

#PRESS STATEMENT#

A group of over 80 leading organisations involved in improving life chances for care leavers today welcomed the Government's Green Paper 'Care Matters' as an opportunity to address some of the issues that lead to poor outcomes for looked after children and care leavers in the UK.

In a joint statement on the publication of the Green Paper, Action on Aftercare, What Makes The Difference?, the National Leaving Care Advisory Service and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum supported in particular:

- Allocating **lead professionals who are empowered to advocate and commission services for children and young people** as they move through the care system. This challenge can not be met by introducing more professionals into children and young people's lives but empowering existing carers or workers.
- Plans to allow all **young people to stay in foster families until the age of 21**.
- Giving **young people the power to veto a local authority's decision to make them leave care** before the age of 18.
- Proposals to give councils a **duty to place children in their care in the best local schools**, with the power to force schools to accept them as well as **provide additional teaching support** to make up for school they have missed.
- Allocating young care leavers **personal advisors until the age of 25**.

However, they also sounded a note of caution.

Jane Sufian, Chair of Action on Aftercare said: "We have been aware of many of the problems identified in the Green Paper for a long time. The sad fact is that many of **these problems wouldn't exist if current legislation were properly upheld and care and leaving care were properly prioritised**. We must now ensure that, this time, these recommendations become a reality."

John Hill, National Manager of What Makes The Difference? (WMTD) said: "What really makes the difference to young care leavers are improved education, training and employment opportunities. The Green Paper should **provide encouragement and support for local authorities to facilitate young people's training and employment**, including work experience."

Martin Hazlehurst, Executive Manager of the National Leaving Care Advisory Service said: "Housing has always been a big problem for young people leaving care. Too often in the past there's only been one chance to move to independence and nowhere to go if things go wrong. **The Green Paper must emphasise the importance of good quality supported accommodation and the responsibility on housing departments to meet the needs of young people from care.**"

The Steering Group of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum said: "We particularly welcome the Government's determination to spread good practice in the care and leaving care world. **By bringing together those working at the frontline**

we can ensure that good practice from one area is passed on more widely. We look forward to being part of discussions around Government proposals to develop a ‘Centre of Excellence.’”

For further information, or to interview to John Hill or Martin Hazlehurst, please contact Sarah Richardson on 0207 840 5614 or 07775 524866.

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Notes to Editors

Action on Aftercare brings together over 25 statutory and voluntary service providers and associated specialist agencies committed to working together to support the development of improved leaving care and aftercare services for young people, including Regional Leaving Care Forums, A National Voice, the Prince’s Trust, NCH, NCB, Barnardo’s, The Who Cares? Trust and Save the Children. It aims to incorporate the views of young people into discussions and proposals and provides a forum for the sharing of research and good practice with the objective of developing proposals for positive changes in policy, training, practice and resource allocation as they relate to leaving and aftercare services.

WMTD is a national partnership which aims to help overcome the issues which lead to poor education, training and employment outcomes for many looked after young people in England. During the period of the project (July 2005 – December 2007) the partnership will pilot and evidence good practice across a range of leaving care services. Its objective is to influence national policy and practice through the re-engineering of the education, training and employment support process for those in and leaving public care, increasing their opportunity for sustainable employment and enabling them to reach their full potential. Partners are drawn from all sectors – national and local government, and the voluntary sector, with young people’s charity Rainer as lead partner.

The National Leaving Care Advisory Service (NLCAS) is a national organisation, supported by young people’s charity Rainer and a partner within the WMTD project. It is devoted to improving the life chances of care leavers. Its work aims to assist, and where necessary challenge, government, local authorities and other agencies who have a responsibility for developing policy around young people in and leaving the care system.

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is the only national network of local authorities on leaving care and currently has 40 members. The Forum aims to benchmark services to young people leaving care with a view to promoting good practice in member authorities.