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Policy by Children

A Children's Views Report

Dr Roger Morgan OBE
Children's Rights Director

March 2007

www.rights4me.org

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All Children's Views Reports can be found on our website:

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About the Children's Rights Director

My legal duties as Children's Rights Director for England are set out in the Commission for Social Care Inspection (Children's Rights Director) Regulations 2004. One of my main jobs, with my team in the Office of the Children's Rights Director, is to ask children and young people for their views about how they are looked after when they are living away from home, or being helped by local councils' social care services.

I then tell the Government, as well as the Commission for Social Care Inspection (which does inspections to check on how children and young people are being looked after and supported) what those children and young people think, and about any concerns they have about the care or support they are getting. "Children's Views" reports of what children and young people have told me are published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my Children's Views reports on our children's rights website www.rights4me.org.

The children and young people I ask for their views are those living away from home in England (in children's homes, boarding schools, residential special schools, residential further education colleges, foster care, adoption placements, or residential family centres), those who are getting help of any sort from the children's social care services of their local council, and care leavers.



About this report

This report is unusual. Most of our Children's Views reports are about a particular subject that is important to children and young people, and come from an event, a survey, or a series of discussions that we have held with children and young people on that subject. This report, though, puts together the ideas that children and young people have given us over the past three years on what councils and people providing services to children and young people living away from home, or getting children's social care services, should do. It is a list of the policies that children want people providing services to follow.

There are 107 policies here that come from what children have told us in our consultations. We therefore offer this list to those working with children and deciding policies for children as a major list of what policies children want for themselves.

One of the important messages we have heard from children over the years is that often the policies that are already in place are not always fully carried out. We have written about that in other reports rather than this one. But there is a strong message there that where there is a clear policy, it needs following fairly for each individual child it affects. That would go for new policies as well as those that are there already.

The reason for writing this report now is that I and my team at the Office of the Children's Rights Director are moving on 1st April 2007 from the Commission for Social Care Inspection, to work as part of the new Ofsted. Now seems a very good time to write up in one place – this report – all the main policies that children and young people have told us over the past three years that they think should be followed by people and organisations looking after them.

We have gone through all of our Children's Views reports over the three years – all 26 of them – and taken out the main policies children have asked for from each one. We have listed the policies under the titles of the reports they come from. Those reports can still be found on www.rights4me.org

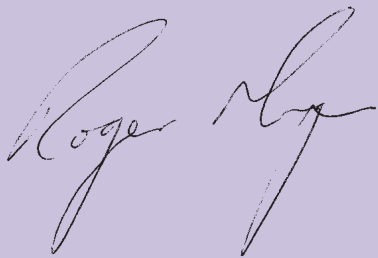
We have listed the policies in the order we first heard of them from children, not in any order of how important they are.

We are sending this report to the Government officials who are looking at how children should be looked after in the future. We are sending the report to Government Ministers, to other key people in Parliament, to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, to Ofsted, to each of the UK Children's Commissioners, and to all children's social care authorities in England. We hope that people making

decisions for children living away from home or getting children's social care services will refer to it and think about the policies children have said they want, when they are making decisions for children.

I want to thank all the children and young people, from all around the country, who over the last three years have come to our children's conferences and events, have filled in our surveys on paper or on the web, have answered our regular Friday mobile phone text questions, or have joined in our discussion groups about so many subjects. I also want to thank all the many staff, carers and parents who have done so much to make it possible for children to come to events or give us their views, and to the staff of the many different places we have visited for our conferences or events.

I also want to say thank you to everyone who has been a member of the team at the Office of the Children's Rights Director over the past three years for making sure that children and young people could use our Office to get their views and worries across to people who make decisions affecting children. As the team moves to its new home in Ofsted, thanks to those members who will be leaving us, and welcome to those who will be joining us to carry on our work to do our best to make sure children's voices are heard and taken seriously.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Myles', written in a cursive style.

Keeping Children Safe

- Safe from Harm (July 2004)
- Younger Children’s Views on ‘Every Child Matters’ (August 2005)
- Children and Safeguarding (January 2007)

Over the past three years, we have often asked children for their views about what the main risks are to children and young people living away from home, in care, or getting help from children’s social care services. When we asked children what they saw as their main rights as children (in “*Children on Rights and Responsibilities*”), they told us that the right to be safe, the right not to be abused, and the right not to be bullied were vital rights.

We have written two major reports on this – one in 2004 and another in 2007. We wrote the first one to feed children’s views in to a review about “safeguarding” that was being done by the Chief Inspectors of different organisations that inspected various services to children. That review made good use of the views children and young people gave us. The second one we wrote for the Government, who wanted to have up to date views from children about risks and staying safe for a new review being done by the Government’s Department for Education and Skills.

We also asked younger children about risks and staying safe – mainly children aged under 12 – who came to our national children’s conference at Legoland Windsor in 2005. We have included their ideas about policies in the list below.

Policy one

Everywhere that children are looked after in any way should have a policy to reduce and deal with bullying, that actually works.

When we have asked about risks to children and what might keep them safer, bullying has been firmly on the list as a risk. Reducing bullying and dealing with it when it happens has always been on the list of what children want everyone looking after them to be expected to do – and to be good at doing.

Children’s ideas for policies about bullying have included having mentors to go to with concerns about bullying, being able to go to any member of staff of your choice – and to people outside your home, school or college – to discuss personal problems, being careful about confidentiality, being careful to check what is actually happening rather

than jumping to conclusions, and discussing what the child who is being bullied wants to happen rather than always dealing with the problem in the same way. Sometimes people want more staff supervision around, they may or may not feel that punishing bullies will automatically help stop the problem, and sometimes they mainly want to have someone to talk to about how to cope with the problem themselves.

Policy two

Tell even young children about the risks there are to them.

We have heard that the best way to make sure that children are aware of the risks of abuse or accident is to tell them fully, and even when they are very young, what can happen and how to protect themselves. Children have said this is necessary, even if it frightens young children, because you never know when that knowledge might save them from harm.

