
Research and Best Practice in the Commissioning of Services for Young People at Risk of Homelessness, Looked After Young People and Care Leavers

Introduction

This report has been produced in response to a request for input from The Commissioning Support Programme (CSP) from South West Commissioners of services for young people at risk of homelessness or entry into care, and of care leaver services.

It sets out the national context affecting service design and re-design, and considers the evidence base for:

- Safely preventing homelessness and / or entry into care for vulnerable 16-17 year olds.
- Promoting good outcomes for care leavers, including effective preparation and securing sufficient accommodation and other services to meet the needs of this group as well as young people who need to become looked after aged 16-17 years.

The report will be presented at a Conference on 20th July 2010 at which messages about demand and the sufficiency of existing provision from across the region will also be considered.

National Context

The national context for commissioning services for this vulnerable group includes:

- Significant increases in the children in care population in some parts of the country, including in particular in the under 2 age group as well as the older teens. These increases are putting pressure on looked after children and care leaver resources nationally.



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- The ‘Southwark Judgement’ and subsequent national guidance¹ to Children’s Services Authorities and Local Housing Authorities about their duties to secure accommodation for homeless 16-17 year old young people². This includes greater emphasis on supporting families to stay together, clarification about the precedence of Section 20 duties over Housing Act duties, a directive to Children’s Services and Housing to work together to ensure that a range of suitable supported accommodation is available for young people in their area, and a directive that Bed and Breakfast accommodation isn’t suitable for 16 and 17 year olds in any circumstances.
- A number of ‘old’ policy imperatives stemming from the White Paper ‘Care Matters’ (2007) that are, however, still pertinent and impacting on the lives of looked after children and care leavers nationally, including:
 - The importance of robust leadership of the improvement agenda from senior managers and Council elected members in each local authority area.
 - The need to secure a sufficient and diverse range of provision.
 - The need to think about and promote the impact of a range of supports and services on young people’s outcomes including educational, mental and physical health, stability, participation, and involvement in positive activities.
 - Piloting and promoting opportunities for young people to stay with foster carers for longer – until age 21.
- Draft care planning and other regulations and guidance for looked after children and care leavers likely to impact on this area of commissioning – proposed implementation date for finalised products is April 2011.

Key Findings - Preventing 16 and 17 years olds from becoming homeless and / or coming into care

The main ‘trigger’ for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown (usually with parents or step-parents). For many, this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and can involve violence. Young people on the brink of care or who become homeless aged 16-17 years are likely to have some or all of the following:

- Attachment problems
- Poor educational outcomes
- Poor physical and mental health
- An involvement in crime and substance misuse

¹ Communities for Local Government 1 April 2010

² See Annex A for Powerpoint Presentation on the Guidance

National policy on preventing young people on the brink of being looked after coming into care is unclear at present, although the coalition government have said that they wish to support the development of effective models of intervention at this high level of need. The Munro Review announced on 10th June 2010 will include an exploration of how social workers and other professionals can work together more effectively to safeguard children and young people at risk.

In the meantime, many local authorities have been working with partners to address and safely reduce the rate of family breakdown for these vulnerable young people. There is no national data collected on a formal basis, but the variation in success from authority to authority in England is reported to be between 30% to 85% of young people presenting as homeless being supported to live with family members.

Commissioning using funding from a range of sources seems to have brought considerable benefits in some areas. Many of the recently developed and more successful models of intervention to prevent youth homelessness have involved multi-component interventions or multi-disciplinary teams of professionals working intensively with the young person and their family to seek an alternative and safe resolution. Key features seem to include:

- Attention to engagement (including addressing practical, relational, cultural and organisational barriers to change within the family).
- Embedding a creative and tenacious family focus at all first points of contact (including some very successful single points of contact).
- Making sure prevention work always takes place alongside assessment.
- Opening up family support and family group conferencing services to this client group.
- Continuing to work to reconcile families beyond decisions to accommodate.
- Investing to make reconciliations sustainable.

Some of these joint projects combine interventions for young people at risk of homelessness with the commissioning of accommodation for 16-17 year olds and sometimes also care leaver services (for example Oxfordshire's Young People's Pathway – see below). Some combine multi-disciplinary team work with an ability to 'buy in' or access a range of other support services, for example: family group conferencing, substance misuse services, teenage pregnancy services, emergency accommodation. In this way, members of the team are allowed effectively to work as lead professionals or budget holding lead professionals.

