



Edward Timpson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Dear Director

Improving Outcomes of Care Leavers

I am writing to you, as Care Leavers Week draws to a close, to thank you for all you are doing to support young people leaving care, to bring to your attention a number of important new developments and to emphasise the importance of the setting up home allowance in helping young people to make the transition to independent living.

As many of you know, I grew up alongside foster children. I know how important and difficult the transition into adulthood can be for them, and for all children in care.

Unfortunately the latest figures show an overall reduction in the number of care leavers in employment, education and training, and that slightly fewer are living in suitable accommodation. But the wide variations between local authorities are very striking; we need all local authorities to learn from the best.

Data Pack

That is why we have today published a data pack on care leavers, complementing those already published on adoption, children's homes and the education of looked after children. The data pack underlines, for instance, the clear links between good outcomes, the number of placement moves and the age when young people leave care. Of particular concern is that nearly one in five children still leave care at aged 16. I hope you will find it very helpful in reviewing your policies and benchmarking your performance.

Charter

Yesterday we also published a Charter for Care Leavers. It has been produced by care leavers themselves, and is all the more powerful because it reflects their aspirations and expectation in their own words. They are very clear that they want us to:

- respect who they are, and remember that they are individuals
- listen to them and place their views at the heart of decisions made about them. If you don't agree explain why.
- provide them with practical help and support
- value their strengths and help them learn from their mistakes
- not forget them when they are no longer anybody's statutory responsibility

I intend to throw my weight behind the Charter and do all I can to help make it become a reality. I hope very much you and your authority will sign up to the Charter and discuss with your Children in Care Council what needs to be done to help embed its principles in day to day practice.

From Care2 Work / Employment

I want us to maximise the employment opportunities for care leavers. I know that in the current financial climate this is not easy. But some local authorities have nonetheless increased the number of care leavers in employment, or in education and training, through focussed action and support. The Government certainly has a role to play here. That is why **last week we announced that we would be tendering for a contract to increase employment opportunities for care leavers, building on the work of the *From Care2 Work* programme.**

This brings the voluntary sector into partnership with national and local employers and local authorities. Thousands of care leavers have already been given opportunities they might not otherwise have had, from taster days through to apprenticeships and full time employment. I hope your authority will take an active part in this programme, if it does not do so already. For my part I will be working hard to encourage more employers to take part in the programme including hosting a seminar later this year.

Accommodation / Staying Put

I hope too that we can address the downturn in the proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation. I am also struck by the numbers of care leavers who have told me that they feel unsafe in their accommodation. **The best local authorities are using Staying Put arrangements** to ensure that care leavers can continue to live with and get support from their former foster carers. I hope very much that you will see such arrangements as a priority in the coming year, particularly where these young people are in further or higher education.

Financial Support – Junior ISAs

Care leavers also need financial help to make a successful transition of independent living. This is one reason why the Government is to open **Junior ISA accounts** for every looked after child who has been in care for 12 months or more, starting on or after 3 January 2011. I feel very strongly that local authorities, for their part, should pay young people leaving care adequate setting up home allowances. Whilst I accept that the cost of setting up home is lower in some parts of the country than others, the amounts paid by some local authorities is simply too low for youngsters to buy the essentials they need.

Care Leavers Grant

In September 2011 the Care Leavers Foundation estimated that it would cost at least £3,000 to enable care leavers to meet the costs of transition, but that the majority of local authorities were paying less than £2,000, and some less than £1,000. Our understanding is that you currently pay £ xxx. I do understand that very difficult financial decisions are having to be made. But I hope your authority will consider increasing this to at least £2,000, and review the figure annually with your Children in Care Council. I am not proposing to set a national minimum amount for this allowance at this stage, but will consider doing so in the future if some care leavers continue to receive an inadequate allowance.

Ofsted inspection reports make very clear that the best local authorities are strong corporate parents, with Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members leading the way in their commitment to championing the needs of looked after children and care leavers. The more I talk to DCSs and Lead Members in my new role as Minister for Children and Families, the more I understand the depth of the commitment there is in very many areas. I share that commitment with you wholeheartedly, and look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

I would be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of your Lead Member for Children's Services.



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