Policy three

Avoid placing children in risky areas, or with strangers. Give them the opportunity to get to know placements and people before they move there.

When asked what social care services can do to help keep children safe, we have been told that these are the two important steps to take. The first is because many young people – including those leaving care – often feel unsafe in risky places they are sent to live in. The second recognises that children and young people feel less safe when they are placed with strangers without the chance to get to know them first, and feeling unsafe is as important as being at risk.

Policy four

People looking after children should make a proper assessment of the risks there are to those children, and take action to make those risks less.

Children have in many of our consultations described what professional adults would call “risk assessment” – identifying risks to children and taking action to reduce them where feasible.

Policy five

Children and young people should be consulted in monitoring how well their staff and carers are doing in looking after them and keeping them safe.

Policy six

Everywhere that children are looked after should have and carry out a policy of helping children avoid getting involved in smoking or misusing drugs or alcohol.

Policy seven

Get people who have experienced the problems of smoking, drug or alcohol misuse to speak to children and young people to put them off.

Policy eight

All places that look after children should have a clear agreed policy about adults touching children and any adult spending time alone with a child.

The important point from children here is that there should be an agreed policy which is safe for the home, school or college concerned, and which everyone knows and keeps to – not that adults shouldn't ever touch children or be able to be alone with a child.

Policy nine

Where children are looked after by staff, those staff should check regularly for what are the risky places and times of the day or week for children, and especially supervise what happens in those places and at those times.

Policy ten

Make sure staff looking after children know and can do first aid and are able to decide what illnesses, accidents and injuries need to be treated by a nurse or doctor.

Children have told us that staff in different places vary a lot in how good they are at first aid. Children also worry that staff looking after them are often not good at telling what is serious and what is not when a child is ill or has an accident or injury. Children tell us that it is an important part of keeping children safe that staff are good at doing these things.

Policy eleven

Children should have a choice of carer or staff member to go to to discuss personal problems or seek help.

Children have told us that it is important that they can go to a person of their own choice if they have a problem to discuss, rather than having to go only to a person who is already their worker or teacher. You may want to go to a different person for a different problem, and may not feel comfortable with the person chosen as your usual worker or teacher.

Policy twelve

Regularly ask children for their views and concerns, give children ways of saying their views and concerns at all times, take what they say as seriously as what adults say, take what they say into account in making decisions that affect children, and tell children what can or cannot happen in the light of their views, and why.

This Policy sums up what children and young people have said to us in very many of our consultations over the past years. We have listed it here because it first came up as a way of helping make sure that children are safe and can raise worries about staying safe – but it has come up when we have asked about lots of other subjects too. For example, it has come up very often whenever we ask about how decisions should be made for children, and how inspectors should check on how well children are being looked after. It is also an important part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and of English law (for example, it comes up in the Children Act, and in many of the Regulations and Standards which set out how services for children should be run).

From what children have told us, over and over again, it is clear that children and young people see a good service as one which does itself ask what children think, and what concerns them, but which also does something about what they say. It may not always be able to do what children want, of course, and there may be good reasons for not doing so, but it will be good at explaining this to children too, so they know where they are and why things are happening that might, for example, worry them. A good service according to children is also one where children genuinely feel able to say what they think, and to raise things that worry them, for themselves, without having to wait to be asked what they think.

Boarding School

- Being a Boarder – a survey of boarders’ and parents’ views on boarding schools (October 2004)
- Boarding School Placement (August 2006)

Policy thirteen

Being placed in a boarding school should be considered for children in care that it is likely to suit, but the right school for the individual child should be carefully chosen with that child.

Placing children in boarding schools is being increasingly considered for children in care. Consultation with children already placed in boarding schools for “boarding need” shows that boarding schools can be suitable placements for children who are suited to boarding living and education. Our consultations with boarders in “mainstream” boarding schools have found that boarders are generally positive about their experience of boarding, but it doesn’t suit everyone, and it is vital to choose the right school for each individual.

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Policy fourteen

If a child in care is placed in a boarding school, there should be a clear plan for their care and accommodation each school holiday, balancing the needs of the child, contact with family, and time with friends.

Restraint

– Children’s Views on Restraint (December 2004)

Policy fifteen

Staff looking after children where challenging behaviour is likely should be trained and skilled in “de-escalating” situations before restraint becomes necessary, in when restraint can be used and when it should not be used, in how to use restraint without causing pain either deliberately or accidentally, in how to use restraint without risk of injury to the child, and in the likely outcomes of restraint for children who are restrained.

This policy puts together a number of key issues that children who have experienced restraint raised with us. Accepting that they sometimes needed to be restrained, they were concerned that restraint is sometimes used as a punishment or to get them to do something, rather than to avoid likely injury to someone or serious damage to property, and that sometimes they are hurt during restraint. This is often when they are restrained by staff who are not trained and experienced in how to restrain safely.

Policy sixteen

The best way for individual children to be calmed down should be recorded in the care plan, known to staff caring for them, and used in place of restraint wherever possible, for all children who are likely to need control of challenging behaviour that risks injury to someone or serious damage to property.

Children respond differently to being restrained, and respond to different methods of calming down as a means of heading off the need for restraint. They advise strongly that the best way of calming each child down should be identified and used in their care when necessary to reduce the need to use physical restraint.

Complaints

– ‘Getting the Best from Complaints’ – the children’s view (February 2005)

Policy seventeen

Whoever decides what should happen after a complaint should tell the child what they have decided, and the reasons for their decision.

Policy eighteen

Children should be enabled to make positive suggestions about their own care or the services they receive, as well as complaints. Positive suggestions should be seriously considered and a response made to the child, giving reasons if the suggestion is not to be pursued, or intended action if it is.

It is clear from what children have said to us that they are just as keen to be able to have suggestions for changes or improvements in their services properly considered, as they are to be able to make complaints if they need to. They tell us they are more likely to make suggestions than complaints. They want seriously made suggestions seriously considered, and to be given some feedback on them.