Both 'off the peg' and bespoke models have been developed and piloted nationally. Some are 'badged' as preventing homelessness services, other as preventing looked after status, or preventing anti-social behaviour.

Example Schemes and Support Programmes include:

Brent Council

This authority has brought together its housing, children's services and Connexions to develop a Supported Youth Housing and Health Service in the form of a co-located multi-disciplinary hub within Children's Services. The hub combines personal advisor, social worker and housing adviser services. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used as a tool to define need and develop a plan, whether or not the intention is to prevent homelessness or to support a young person into accommodation.

The approach to prevention includes 'not accepting a Section 20 on the day of referral' but 'insisting on an alternative process that works for young people' including:

- Intensive (8 week) and urgent responses – this has involved huge staff commitment including to working with young people and families between 7am and 9pm instead of more traditional hours
- Social worker / housing officer interview on the day of approach
- Home visit on the day of approach
- Family Group Conference-style mediation with the family
- Reminding legal guardians of their legal obligations to the young person
- 'Reality check' on housing issues and outlook for the young person
- Referral to other agencies including DePaul mediation and 'crash pad' emergency accommodation
- Support with other housing issues, e.g. overcrowding
- Speedy follow up with young person, family and agencies

Between March and June 2010, the service received 79 referrals. Of those, 63 (80%) are reported to have returned home. In many of the cases where the young people didn't return home, there were child protection concerns.

Other reported successes of the scheme include: more appropriate accommodation for young people who can't return home; no 16 or 17 year olds placed in B&B; a coordinated response to the family by the Council and other agencies; better understanding between Children's Services and Housing; needs of other siblings at risk identified and dealt with; deception identified early on.

Future proposals include to consider the extent to which workers need to retain their separate job descriptions and roles within the multi-agency hub, or whether they can develop a generic worker role; and the development of a full pathway for all accommodation needs.

See Annex B for Slides about this Model.

Time Out Lambeth

This scheme is targeted at 16-17 year olds at risk of homelessness. Young people are referred by Family Services. They are able to stay for between 8-12 weeks in an emergency unit supported by specialist mediation staff who work with the young people and their families to explore all of the options. In the first year of this scheme, 61% of young people returned home or to extended family following this intervention.

The Bridge – Leicestershire

This service provides a single gateway to accommodation services for young people aged 16-17 years originally established in May 2008 to reduce the use of unsuitable B&B for young people requiring 'emergency' accommodation.

The service aims to prevent homelessness in the first place, but also to support young people into suitable accommodation where they can't return home – and to broker services to support them (for example housing services from a variety of districts). Needs assessments are based on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and involve young people and workers developing a structured action and support plan.

The scheme has been able to support approximately 60% of young people to return home and has brought about a 96% reduction in unsuitable and unsupported B&B use since its inception.

Multi-Systemic Therapy

Pilot sites using this off the peg intensive intervention programme target young people aged 11-17 years and families where young people are at risk of an out of home placement in care or custody and the family has not engaged with services in the past. Workers engage the whole family in the intervention, which includes parenting education, increasing involvement in education and training, tackling mental health and substance misuse issues. The recent Parenting and Family Support Guidance (March 2010) identified this as a very effective intervention in terms of reducing offending and the need for young people to come into care, and also that it is highly cost effective. The first UK pilot, which began six years ago in Camden has just reported very positive results in particular in relation to offending by boys. The Care Services Minister, Paul Burstow has received the findings very positively and emphasised the key role that mental health staff and the voluntary sector can play in these schemes. However, a full evaluation of the national pilots is yet to be published.

