

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Care Matters: Consultation Responses

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1: Executive Summary

- 1.1 **The Government's Green Paper, *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* was published in October 2006. Since then, we have been talking to everyone who might have an opinion on the proposals in the paper. We've spoken to groups representing children, frontline staff, managers and to children themselves. More than 2000 individuals and groups responded to the written consultation, and many more at consultation events. Overall people have been supportive of the Green Paper, although there are concerns about the detail of some of the proposals and people emphasised the need to turn the many ideas into a coherent overall strategy. This paper summarises what they have told us.**

Introduction

"We believe that this paper demonstrates that the needs of our looked after young people are finally being considered with more thought and respect than ever before."

Fostering Network

- 1.2 Care Matters set out a package of proposals to address the significant gap in experiences and achievements between children in care and their peers. It set out proposals for change in relation to intervening earlier; strengthening the role of the corporate

parent; reforming the placement system; and providing a first class education for children in care. The Green Paper also looked at their experiences outside school in relation to health, leisure and antisocial behaviour; creating a smoother, better supported transition to adulthood; and ensuring the system works to address failure to deliver these objectives.

In introducing the Green Paper the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Alan Johnson MP, explained that the publication of Care Matters was the start of a conversation between Government, the care system and children and young people themselves. He called for an extensive consultation on the proposals: the Government committed to proceed only with those proposals that would really transform the lives of children and young people in care.

- 1.3 This document sets out the main responses to the substantive consultation period that has been held since October. It is structured by theme rather than by the specific questions from the written consultation as the responses we received were much richer and the consultation events in particular covered more than just the issues asked about in the written consultation.

Overview of Responses

- 1.4 The Green Paper has been generally welcomed by all. Many respondents see the publication of the Green Paper as the start of a long overdue focus on children in care, and an opportunity for real change. People have

commented on the holistic approach of Care Matters and organisations and individuals have been grateful for the chance to respond to the consultation.

“[We] welcome the publication of Care Matters and the commitment it shows from the Government towards children and young people in care.”

A National Voice

- 1.5 The main concern that has been raised about the Green Paper as a whole relates to how it will be implemented – that it may not be properly resourced, that the policies could become diluted in being taken forward, and ultimately that the good messages and proposals in Care Matters will not be translated into policies which can make a real difference for children in care. Some people believed that there may be a need to prioritise those policies which will make a real impact on children in care, and to concentrate on those, rather than progressing all of the 122 proposals in the Green Paper at once.

“Care Matters is an aspiration to do better by this group of children.”

Association of School and College Leaders

What have we been doing?

- 1.6 The Government has worked hard to reach as many groups with a particular contribution to make as possible, and to ensure that we captured views on all aspects of the Green Paper.

“We have been very proud that young people have felt able, not only to give their views, but to travel to the House of Commons to deliver their views in person. It has given them the message that their views will be listened to”.

Advance Children’s Services

The European Social Fund Equal funded **What Makes the Difference?** Project organised four national events during December 2006 and January 2007 in Exeter, Manchester, Newcastle and London. These events collected the opinions and ideas of young people in care and who have left care, alongside the views of professionals, on the proposals in Care Matters. Ministers and officials spoke at these events and young people put their views across in filmed interviews, large group and focus group discussions and digital voting sessions.

- 1.7 Many organisations arranged conferences and consultation events on the Green Paper. The Minister for Children and Young People, Beverley Hughes MP, her Ministerial colleagues and officials have welcomed and attended many of these, giving speeches, holding workshops and focus groups and listening to the views of people on Care Matters. Government Offices have held consultation events in all regions of the country and we have listened to a range of people with specific interests including independent reviewing officers, lawyers, leaving care advisers and teenage pregnancy advisers.
- 1.8 Ministers have met with groups of children and young people in care in Westminster so that young people could feed back their views directly. Officials have been to visit children in a multi-dimensional treatment foster care project, in secure children’s homes and in young offender institutions. We have also been to an adult prison to consult adults who have had experience of care. These have been invaluable experiences which have given us a real insight into the lives of children in these settings, and an opportunity to talk face to face to children in care about what might really make the difference for them.

- 1.9 The Government also published a young people's guide to the Green Paper and an 'easy read' version. Over 12 000 copies of the children and young people's guide have been disseminated to children in care. We have had written responses from 1376 children and young people to this.
- 1.10 Alongside the number of children and young people that we have spoken to directly, and those that the Children's Rights Director, WMTD, A National Voice and other groups have consulted, this means that a large proportion of children with experience of care have been consulted on their views on Care Matters. We estimate that we have gained the views of over 10% of the care population directly or indirectly.

The main groups that we have received responses from are:

- Children in care
- Care leavers
- Local authorities
- Carers
- Social workers
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Schools
- Aimhigher partnerships
- Universities
- Primary care trusts

- 1.11 The responses we have received from adults by post, email and on the consultation website are highly valued, and they supplement the responses of the many people that we have talked to over the last few months. We have received 682 responses to the main written consultation. Many of these responses were from groups of people or organisations who had consulted widely to develop their response.

Pledge

"The pledge is a good idea, as long as it is not a token gesture and that local authorities stick to it."