Policy nineteen

If a recommendation for action comes out of a complaint, there should be a follow up to make sure that the action is carried out.

Policy twenty

Consideration of a complaint should aim to sort the problem out, rather than simply produce a report about it.

Children are clear that if they make a complaint, it is because they believe something needs to be sorted out. They complain as a way of getting action, and do not usually see a report about things – which is what they find often comes out of a complaints procedure, after quite a delay – as solving the problem for them. Children have told us that if their complaint is agreed with, then people need to “sort it – not report it”.

Policy twenty one

Complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible while still doing the job properly, rather than having set timescales.

Policy twenty two

If children consider things have gone wrong in how they are being looked after, they should have the opportunity to discuss problems with someone they trust before deciding whether or not to make a formal complaint.

Policy twenty three

When a child makes a complaint, the people they have complained about should not automatically be told what the child has said.

Children often find that if they make a complaint about someone, particularly someone in charge of their care, that person is usually told exactly what the child has said. This might be to give that person the chance to have their say too, but children tell us that there are often comebacks for the child, and that knowing this might happen puts many children off using complaints procedures. Children have instead suggested that the person should only be told what they need to know to have the chance to put their side of things, that what children have complained about should not be passed on without the child agreeing to that, and that only what the person needs to know should be passed on.

Policy twenty four

In investigating any complaint by a child or affecting a child, what a child says should be taken as seriously as what an adult says, and evidence from children should be weighed equally with evidence from adults.

Inspection

- The Children’s View of Inspection – first report of children’s audits of inspections by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (March 2005)
- Does Inspection Make a Difference? (November 2005)
- Sorting out Inspection – views from children and young people on the government’s proposals about the future of inspection for children and learners (November 2005)

Policy twenty five

Inspectors visiting children’s services should explain to children what they are doing and what they are checking on. They should explain to children that they can tell inspectors anything, good or bad, about the service, that they can tell inspectors anything about the service that worries them, and that they are not expected to try to make their service “pass” the inspection.

Children have told us in our audits of inspection that they often do not know what inspectors are looking at, and that they are not clear what they are expected to tell inspectors. Some have been told different things by their staff or carers about what they should and should not say to inspectors. Children have been clear to us that they will say different things to different people, depending on how they understand what those people are doing.

Policy twenty six

Inspectors should ask children what is important to them in the service, then check those issues for themselves, then finally check back with children on their findings.

Policy twenty seven

Inspectors should ensure that appropriate action is taken on individual concerns that children may raise with them during inspections, and not fail to pursue those issues that are not counted as evidence for the subject of their particular inspection.

Children often tell us that they raise concerns with inspectors, but often nothing happens. They believe that telling a concern to an inspector, even if it is not going to be used for the inspection report, is a proper way of getting something considered and acted upon.

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Policy twenty eight

Inspectors of children's services should be chosen as people who are good at listening to children, and who are usually people that children trust.

Policy twenty nine

Inspectors should give children a choice of ways of giving information to visiting inspectors, give all children in a place they are visiting the chance to give information to the inspectors if they want to, choose which children to invite to meet them at random rather than meeting those the service chose for them to meet, and make speaking to inspectors voluntary. In listening to children, they should listen neutrally to find out children's views rather than coming with their own views, and should feed back to children what they are going to do with what children have told them.

Policy thirty

Inspectors should ensure that staff of an inspected service cannot identify which child or children said what to an inspector (other than where the child agrees or accepts a particular issue is going to be followed up in a way which will identify them).

Children tell us that inspectors are less good than they think they are at keeping who said what confidential.

Policy thirty one

As well as any rules or standards they are working to, inspectors should always take into account the likely effects on children of any findings or recommendations they make.

Policy thirty two

Children in services that are inspected should be given the means of contacting inspectors between inspections if there is a major concern they wish them to know about.

Policy thirty three

Inspectors should feed back their findings to the children in a children's service they have inspected.

Policy thirty four

When inspectors find that something needs changing, they should always follow up afterwards to make sure that it has actually changed.

Policy thirty five

Services that inspectors think are doing well should still be inspected at their present frequency, but services that inspectors think are doing badly should be given additional inspections,

This is a major policy proposal from children. We asked them about proposals that services inspectors think are doing well should have fewer inspections, and those that inspectors think are doing badly should have more. Children agreed with services doing badly getting more inspections, but were against those inspectors thought were doing well getting fewer inspections than they do now. The reasons children gave us for this were that inspectors may not have been right in judging that the service is doing well, that having regular inspections may be something that keeps a service doing well, and that services can change from doing well to doing badly very quickly.

Foster Care

– Being Fostered (June 2005)

Policy thirty six

Foster carers should be given training in helping with any special needs that their current or future foster child has.

When we surveyed foster parents, they told us that although they were usually given good training, their one main need for more training was where a child being placed with them had particular needs that the foster carers may need help in meeting properly.

Policy thirty seven

Children should be given full information beforehand about a foster family they are likely to be placed with, including information about the carers, the house, activities there, and other children in the family. Foster carers should be given full information beforehand about a child who is likely to be placed with them, including information about any behaviour problems and any special needs the child will need help with.

A third of foster children have told us that they needed more information about their foster carers before they moved in, and a third of foster carers too told us that they needed more information about their foster child before they moved in.

Policy thirty eight

When a child is placed in foster care, the child's plan should clearly state whether the child can stay with that foster carer beyond the age of 18.

One of the worries we have heard from foster children is about what will happen when they reach the age of leaving care, and whether they can stay with their foster carers. (This is something the government is now looking at as part of the "Care Matters" discussions).

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Policy thirty nine

Foster children should have the opportunity to meet with other foster children to talk about fostering if they wish, but should not be pressed to do so if they do not wish to meet other foster children.