CLG Support to Develop Local Approaches

Communities and Local Government launched a programme of activity known as the National Youth Homelessness Scheme (NYHS) which has developed a web-based resource of practical assistance to local authorities and their partners in developing and implementing strategies to prevent and tackle youth homelessness at www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness. This includes:

- Third sector prevention work with children and families
- Early prevention and advice

- Mediation and home visiting
- Work in schools
- Local Authority assessment and advice
- Local Authority prevention tools

Promoting Good Outcomes for Care Leavers

For young care leavers, research suggests that achieving successful transition to independence involves:

- Careful preparation including attention to developing the young person's emotional resilience and independent living skills.
- Leaving care at a later age.
- Making the transition gradually and being given second chances when mistakes are made.
- Leaving care from a kinship placement (although the evidence on this is limited) or from another stable placement where there is a good relationship with the carer.
- Being involved in decision making, including about the timing of leaving care
- Being in settled safe accommodation, including having access to a range of accommodation and support services to meet different levels and types of need. Tailor-made flexible support packages that are needs led rather than defined by age or 'category' of looked after child or care leaver.
- Receiving adequate support upon leaving care, including from professionals as well as former carers, friends and those in a mentoring role. Examples include support to engage in education employment or training, out of hours support, mentoring, mental health support services, positive immediate and extended family contact, and practical support with moving and setting up home.
- The early identification of individuals and groups who are at particular risk of poor housing outcomes, for example: young people with social, emotional or behavioural problems; offenders, including those with a history of violence; young people who have run away from care; young disabled people who do not meet the threshold for adult services; and young asylum seekers with mental health problems.
- Developing contingency arrangements agreed across Housing and Children's Services including sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness and for specialist accommodation for young people with higher level support needs.

Key Messages for Commissioners include:

In Relation to Preparing Young People to Leave Care

Local Authorities have a duty to support children in care as they prepare for adulthood. Messages from the available research and national guidance indicate that commissioners and professionals working with young people need to consider how:-

- Levels of placement stability can be improved - there is evidence that young people with fewer placement moves have a better chance of acquiring the skills and resilience to prepare them for adulthood.
- Young people can be effectively prepared for and supported to live independently or semi-independently, including attention to emotional resilience and independent living skills, and helpful information about all aspects of transition.
- All providers of 'in-care' including fostering and residential services are assessed in relation to and provided with appropriate support to enable them in turn to support young people preparing for adulthood and transition (there seems to be a particular concern regarding the ability of foster carers to support young people in acquiring the independence skills they need).
- The young person's key worker is able to facilitate joint assessment with colleagues for example from housing and other services to facilitate multi-agency planning.
- The required outcomes are identified and specified before a leaving care placement is identified for a young person, to ensure those delivering support to the young person are aware of expectations from the start. Also how the quality of placement and support services can be effectively monitored.

Good practice examples include:

Warwickshire

This shire county has in place a programme of training for foster carers looking after 13-15 year olds. The course explores factors that help or hinder transitions to independent, living and how looked after young people are supported to access a positive route into education, employment or training (Realising Young Potential 2009).

Tower Hamlets

This London Borough has produced a clear and comprehensive booklet about the financial and other support available for prospective and actual care leavers. This booklet is regularly reviewed and updated. The council has also commissioned an extensive training programme for young people, in partnership with Connexions, to help prospective and actual care leavers increase their learning potential by improving key skills. The council also ensures that young people's independent living skills are assessed rigorously before accessing permanent accommodation (Realising Young Potential 2009)

North Lincolnshire and Norfolk

Both of these councils have commissioned mentoring schemes targeted at young people in and leaving care. Evaluations have showed that the main benefits for mentees have been: higher self-esteem; better engagement with school; and an outlet for their concerns about all aspects of their lives, such as choosing a course. (Realising Young Potential 2009)

Essex

Young care leavers in Essex have themselves developed a '*welcome pack*'. The welcome pack contains information about the leaving care teams, housing, education and training opportunities, including leaflets on options and skills required to move on, accommodation types, and tenancy management. (Journeys to Home)

In Relation to Promoting Access to a Range of Accommodation and Support Services

Young people have many different needs when coming into care at an older age or leaving care. No one accommodation and support model will suit all and a range of accommodation options is therefore essential.

What is the Range of Provision?

Whatever the care planning and commissioning process in place locally, having a range of placements available to support young people either on the verge of care, in care or leaving care seems to be closely linked with improved outcomes. Example placements and other supports include:

Training flats: there are two kinds; one where a young person tries out living more independently then goes back to their care placement (taster flats); the others are designed to provide support and act as a bridge to independent living. Both types usually have significant support from staff.

