

There are a multitude of questions for the pilots to address, such as: at what rate would the post-18 foster placements be funded and on what legal footing? We are interested to hear more about how these placements would be monitored.

Even with an expansion in the numbers of young people who are able to remain in their foster placements, large numbers will continue to leave care placements to live independently or semi-independently at a young age, when they are still vulnerable. At present, many of these young people continue to move to unregulated places, and we feel strongly that there is a need to address how such places should be regulated, reviewed and inspected to ensure quality and safety. The enhanced role for Independent Review Officers (IROs) is very important here in order to ensure that all young people benefit from placement stability, including those who are not in stable foster care. There will be a need for better links between professionals and training for IROs in those local authorities where IROs currently do not play a role in post-16 planning.

Education

We applaud the Government's continuing commitment to education. We believe that many of the proposals have the potential to make a real difference to children in and leaving care. However, we think the proposals about post-16 education could be improved. We would like to see an extension of the statutory designated-teacher role to further and higher education, and the virtual head having a remit that covers these areas as well. Similarly, the Government should require all further-and higher-education establishments to strive to achieve the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark, which recognises institutions that go the extra mile to support students who have been in public care.

Accommodation

We feel that the proposals in the White Paper relating to ensuring care leavers have access to a range and choice of suitable accommodation do not address sufficiently the issues of quality and support. NLCAS wants to see more rigorous monitoring and regulation of all places care leavers live; preparation for leaving care that deals not just with the practicalities of living alone at a young age but also the emotional demands of the transition to adult life; a recognition of the potential of the birth family to support care leavers; greater flexibility in the provision of permanent housing; and a guaranteed level of support for young people in supported accommodation and their own tenancy.

Support and wellbeing

We believe that support should not stop simply because people have reached particular ages. Nor do we feel that education should be the only trigger for continuing Personal Adviser (PA) support. The extended remit to age 25 ignores the importance of being able to support young adults who continue to need emotional support regardless of their educational goals. Furthermore, our work with local authorities shows us that currently some struggle to allocate PAs even for 16-18 year olds, and we see little in the White Paper to remedy this. Also, with the extended remit to work with older young people is it not time to look at whether there is a need for a qualification that equips people to work with older young people and young adults?

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Finally, we remain extremely concerned about the developments regarding UASC. The proposals risk creating a two-tier care system because the aspirations of this White Paper are not reflected in the Home Office proposals. For example, Home Office proposals in *Planning Better Outcomes and Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children* (www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk) suggest that UASC should move to supported accommodation at the age of 16 rather than remain in foster care; this is strongly at odds with the spirit of extending placements and giving young people a veto on leaving care before age 18. Whilst we recognise the role of the Home Office, we would like to see stronger DCSF commitment to the continuing welfare needs of UASC.

Further information:

Documents relating to *Time for Change* include the reports of the four working groups: social-care practices; placements; future of the care population; and best practice in school. As well as these four reports, the full version of the White Paper, a summary, a young person's version, an equality impact assessment, and an impact assessment (with cost implications) are available at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/timeforchange/

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