This is one of those issues on which children had very different views. Some wanted, but didn't have, the opportunity to meet up with other foster children, while others told us this was something they would definitely not want to do. Some said that doing this would make them feel different from other children just because they were fostered, while others said there were issues and experiences that affected them as foster children, or as children in care, that they wanted the chance to check out with other children in the same situation.

Private Fostering

- Private Fostering – some views from privately fostered children on the government's proposals about private fostering (May 2005)

Policy forty

Children going to a private foster placement should be given information they wish about that placement before the decision is made. Possible private foster carers should also be given information they wish about the child who may be living with them, before the decision is made.

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Views of Younger Children

– Younger Children’s Views on ‘Every Child Matters’
(August 2005)

Policy forty one

In addition to the “Every Child Matters” five outcomes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying life and learning, helping others and having enough money, should be added the seven further priority outcomes identified by children: family, friends, food and drink, fun, love, respect and being happy.

The additional seven outcomes came from our younger children’s conference at Legoland Windsor, where children agreed with the government’s five outcomes, but proposed the extra seven, making a “children’s dozen” outcomes.

Policy forty two

Children should be given opportunities to try different activities and hobbies, and to take up and keep personal interests, activities and hobbies regardless of subsequent placement changes.

Children of all ages have told us that they often lose hobbies that they have started, when they have to change placements. Younger children have strongly asked for the opportunity to try new activities, and older children and young people have repeatedly told us that having plenty of activities to do is a major counter to boredom and getting into trouble.

Young Carers

– Being a Young Carer – views from a young carers' workshop (January 2006)

Policy forty three

Whenever adult social services find out that an adult is getting support from a young carer, they should make sure that children's social care services check on whether the young carer needs support for themselves. Young carers should then be given that support, which may include having relief care to give them a break.

Young carers tell us that councils often see them as part of the services available to adults, but also need to see them as children in need of support with their own needs too.

Policy forty four

How councils support young carers should be checked on whenever council services are being assessed.

With adult social services and children's services now separated, it is important that how councils support young carers is monitored – as a good way of assessing how different services work together in the council.

Policy forty five

Young carers should be given training in the tasks they have to carry out as carers, including first aid, lifting, dealing with risks, and giving medication.

Young carers have told us that they are often taking on major responsibilities, but because they are children they are often not given any training in what they should be doing, and so are left to cope alone – and sometimes to get things wrong for the person they are helping.

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Policy forty six

Schools should identify, to staff with a need to know, which children are young carers, and those staff should provide support at school and make sure that necessary allowances are made for their caring tasks.

The allowances needed include things like accepting delays in completion of homework or coursework when children are coping with peaks of caring duties, sometimes missing school in a crisis, and allowing young carers to contact home during school time to check how things are going there when they need to. The support needed at school includes having someone to confide in, teachers being made aware of young carer pressures when they need to be, avoiding staff constantly asking children to explain what being a young carer means, and helping to arrange support at times the child has a peak of caring to do.

Policy forty seven

Young carers should be provided with the support of young carers' groups, including time away to enjoy the company and usual activities of children and young people of their own age.

The young carers we have met have said that they find young carers' groups extremely supportive and valuable, but that they need more support of this type, and this support available in all areas.

Sharing Confidential Information

- Passing it On (January 2006)
- Children’s Consultation on the Children’s Index (January 2006)

Policy forty eight

Information about children should be kept private and confidential. Information should only be given to those who have a definite need to know that information in order to help or look after that child or to protect other people. Even then, no more information than is needed should be given.

The right to have information about you kept as confidential as possible is one of the key rights that children have told us they want. They were clear that the main rule should be that everything about you is kept safely confidential unless there is a clear need for someone else to know that information, either for your own benefit or to protect other people.

The policy above has come from numerous groups of children and young people, of all ages, and from all settings that we have consulted children in. It is a policy that children want to be followed very widely, in all settings in which children are looked after or given support.

Policy forty nine

Information about a child or young person should not be passed on unless doing so is clearly likely to benefit the child or young person concerned, or to prevent serious harm to that child or young person or another person.

This is the central policy to come out of our consultations with children on sharing information. It was passed on to the government for the latest guidance on sharing information.

Policy fifty

Before passing on information about a child or young person, an assessment should be made of; the likely benefit to that child or young person, of the seriousness and likelihood of harm happening to that child or young person or to someone else if the information is not passed on, of any likely harm to that child or young person if the information is passed on, of how likely it is that passing on

the information will actually bring a benefit or prevent serious harm to someone, and of how certain are any facts being taken into account in the decision.

This policy puts together the main issues that children advised us should be taken into account in deciding whether or not to pass on confidential information about a child to someone else. Importantly, it involves thinking through the likely consequences of both passing the information on, and of not passing it on, and checking how sure the person making the decision is of their facts and of those consequences. This is the basis, as advised by children, for deciding whether there is a “need to know” that information.

Policy fifty one

Whether or not a child is able to make a decision for themselves should be based on their understanding of the issue, not their age. Understanding should be assessed, for each decision, by considering whether, once the issues have been explained to the child in a way suitable for them, the child can understand the question they are being asked, can reasonably understand the main reasons behind it, can understand the choices they have to decide between, can reasonably understand what will happen if they choose each of the choices they have to decide between, can weigh up those different choices against each other, can communicate what they want rather than repeating what someone else thinks they should do, and can keep to one decision without constantly changing their mind.

This policy came from our consultations on sharing information, and the government has included it in their guidance on deciding when a child or young person can understand enough to make their own decision on giving permission for information about them to be passed on. It is important to note that the ideas from the children are very similar to what the law already says in other places about deciding when children can decide things for themselves – for example about medical treatment.

It is however an important policy for assessing whether a child understands enough to make any decision, and it is therefore listed here as a policy for other situations where there needs to be an assessment of whether a child is able to make a decision, not just about passing on confidential information.

Policy fifty two

The child should be told, if they are likely to be able to understand the issue, what information is being passed on about them and why.