Supported lodgings: a room in someone's house where the 'host' provides some support.

Making a Difference & Home from home: Analysis of Supporting People Outcomes (2009) found that, on most outcome indicators, a higher percentage of young people aged 16 to 21 living in supported lodgings achieve positive outcomes across the five Every Child Matters outcomes than those supported in three other types of provision; supported accommodation, floating support, and Foyers. More than 80% of young people in supported lodgings who needed support achieved their objectives in pursuing education

However, the 'Making a Difference' review also found that supported lodgings does not suit every young person and can be administratively and financially complex, especially in

comparison with the scale of service. However, providers who have been delivering this service for a number of years report that the benefits to the young people accommodated in supported lodgings outweigh these factors and offer strong justification for its provision, especially with regards to longer term savings.

In some areas, commissioners have been working in partnership with Independent Fostering Providers as well as in-house fostering services to negotiate mutually acceptable ways of converting foster placements to supported lodgings.

Stonham Housing provides social housing for people in Hampshire on behalf of Hampshire County Council. It also provides supported lodging in family homes for young people over 16, including many leaving care and not yet ready for their own accommodation. Stonham and Hampshire County Council work closely together to ensure that they get the right household for each young individual. Stonham has contracts with Hampshire County Council setting out exactly what services it provides. But the real key to finding appropriate homes for young people is close working with the leaving care team. The leaving care team have successfully placed many challenging young people into suitable households.

Supported housing: This term is generally used to describe shared housing or self-contained flats managed by a housing association or voluntary agency and where trained support staff are around for up to 24 hours a day to support young people while they make the transition to independent living.

Foyers: These are similar to supported housing but usually also offer on-site training, education and access to employment. Young people are usually required to take part in a compulsory activity during the day that will help them move on with their life.

Further information about foyers can be found at the Foyer Federation. www.foyer.net

Foster Care: The Staying Put pilot, which began in 11 local authorities in July 2008, has been targeted at young people who have established relationships with foster carers and has offered this group the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach 21. The aim is to enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support.

The pilot Local Authorities include: Bristol; Cheshire; Dorset; Lincolnshire; Merton; Northamptonshire; North Tyneside; North Yorkshire; Warwickshire and York.

The evaluation is due for completion in September 2011 and aims to assess the extent to which Staying Put meets the objectives and to ascertain the costs and benefits of the pilot

compared to standard leaving care provision. However, in May 2010 an OFSTED inspection in Bristol already referred to the pilot as being successful. The impact on local 'pools' of foster carers must be factored in.

Emergency accommodation such as 'Nightstop', 'Crashpad'. or young people's direct access accommodation. All of these are considered to be preferable to Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

A number of local authorities (see for example Brent and Leicestershire above) have prioritised the elimination of B&B use for vulnerable young people.

Floating support: this kind of support can be used flexibly to assist young people living in a range of independent accommodation, for example to consolidate their independent living skills, or mental health outreach. In some areas, behaviour resource services have been established as part of the CAMHS offer, including direct work with care leavers for example around managing emotions and making transitions, and training for staff.

Specialist accommodation and support services. These have developed in a relatively ad hoc way across the country and have included schemes to meet the needs of young people with:

- Specific substance misuse problems;
- Severe learning disabilities;
- Severe mental health problems;
- Severe behaviour problems;

or ex-offenders, for example those released from custodial settings.

Joint commissioning approaches with other agencies within local authority areas and/or sub-regional commissioning may be helpful here.

Examples from around the country include intensive fostering or 'enhanced' supported lodgings schemes for young people released from custody – using particularly experienced and willing hosts and paying higher rates than for standard services.

Porter Street in Oldham and Statham House in neighbouring Rochdale are commissioned from Depaul UK. Both these services are designed to support young people with multiple needs, particularly those with challenging behaviour who would be at risk of eviction in other settings. There has been close involvement of a range of partners including YOT, Housing, Supporting People, Children's Services, CAMHS, PCT and Substance Misuse Services and the commissioning process was led by Supporting People. Supporting

People funds approximately 60% of the placement costs, with the remainder picked up by the Leaving Care Team and YOT. Complementary mental health services are also commissioned by the PCT. The units provide self contained accommodation and support for young people including high levels of staffing for up to 24 months, but stays of between 6-9 months are more common.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/widerneeds/multipleneeds/engagingandworking/casestudy1>

How to Promote Better Choice and Better Value for Money

Given the potential number of contributing agencies and people here, it is unsurprising that a number of areas have developed multi-agency commissioning and/or pathways for vulnerable young people who may require accommodation.

In some areas, this work has encompassed young people at risk of or becoming accommodated aged 16-17 years as well as care leavers, in acknowledgement of the level of overlap in terms of needs and resources.

Commissioning is merely 'a process for deciding how to use the total resource available ... in order to improve outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way' (Commissioning Support Programme 2009).



Hull Young People's Support Service (YPSS)

Hull YPSS was established in 1999 to provide an integrated, partnership based service to young people in need and young people leaving care. The partnership is led by the Children's and Young People's Service and involves Connexions, the Housing Service and the Primary Care Trust. The YPSS provides the leaving care service and assessment, advice and support on behalf of the local authority and Connexions to any young person in need aged 13-21. The YPSS and Supporting People worked together to develop the young people's elements of the Supporting People Strategy, and supporting people and leaving care funds are used to jointly commission all supported accommodation for young people in the city. At 2008, 98 per cent of young people using supported lodgings were in education, training or employment and 97 per cent of 19 year old care leavers were in suitable accommodation. (Joint Working between Housing and Children's Services 2008)

In many areas, commissioners from across the local authority and partner organisations have found it helpful to develop an evidence-based commissioning strategy with a focus on understanding existing pathways into services and developing a single, jointly owned future pathway based on best practice and messages from young people locally. **A guide to doing just this has been developed in collaboration between the Communities and Local Government Department and the Commissioning Support Programme (see Annex C)**

Oxfordshire Care Pathway

Oxfordshire has developed a joint pathways approach to developing housing and support services for vulnerable young people aged 16-24 who need accommodation. Resources from across the Children and Families Department, Supporting People, and 5 local Housing Authorities have been used to jointly commission a clear pathway of housing and support services to prevent homelessness and improve the quality of accommodation and support with reference to value for money. The pathway is underpinned by a joint commissioning strategy and formal partnership agreement. This local authority estimates that approximately 20% savings have been made whilst delivering services that more closely match young people's needs. The pathway is outlined in diagrammatical form below:

Prevention, Assessment, Referral →		Access →	Progression →	Move – through →	Independence	
Assessment completed by:	Referral co-ordinated by:					
Social worker	Placement Duty Team in Children and Families	Housing and support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) <i>Based in Oxford City only</i>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers aged 16 & 17: completed by social worker • For 16 & 17 homeless: completed jointly by a social worker and housing officer 		Housing for high risk young people with multiple needs <i>Accessible to young people from across Oxfordshire</i>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers aged 16-21: completed by social worker/Leaving Care PA • For 16 & 17 homeless: completed jointly by a social worker and housing officer • For 18 – 24 homeless: completed by referral organisation 	Cherwell, South, Vale and West: District Referral Co-ordinator Oxford City: Reconnection and Referral Co-ordinator	Supported Lodgings <i>Accessible to young people from across Oxfordshire</i>				
		Direct access supported housing <i>Based in Oxford</i>	Supported housing with <i>Based in all districts</i>		Step-down &	Out-reach
						Floating support
	Average time in service	1.5 – 6 months	6-18 months		6 months	3 mths

Other pathway projects have included those where they focus mainly on one segment of this vulnerable young person population, for example Camden has focused only on care leavers. The project was commissioned by Supporting People and jointly funded by Supporting People and Children’s Services.

Whatever the focus or cohort, the aim of an accommodation pathway is almost invariably to enable young people to move through services in a structured way. For example, to move between intensively supported accommodation to more independent accommodation as they develop life skills and confidence, or between emergency highly supported accommodation into more independent accommodation.