Policy fifty three

Children should, where practicable, be given the choice of whether they wish information they have provided about themselves or their views to be passed on when necessary by an adult they have already told, or whether they wish to give this information again themselves to others who need to know that information.

This was the children's answer to the worry of many professionals that they should not have to "repeat their story" again to many different professionals, but should only have to say it once and then leave it to the professional they told to pass it on. Children differed in whether they wanted that to happen or not, and many said they would prefer to repeat their own story again so that they were sure that it got across the way they wanted it to. Their agreement was that children should have a choice about this, though of course it is not always possible for the child to be there to tell their story again.

Policy forty four

Children able to understand the issues should be able to look up information about themselves kept on any Children's Index.

Policy fifty five

No person should be able to look up information about any child on a Children's Index unless they are actually working themselves with that child at the time.

Children told us they were very concerned that getting information from an index should be by people who need to know, but that over time many people (such as people who worked with them in the past, people who have had passwords handed over to them to look things up on behalf of someone else) would end up being able to look up a child's information when they had no need to.

Policy fifty six

People looking up information about a child on a Children's Index should be required to state their reasons for that enquiry, each time they look up information.

This was part of how getting information from an Index could be made more secure.

Policy fifty seven

The security of any Children's Index should be kept under review and updated regularly.

The one big concern children had about their information being held on an Index was that they knew computer systems could become insecure and be hacked into very easily. Security measures like chip and pin cards and codes and passwords would soon find their way into the wrong hands. They wanted anyone running such an Index to keep its security level as high as modern technology allows – including using biometric checks before someone can get access to confidential information about a child.

Policy fifty eight

It should be an offence to put incorrect information about a child on a Children's Index.

As well as security, children were very concerned that they could become the victims of incorrect information about them being put on a computerised index. They asked for ways of checking the accuracy of information on any Index, and that there should be fines for people who put wrong information on, as a way of making sure that people checked that information was right, and was kept right, before they put it on.

Leaving Care

– Young People’s Views on Leaving Care (February 2006)

Policy fifty nine

Young people should not be made, or expected, to leave care until they feel ready to leave care, they should have the opportunity to leave care gradually, and to return to a care setting (where possible their previous placement if they wish) if they find themselves needing to do this.

This policy sums up what the great majority of care leavers have told us they need. Not being made to leave care at a set age is something that the government is now looking into as part of its “Care Matters” discussions.

Policy sixty

Young people leaving care should have clear entitlements to money and support after leaving care, that are not dependent on which local authority they were in, or on how effective their social worker or support worker is in securing help for them. These entitlements should be the same wherever they are in the country, care leavers should be told clearly what these entitlements are, and should have ready access to their entitlements.

Care leavers have told us that they usually do not know clearly what help they are able to have, and when care leavers from different local authorities (or even different areas in the same authority) have met at our events and discussions, they have naturally compared notes and found that what money and support there is for care leavers is very different depending on where you live, and often depends on whether your particular social worker or support worker is good at getting money or support for you. They are clear that all care leavers should be entitled to the same support across the country, and should know what they are entitled to. The government is looking at support for those leaving care, and with other organisations, the Office of the Children’s Rights Director has produced a short guide to what care leavers are entitled to (“Your Starter for Ten” – which is on our website www.rights4me.org).

Policy sixty one

Those leaving care should be assisted to secure good quality accommodation, and to move on to other good quality accommodation if they need to do so.

Where they live is a major issue for many care leavers. Many have told us that they have found the accommodation they move into after leaving care is difficult to live in – or sometimes in an area where they are at serious risk. They have also told us that often a care leaver moves on from the accommodation they first went into, and needs further help with finding suitable accommodation after that move.

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Running Away

– Running Away, a children’s views report
(May 2006)

Policy sixty two

Any child or young person returning after running away should be given the opportunity to talk, when they feel ready to do so, to a person independent of the place they ran from, about any problems that led to them running. Action should be taken to resolve any such problems identified.

Children tell us they may run away simply to have fun somewhere, but also to be somewhere (or with someone) they want to be, or to get away from problems (such as bullying or disliking their placement) where they are. If there are problems, these need finding out and dealing with, both as problems in themselves, and to make it less likely that the person will run away again, with all the risks that come from being on the run – for themselves and possibly for others.

Policy sixty three

If police find a runaway child, they should provide that child with the opportunity to talk with an independent counsellor if the child wishes, before returning the child to a place they have run away from.

Residential Family Centres

– Young People's Views on Residential Family Centres (June 2006)

Policy sixty four

Residential family centre provision should be sufficiently local, and run in such a way, that parents' links with their local communities, family, friends and employment are not unnecessarily broken. Centres should positively promote existing links with family, friends and the parent's local community.

People in residential family centres had told us that moving into a centre often means moving away from their home area, and becomes a life separate from their own family and friends. If they are in employment, they can lose their job, which makes return to independent living afterwards even more difficult.

Policy sixty five

Before going into a residential family centre, parents should have (and have a say in) a clear plan which states the date they will be leaving the centre, how they are to be involved in reviewing their own assessment there, the involvement of the other parent of the child if both parents are not being admitted together or do not normally live together, how the centre will enable them to make important decisions affecting their child, and what support they will be given to help them return to living in their families and communities after they leave.

These were the key things young parents told us needed to be sorted out when they went into a residential family centre. Each of these are things they told us it is important to know or to promote for them. For instance, many told us that if a mother is admitted to a centre with her child, the centre may not have a clear plan about how the child's father, who may still be involved with the child afterwards, was to be involved while they were at the centre. Also, many young parents told us that centres were very helpful in supporting them as parents but the one thing they needed to do was to make sure that the young parent was able to make some important decisions for themselves (for example, about immunisations for their child), even if they might make a different decision to what the staff or others at the centre would want.

Social Workers

– About Social Workers (July 2006)

Policy sixty six

Social workers should ensure that they carry out promises and undertakings they make to children and young people.

Carrying out promises is one of the main wishes about social workers that children have made to us.