Effective pathways often combine accommodation and support options along a continuum including a range of options at each stage and opportunities to step up or down from each:

One	Two	Three	Four
<p>Assessment Services – short stay with emergency access for example Crash Pad / Emergency homeless prevention services</p> <p>N.B. Not all young people will need this! Particularly young people leaving care in a planned way</p>	<p>Progression services – where young people can develop the skills they need to live independently, including support with education, training and employment and to build emotional resilience.</p> <p>Examples include: Foster care Supported lodgings Foyer accommodation</p>	<p>Specialist services – which can cater for young people with high support needs and challenging behaviour – at increased risk of eviction and homelessness</p> <p>Examples include: Specialist 24 hour care services for young people with severe mental health problems Move on accommodation for young people discharged from custody Accommodation and support services for young people with substance misuse needs</p>	<p>Move on options – including resettlement and floating support services</p> <p>Examples include: Private rented sector flats Social housing Flat shares + outreach / floating support</p>

Many areas have recognised that they may not be able to effectively commission a small number of very specialist placement services on their own – and that regional or sub-regional commissioning may be the way forward here.

Some variables to consider when commissioning new or different types of services are:

- Support levels
- Length of stay and degree of flexibility
- Shared with other young people?
- Size of accommodation-based services
- Location – including proximity to key services and support networks
- Affordability – and incentives for employment
- Facilities and support for study
- Diversity issues

Managing Pathways and Individual Cases in Practice

Rather inevitably, though, such pathways need day to day management. In practice, streamlined multi-agency arrangements often need to be in place to manage and monitor:

- Entry points, move through, and exits from the pathway.
- Pro-active attention to prevent placement breakdowns.
- Move on options and support to prevent ‘silting up of services.
- Outcomes for young people linked to agreed objectives for both the individual and the pathway as a whole.

One option is the establishment of a multi-agency panel. Panels demand significant officer time (for example on a weekly basis) and don't in themselves deal effectively with emergencies. However, they can be an effective way of sharing responsibility for decision making as well as securing partner commitment to support. Another option is the establishment of a post or team responsible for co-ordinating and procuring placements and moves within the pathway. These individual posts or teams can often also report to a multi-agency group overseeing the pathway, particularly in relation to the more complex packages of support. Examples include the model described above in Brent.

For two-tier authorities, these processes can be complicated by the existence of numerous district housing authorities. Hertfordshire is a two-tier area with approximately 110 young people leaving care every year where they have established an accommodation manager in leaving care services who is responsible for managing the move-on (district and borough council-housing authority) accommodation needs of young people leaving care. The manager is responsible for developing relationships with the ten district housing authorities. Hertfordshire have identified the following as critical to success in two-tier area: effective communication; clear points of contact, joint training and attending each other's team meetings; investing time and staff resources in housing; gaining sign up from the appropriate level both strategically and operationally (Journeys to Home 2009)

Finally, protocols have also been used effectively, in particular to ensure more effective transition between children's and adults' services for young people with more complex needs. Plymouth has a protocol between adult and children's services to ensure that it better facilitates the transition to adult services. The protocol and transition pathway have a multi-agency agreement and include 'vulnerable young people with complex needs'. The operational group, chaired by Connexions, is a multiagency group that considers all referrals at age 16 and allocates an appropriate adult services worker to work jointly with children's services. The strategic group is chaired by the Learning Disability Partnership Manager and provides monitoring and evaluation of the protocol, feeds into the commissioning function and resolves disputes. (Journeys to Home 2009)

In relation to promoting access to other support services – spotlight on support to engage in education employment or training

The Cabinet Office report 'Young Foundation' (2009) made a number of recommendations for commissioners of services for prospective and actual care leavers as follows:

Leaving Care teams and 16-19 teams in Education should develop and monitor targets to reduce care leavers who are NEET.

Sheffield Leaving Care Team, the 16-19 Team within the education and skills department and the local Connexions service have worked together to share data on Care Leavers. This has begun to pay significant dividends with a focus on care leavers as a priority NEET group, and additional resources being made available, including a specialist EET worker within the 16-19 Team. This has allowed successful targeting of support and has led to a reduction in NEETs over the last few years. (Realising Young Potential 2009).