Policy sixty seven

Councils and organisations that employ social workers should do whatever they can to reduce the number of changes of social worker experienced by children and young people.

Frequent changes of social worker is one of the main problems children have raised with us about social workers and the support they can give.

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Policy sixty eight

Children should wherever possible have a say in who becomes their social worker.

Policy sixty nine

Social workers should regularly visit each child living in a placement, and on each visit should see the child alone somewhere away from the building and carers, where the child feels comfortable to speak freely about their care. Every child living in a placement should have the means to contact their social worker whenever they wish (including by mobile phone, text or email), and the social worker should visit that child if the child asks them to.

Being able to contact their social worker whenever they need to, and being able to speak freely to their social worker on their own away from the people looking after them, are two of the main requests made by children about social workers. Many children tell us that they are not able to see their social worker on their own when they visit.

This policy has been taken into account in the current government Regulations for private fostering, as a result of consultation with privately fostered children. It needs extending to other settings, and to the work of social workers generally. Easy access to social workers is one of the issues now being pursued by the government.

Policy seventy

Social workers should contact children regularly by phone to check that all is well.

Children tell us that phone checks are often as effective as visits, and are a practical way for social workers to keep checking how things are going – especially at difficult times for the child or young person.

Policy seventy one

Social workers should visit, and contact in other ways, children placed outside their own council area, as often as they do children living more locally.

Children have told us that they tend to see less of their social workers if they are placed a long way away. However, they still need their social workers to check up on how they are doing, regardless of the distance.

National Minimum Standards for Care

– Children’s Views on Standards (September 2006)

Policy seventy two

Where a child is too young, or unable to understand, to make or take part in a decision affecting them, they should still be asked if possible for their views and those views should be taken into account in the decision.

While most children have told us that it is important that children can have a real say in decisions affecting their lives if they can understand the issues, many have also said that children who can express a view but are not able to understand the issues should not simply be ignored. They should still be asked for their views and feelings, and these should be properly considered.

Policy seventy three

Children should be able to find out easily what their rights and entitlements are under the law and relevant Standards, and should be told how to find this information out.

Policy seventy four

Children should have a means of rapidly triggering an independent review of how their care plan is being carried out if they believe that their council plans to do something that is against their care plan (such as a placement move that the child believes is not in their own best interests).

This is a proposal that came from discussions of the possible future development of the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer between review meetings. Again, this is something the government is currently considering.

Policy seventy five

Provide children with independent advocates to help them in their care reviews as well as when they make complaints.

Policy seventy six

Make it illegal to discriminate against someone because of their care status or because they were formerly in care.

Making Decisions for Children

– Placements, Decisions and Reviews (September 2006)

Policy seventy seven

Children should always be asked their views and feelings before any decision is made that affects them, unless this is not possible, should be given the explanations they need in a way they can understand. They should not be made to justify their feelings, and their views and feelings should be taken into account in the decision.

This is a policy that follows the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and what is in UK law (such as the Children Act of 1989). But children have told us how vital this policy is that it earns a place in this list. The law provides for feelings to be taken into account for children in care. Children also ask us to make it clear that their feelings should be accepted as they are – you can't properly be asked to give reasons for your feelings or told they are not the right feelings to have. They just are your feelings.

Policy seventy eight

When children are being placed, there should be a sufficient range of placements to provide a choice of suitable placements for each child, the child with their worker should have a choice between at least two suitable placements, whether the placement is working out should be closely monitored following placement, and there should be a suitable backup placement available to move to if the chosen placement doesn't work out.

All too often, children told us they and their social workers had little or no choice of placements, and often that there weren't enough placements available to give a choice or to have a backup placement available if things didn't work out. This policy is therefore a big one for councils, but children tell us it is an important one for them, for more often getting the right placement first time, and for avoiding placements breaking down badly later on. Social workers keeping in close touch to check on things just after a new placement is made is also vital to try to avoid placements breaking down later on, by discussing or dealing with problems of settling in early on, before they become fixed as big issues.

Policy seventy nine

Do not automatically consider adoption for children whose placements are already working out well.

We have heard from foster children that they feel that even stable foster placements lead to discussions about being adopted. Children are clear that adoption is right for some people, but not right for others, and that staying as you are with long term foster carers can be just as right for many foster children. Children tell us that they do not want to feel that they are going to be considered for adoption because there are targets or a general policy that adoption is best.

Policy eighty

Whenever possible, a child likely to change placements should visit any possible new placement and spend time they need to get to know the people and the place before any decision is made. They should be given the information they wish for about the possible new placement, including photographs.

This is a policy which children tell us is not only good in itself, but is important to help avoid placements being made without enough preparation and then breaking down later on. It also means that children are more likely to be able to have a say in their next placement, and more likely to have good notice of when they are likely to change placements which do not have to change in an emergency.

Part of deciding and adjusting is having information about the possible new placement, and many children have suggested that having photographs of places and people before they move is an important way to help them decide and adjust.

Policy eighty one

Unless there are good reasons not to do so, children should be able to keep in touch with those at placements they have left if they wish to.

Policy eighty two

Only move children from one placement to another if it is in their best interests to move, having taken their views and feelings into account.

This seems an obvious policy, but it is one we regularly hear about not being followed, especially where the child is placed somewhere a long way from the council that placed them. We are regularly contacted by children who have been told that they must leave a placement that is going well for them, because it was only approved for a limited period, because there is no more money to pay for it, or

because the council has a policy of not having children placed out of its area if it can bring them back. Children are clear to us that sometimes it is of course right to change placements, but that this shouldn't happen for reasons that are not in their best interests, to do with targets, or the decisions of people dealing with funding rather than what is best for the individual child.

Policy eighty three

Children should have a choice of different ways of feeding their views and feelings into their reviews, recognising that many children do not feel able to get their views across in a review meeting with adults. Their views and feelings should be taken fully into account, and decisions and the reasons for them fed back to children, regardless of how they have fed in their views.

Children have told us that some feel it is good to be able to get their views across to the adults making decisions for them, but others find it very difficult to get things across in a roomful of adults.

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Policy eighty four

Children should be told who will make the final decision on issues raised in their reviews.

We have included this policy because we have found that children have many different ideas about who makes the final decision on something raised in their review, but wish to have this information. Many simply do not know how decisions are made through the review process, and who has the final say.

Children's Rights and Responsibilities

– Children on Rights and Responsibilities
(October 2006)

Policy eighty five

Decisions made that affect a child, and the care and support they receive, should be determined by the needs, wishes and feelings of that child as an individual, not by what is assumed to suit a group of children or children in general.

This is a very basic right that children do have, and it is one that has come top of the list many times in our discussions with children about what they believe to be their own rights, and what they want from the services that care for them.

Many children tell us that decisions are often made for “children as a group called children”, rather than for them individually. Of course the same service might be decided as suitable for a number of different children, but they are clear that the decision about what is suitable should first be made for each child individually and separately.

Policy eighty six

Children should be given the maximum possible privacy in the space they live in, in dealing with personal care and bodily functions, and in being able to be alone if they wish, depending on their own wishes and feelings about their own privacy.

The right to be as private as you want to be was something that children told us was an important right. It is one that children see as being just as important as privacy is for adults – but it is one we are told that children are often not given very much.

The right to your own privacy when you want it is also something that matters whatever age you are, if you feel you want some privacy. Young children have told us that sometimes adults looking after children think that the need for privacy gets greater as you grow older, and that privacy doesn't matter if you are very young. That is not what very young children have told us. Their key point is how much privacy you feel you want, not how old you are – or even how much privacy other people generally want where you are.

Children with illnesses or disabilities that mean they need adults to do very personal care for them also see privacy as very important. Some children who need very personal care have told us that those in charge need to be better at asking the child about privacy, and not making assumptions. For example, many have told us that adults in charge think that what gender your personal carer is is very important. Children tell us that of course this is important, but even more important are how you get on with the person giving you your care, whichever gender they are, and whether they are good at doing what needs to be done – especially if it involves things like using special equipment.

Policy eighty seven

Children should be provided with the opportunity to learn, whether or not they are in school or college, and particularly if they have been excluded or suspended from school or college.

This is another right that we have heard from very many children. Many have told us that professional adults need to separate how a child or young person behaves, from whether they get an education, and make sure that they always get tuition and help to learn even if their behaviour or personal problems have led them to miss out on going normally to school or college.

Policy eighty eight

Whenever decisions are being made about the care or education of children and young people, the likely effects on their friendships should be taken into account.

Children told us that a basic right is to make and keep friends. When they have discussed other things, like their education, they have very often raised the same issue – that changes in where you are placed to live, or changes in which school you go to, are important because of what happens to you having friends as well as because of getting the placement or school right for other reasons. Children have told us very clearly that how easy you find it to make new friends makes a massive difference if you are going to a new placement or a new school – and can make all the difference to whether it succeeds and whether you end up being bullied.

Policy eighty nine

Children should be kept informed of what is happening or likely to happen to them, and also kept informed of progress in carrying out decisions that have been made for their future, including being kept informed when there is little progress being made.

Being kept informed of what is happening to you, and what is happening with decisions that are made about you, is another key right that children have asked for. Part of this is being kept informed of what is happening even when nothing is – if you know a big decision has been made, but you don't hear what is happening, you tend to think the worst. You think you have been forgotten, or things are going wrong. When we talk to social care services staff, we are often told that they have not been able to tell children of what is happening because things are not happening very fast, and there is no news to tell. Children have told us that they want to know just that, too.

Policy ninety

Children should always receive feedback on what has been done with views they have given about important issues in their lives and future, and should always be given reasons for decisions and actions, including the reasons for deciding in a way that goes against their wishes.

Being told what happened to views you gave about something important is another part of being kept informed. Children have always been very clear to us that they realise that there will often be reasons for decisions being made in ways that go against what they might have wanted – but they are also very clear that they believe they should be told those reasons.

It is also important to say here that children have recently been telling us that professional adults are getting better at asking what children think – but that very often children do not know what (if anything) happened as a result of what they said. Giving children feedback on what happened to their views – especially if there were good reasons for doing or deciding something against the child's wishes – is an important way of making sure that children carry on giving us their views rather than feeling (as many do) that there is no point.

Policy ninety one

Children in care should be treated in all possible ways in the same way as children living with their own parents.

Children in care have always told us that they realise that being in care makes differences, not least that they are probably living somewhere else than with their own parents. However, they tell us too that there should be a clear policy that wherever possible, they should not be treated differently from other children just because they are in care.

An example of this has been that often children in care, living in children's homes or foster homes, have not been allowed to stay overnight with friends, or go on sleepovers, like other children in their group of friends, because of rules that they cannot stay where the adults haven't had police checks. (That has never been government policy, and there is guidance saying that children in care shouldn't be treated differently in this way, which was produced by the government because children had told us this. But we still hear from children about this difference happening in some places).

The key point here is that children want there to be no differences that creep in to their lives almost accidentally because they are in care, except those that they can understand need to be there for their own safety or welfare or the protection of other people.

Policy ninety two

Where major decisions are being made for a child's future, including future living placements or school placement, there should be a genuine choice between alternatives on which the child can give their views.

One of the top concerns from many children living away from home or in care, is that when a decision is made, there is often little or no choice – either for the child, or for people like their social worker.

Policy ninety three

A child with sufficient understanding should be able to veto a proposed new placement.

This would be a significant new policy, going one step further than the last one. It is listed here because so many children over the years have told us that they are moved to new placements that they do not feel at all happy to be in, often because they are told there are no alternatives for them. At the same time, professionals and the government are concerned that children in care should have fewer needless changes of placement. When we asked children what would make it less likely that a placement would break down and have to change, the answer has usually been that social care services need to be much better at getting placements "right first time". When asked how this might be done, one of the usual answers is that children should have enough say in the final decision about moving into a placement to make it unlikely that they are being moved somewhere they don't want to go.