Derby has a dedicated specialist Education, Employment and Training adviser for all care leavers. One of the benefits has been a single point of contact for all of the local schools, colleges and the university. The most significant improvement in how the team functions is the adviser's scope and depth of knowledge about EET opportunities and how to overcome barriers. The EET adviser also attends interviews with young people, including at the Job Centre, to boost confidence. This has helped to push Derby's performance to one of the best in the country. (Realising Young Potential 2009)

Leaving Care Teams should ensure close working relationships with further and higher education support services.

One suggestion to improve the quality of support for care leavers was getting a named contact in each of the colleges of further education to make joint working effective and to facilitate appropriate courses with minimal entry requirements.

Devon Leaving Care Team, in partnership with the council's education team, have created strong links with a number of further education colleges. Key to success has been getting a named contact in each of the colleges of further education. The Leaving Care Team is able to share basic information with them, highlighting particular skills or talents the young person had as well as potential risk factors. The student welfare officers were then able to

work with the tutors to look at how they could best support the young people. This helped to ensure that Personal Advisers and carers were informed of any problems at an early stage, allowing them to be addressed and enabling more young people to remain in education. (Realising Young Potential 2009)

Local Authorities should engage actively with the 'From Care2work' concept including consideration of how Care Leavers can have access to high quality work experience and employment opportunities.

The National Care Advisory Service - part of the charity Catch 22 – is managing the from Care2work initiative, enabling relationships between 'corporate parents' and employers in order to offer a breadth of opportunities to young people leaving care. All South West authorities are engaged and a large number of national employers have agreed to explore innovative and interesting employability routes. Local Authorities are encouraged to increase opportunities within councils and Government offices and departments have also given their support to from Care2work by offering apprenticeships.

Starting Blocks in York was established in January 2008, when the charity York Cares set up a working group to find ways of helping the city's young people who are leaving care to get valuable skills and experience through workshops and supported work placements. Starting Blocks provides four-week work experience placements with local employers. It has also secured funding to offer skills and employability workshop sessions. The workshops are brought to life with the help of employers who offer taster sessions and site visits.

In response to high levels of care leavers not in education, training or employment, Southwark raised awareness of the issue and launched a coaching scheme under which managers across the council were recruited to mentor care leavers and help them find accommodation, a job or a place in further training. Work opportunities within the council are also explored. "Traditionally, outcomes for care leavers have only been of interest to social care teams. But we wanted people across the council to understand they had a role to play. From a corporate parenting perspective, it's all of our responsibility." (Community Care, March 2010)

Consider extending the remit of virtual head teachers to cover care leavers up to the age of 21.

Salford has extended the responsibility of the Virtual Head to pilot to include all those young people in education up to the age of 21. As well as improving GCSE results for all looked after children, the extended Virtual Head has been particularly important for those young people placed outside Salford, where they were able to advocate directly with local education providers. (Realising Young Potential 2009)

Reduce the delay in accessing benefits.

Access to housing benefit and Job Seekers allowance at the right time can help provider stability which is critical in enabling care leavers to plan for EET.

The Government Office West Midlands began a pilot in 2008 to make it easier for care leavers to apply for benefits two weeks before their 18th birthday using paper forms. A partnership with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) in the Black County has resulted in 95% of benefit claims now being processed by the young person's 18th birthday (Realising Young Potential 2009)

Invest in services that engage with young people, supporting them to develop confidence and self esteem.

These are factors which contribute significantly to enabling young people to enter into Employment Education or Training.

Bristol has contracted Fairbridge, a charity that specialises in working with young people disengaged from EET, to work with a number of care leavers. Following a short induction period, the participants go on a five day outward bound style course, the purpose of which is to develop not only confidence in their own abilities but also how to draw on relationships with others. The Fairbridge model has demonstrated excellent outcomes through young people's improved self confidence and self esteem. (Realising Young Potential 2009)

The Yard is a community organisation based in Suffolk. It works with young people such as care leavers who may be 'switched off' from education and formal training. Through a variety of mentored community project activities, The Yard aims to give young people hands-on experience of work, plus a range of practical skills, while building their confidence. 'The Yard can be a first step in the process towards getting a qualification and ultimately getting a job.

Involving young people in the commissioning process

Young people involvement in shaping service provision is vital in ensuring that commissioned services meet needs. In many areas, where service re-design has been undertaken effectively, young people have had a close involvement, for example through sharing their experiences in relation to existing service pathways and making suggestions about improvements about all aspects of the pathway. Young people can also be involved in:

- Service delivery itself, for example through peer mentoring or participating in individual decisions about their own care
- Service review – for example mystery shopping

A National Voice is the only charity in England run by and for young people from care. They run forums, events and campaigns led by young people – and advise agencies about how best to involve young people.

Right2BCared4 pilots to increase the voice of care leavers in decisions about their care, including moving to an independent placement.

Bristol website R Voice <http://www.rvoice.co.uk/> Example of a website for Children in Care – provides web-based support and advice for care leavers

Key Reports

- a. [What could make the difference? Care leavers and benefits](#) This report outlines how the benefits system is structured in such a way that it can hinder a Care Leavers progress into education, training or employment. The report outlines the priority themes and solutions that emerged. (DSCF March 2010).
- b. [Realising young potential: Supporting care leavers into education, employment and training](#) Produced by the Social Exclusion Task Force with support from the DCSF and NCAS. This report aims to support local authority Leaving Care Teams and their partners to further assist young people who have left care to access education, employment and training (EET). The report is part of the Socially Excluded Adults Public Service Agreement (PSA16) work programme. PSA16 aims to support more vulnerable adults into homes and jobs. (Cabinet Office November 2009)
- c. [Journeys to home: Care leavers' successful transition to independent accommodation](#) A good practice guide for local authorities and their partners on accommodation for young people from and in care. (NCAS 2009)
- d. [C4EO – Increasing the number of Care Leavers in safe settled accommodation.](#) This review tells us what works in increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation', on the basis of a systematic review of the research literature and analysis of key data. It aims to provide evidence that will help service providers to improve services, and ultimately outcomes for children, young people and their families. (C4EO 2009)
- e. [Making a difference: Supported lodgings as a housing option for young people](#) The aim of this guide is to inform and support local authorities' planning and commissioning of supported lodgings within the context of strategies to tackle youth homelessness. It is based on a review of supported lodgings services in 17 local authority areas in England (Communities and Local Government 2008)
- f. [Off the Radar](#) –Insight into the lives of detached children and young people on the streets in the UK and provides an indication of the prevalence of certain characteristics and experiences in this particular sample of children and young people. Only a quarter of the children and young people who participated in the research received interventions to address problematic issues in their lives. (Railway Children 2009)
- g. [Provision of mental health services for care leavers: transition to adult services.](#) The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) carried out research into the provision of mental health services for care leavers. This report sets out the key research findings and recommendations. (NFER 2009)
- h. [No place like home.](#) A survey by A National Voice especially for Housing Workers and Leaving Care Workers/Personal Advisors. The study provides differing housing experiences from young people leaving Care, it also offers recommendations which aim to improve housing and support systems for the better. (A National Voice 2005)
- i. [Commissioning, Delivery and Perceptions of Emergency Accommodation for Young Runaways](#) The overall aim of the project was to generate a set of recommendations which will help local authorities and other key stakeholders to develop solutions that will meet the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways. Children's Society 2009)

- j. [Joint working between Housing and Children's Services](#) Guidance designed to assist local authorities in the exercise of their powers and duties in respect of joint working to meet the needs of CYP who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. (DCSF & CLG 2008)
- k. [Home from Home](#) . Developments in supported lodgings provision for young people (The Fostering Network 2009)
- l. [Towards a shared Future.](#) A guide for commissioners and service providers to improve the life chances of young people with multiple needs through better commissioning. It is targeted at those working in a wide range of sectors including health, criminal justice, local government and the voluntary sector. It focuses on 16-24 year olds who experience a number of vulnerabilities such as mental health problems, drug and/or alcohol misuse, homelessness, lack of legitimate income, contact with the criminal justice system and legal problems. (Revolving Doors Agency 2010)
- m. [Support for Care Leavers.](#) This report illustrates how effective strategies and services help improve the quality of life for care leavers and assist them to make successful transitions into adulthood and independence. It is a small-scale survey based on visits to six local authorities and four secure provisions; it also draws on evidence from social care inspection and takes account of care leavers' views and experiences. The report identifies how barriers to positive outcomes for care leavers have been overcome. (OFSTED July 2009)