Adoption

– About Adoption (November 2006)

Policy ninety four

The process of being adopted should be without delays, but taking the time the child needs for each stage.

Adopted children have told us that for many, the whole process takes too long, and needs to be quicker once decisions are made. But timing is not just going faster or slower. Some things, like paperwork, need to be done faster, but other things may need to go slower for the child's sake, like saying goodbye and getting to know your possible new family before the decision is made.

Policy ninety five

Children being adopted should have the opportunity to meet with other children in the same situation to talk about adoption if they wish, but should not be pressed to do so if they do not wish to meet others.

This is similar to the policy for foster children to meet other foster children if they wish. Again, children were divided on whether or not they would want to meet other children going through adoption to share and discuss their experiences, but most were agreed that they wanted the chance to decide this for themselves.

Policy ninety six

Children going through adoption should be provided with all the information they wish about the process, the stage they are at within it and what happens next, regularly throughout the adoption process.

Again, adopted children told us that they usually wanted to know more about these things, to help them cope with the process, to avoid the worry of not knowing what is going on, and to make it more possible for them to play their own part in their future planning.

Policy ninety seven

Adopted children should be given full information about the reasons they needed to be adopted, and about their birth family and their lives before adoption, if, as and when they wish to know, and should be told once they are able to understand the issue that they can ask for this information.

Not all adopted children wanted to have this information, but many wanted to know that they could get the information if they ever wanted it, and many said that they wanted to know about these things, especially about the reasons for their adoption.

Policy ninety eight

Adopted children should be given the choice about how far they wish to receive news about their birth families.

This was another area in which children had different views about whether they wanted to know or not, but agreed that they should therefore have the choice of whether efforts should be made to keep them informed, and whether they should be told only of major events, or given regular news. Many pointed out that they might change their minds about this as they grow older, so the choice needs to be kept available if possible.

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'Care Matters'

– 'Care Matters' – children's views on the Government Green Paper (February 2007)

Policy ninety nine

Children should be treated differently rather than the same as others where their needs, wishes and feelings differ, and should be given individual pledges by their councils that reflect their different individual needs, wishes and feelings.

The government's "Care Matters" Green Paper proposes that each council should make clear pledges to children. Children agree with this, and with many of the pledges the government has suggested (although they have made their own suggestions, set out in this Children's Views report). But they point out that councils need to make equally clear and strong pledges about the individual needs of individual children, as well as pledges that suit most or all children.

Policy one hundred

There should be no targets for how many children councils should take into care. They should make the right decision for each child, and not try to decide in any individual case in a way which helps meet targets.

This was the one proposal in the government's Green Paper that made children angry. They told us, very strongly, that councils should not try to meet targets rather than make whatever they thought was the right decision in each individual case, accepting whatever numbers of children that led to them taking into care. Children were worried that if councils were trying to meet targets for having fewer children in care, they might be tempted to leave a child at risk rather than take that child into care when the child needed that.

Policy one hundred and one

Before taking a child into care, councils should always check whether a relative of the child is able and suitable to look after the child instead.

This is something the government is now considering. This policy won the top vote of all the government's ideas in "Care Matters" among the children in our consultation.

Being a Child in Care in England

– Looked After in England – how children living away from home rate England's care (March 2007)

Policy one hundred and two

Develop ways of making children safer, and feel safer, when out in towns and cities.

When we asked children how safe they felt in different places where they lived in England, they felt least safe in urban areas like towns and cities.

Policy one hundred and three

Help children's staff and carers at home to help them with their education.

Education of Children in Care

– About Education (March 2007)

Policy one hundred and four

School and college staff should only give the information that a child or young person is in care to staff who need to have that information in order to support the child or young person, and otherwise maintain confidentiality about care status.

In our consultation on education, we heard many different views about whether staff at school should, or should not, be told that a particular child is in care. There was concern that this singled out children, and although it could mean more support, it could also mean people assuming that they would not do well or would have problems, or be the cause of problems. On balance, children agreed that the important thing is that the only people who are told that someone is in care are those who genuinely need to know that in order to work with and help that child. Other staff, and other people (including other children) should not be told – it is up to the child whether or not to tell someone who does not need to know.

Policy one hundred and five

When children come into care or may change living placements, always assess carefully and with the child what are the good and bad things about any possible change of school, and take that into account in making decisions. Identify whether changing school will be overall a good thing or a bad thing for that child at that time, for both their education and their friendships.

We found that children often have to change schools when they first come into care, and again if they have to change the placement they are living at. But children told us that changing schools is often a good thing, for example if you are being bullied at your old school, if the new school is a better one for your education, and if you find it easy to make new friends. But it can be a bad thing if it just makes it harder to follow the curriculum or to take exams, or if it is not such a good school, if you get bullied more, or if you find it hard to lose friends from your old school and not easy to make new ones.

The important thing is to know that having to change schools can spoil your education, or instead it can be a good thing for you, and to find out which it is likely to be for each individual each time before decisions are made, and not to assume things.

Policy one hundred and six

There should be standard entitlements to grant support for education of children in care, made known to children and easily applied for. Grant and other support for education should not depend on individual social worker effectiveness in securing funding, nor on differing individual local authority policy or practice, so that educational support does not depend on where you live.

When children from different councils get together and compare notes in our consultation groups, they are surprised and sometimes angry that they get different types and levels of support. This varies from one council to another, and often depends too on how good their social worker is at getting hold of help for them. Children have asked us to stress that it is important that all councils should try equally hard to support the education of the children in their care, and different councils should not be allowed to decide to invest less in their children's education.

Policy one hundred and seven

Every child in care should have access to individual one to one support to help with problems in their education, including personal problems affecting education, from both carers and from school or college staff.

If you have any comments regarding this report
please send them to:

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