Young person

- 1.12 Care Matters proposed that every local authority should develop a pledge for children in care, which would set out all the things that children in their care will receive. Children, young people and professionals have overwhelmingly supported this proposal, and there has been much debate over what key services should be at the core of the pledge.
- 1.13 Respondents felt that the pledge would only be of benefit if it was regulated and local authorities made fully accountable for the promises within it. There were concerns that the pledge could be tokenistic. Young people suggested linking the pledge to performance indicators and individual performance management within the local authority.
- "We feel [the pledge] could really benefit young people and the professionals working with them so long as accountability for delivering on these pledges rests with DCS and Elected Members."*

A National Voice

- 1.14 There was a strong feeling that pledges must be well-publicised, public documents. Young people should be made aware of the promises in the pledge and offered routes to complain if they felt that this 'contract' had been broken. Local authorities should see the pledge as a promise, and there should be consequences if this promise is broken.
- 1.15 There were several suggestions that central Government should also set out a core national pledge for children in care. Other respondents thought that pledges could be made on a regional level – this came out particularly clearly in respondents from London who felt that there was a lot of

inconsistency in provision between London boroughs. Respondents felt that the Government should issue clear guidance on development of the pledge to reduce the amount of inconsistency in services that children in care receive.

- 1.16 Young people would also like to be consulted on the development of the pledge. There has been much debate around what the core promises in the pledge should be, and many young people have prioritised what they think should be in the pledge.
- 1.17 The details of young people's views on the specific proposals are included in the rest of this document, but the headline views on what children and young people in care think should be in the pledge are:
- Choice of quality placements;
 - Effective, consistent social worker;
 - Being listened to, heard and involved in decision-making;
 - Someone to act as a personal champion and advocate;
 - Leisure opportunities;
 - Choice of when to move on from care;
 - Support to maintain relationships with birth families;
 - Support to move on from care; and
 - More support in education.

2: Children on the Edge of Care

“Families should be supported to stay together when to do so would be in the best interests of the child. Where this is not the case then care should be used as a positive option and not as a substitute for lack of proper support.”

A National Voice

- 2.1 Care Matters proposed earlier intervention to support children on the edge of care so that, where appropriate, they can be supported in their family settings rather than in care. The focus on support for children on the edge of care, early intervention and prevention has been widely welcomed throughout the consultation.
- 2.2 Local authorities supported this move to earlier intervention but are concerned that these proposals will require long term redirection of resources toward preventative services, and are anxious that adequate resources are found for this. Many respondents called for more investment in family support services so that the social care system can properly focus on early intervention and prevention rather than being reactive and crisis-driven.

A Multi-disciplinary Approach

- 2.3 The Green Paper proposed exploring the implications of and models for extending access to the Integrated Children’s System (ICS) to those such as schools and health

services who could use the information to be more joined up in supporting children.

- 2.4 This proposal made many children and professionals anxious. Young people in particular were concerned about confidentiality. They felt that the more people who were aware of the child or young person’s background, the more likely it was that they would be stigmatised or bullied. Many children we met felt that teachers did not always respect their desire for confidentiality, or else labelled them troublemakers when they found out that they were in care.

“A teacher blew my confidentiality in front of 20 kids.”

Young person

- 2.5 Children were concerned that information would be shared about them without their permission. They felt that their right to control their private information should be respected and that it should be up to the individual to decide who has what information about them. Most young people supported the idea of teachers and health professionals having better knowledge of the care system more generally, but not of the children’s individual case details.
- 2.6 Professionals could see the need for better information-sharing but thought that extension of the ICS was not the best way to achieve this. This was because of rights to privacy and the amount of detailed, sensitive information on the ICS which it would not be appropriate to share with individuals such as teachers and doctors.

Interventions based on Evidence

- 2.7 Care Matters proposed creating a national centre for excellence in children's and family services to deliver a systematic approach to sharing best practice across children's services. Organisations have generally welcomed this proposal. People thought that this centre could be an appropriate vehicle for collecting and disseminating information and good practice.

89% of respondents to the written consultation thought there needed to be a more systematic approach to sharing effective practice in children's services.

- 2.8 Respondents felt that dissemination of good practice and knowledge should be based not solely on guidance and electronic resources but also on conferences, specialist training, facilitated learning networks, workshops and seminars.

"We welcome a more systematic approach to sharing effective practice. It would be extremely useful to have advice on which interventions are effective and which aren't."

Young Minds

- 2.9 There was a feeling that the impact of the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) on practice in social care should be evaluated and that it was important to ensure that there was no duplication of the work done by SCIE or the National Centre for Parenting. The Local Government Association believed that any new approach to sharing good practice should be integrated with the work of SCIE and the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Care to produce better value for money and to avoid duplication of work.

Importance of Family and Friends

- 2.10 Children and young people consulted by the Children's Rights Director thought that one of the best things local authorities could do

was to see if there are other relatives who can look after a child before going into care. Children thought that they would be happier looked after by their own relatives. They felt that all local authorities should consider placing children with family members before a decision was made to take them into care.

*"Social services should ask every single person in my family if they could look after me but they only asked my Nan and it really p***ed me off."*

Young person

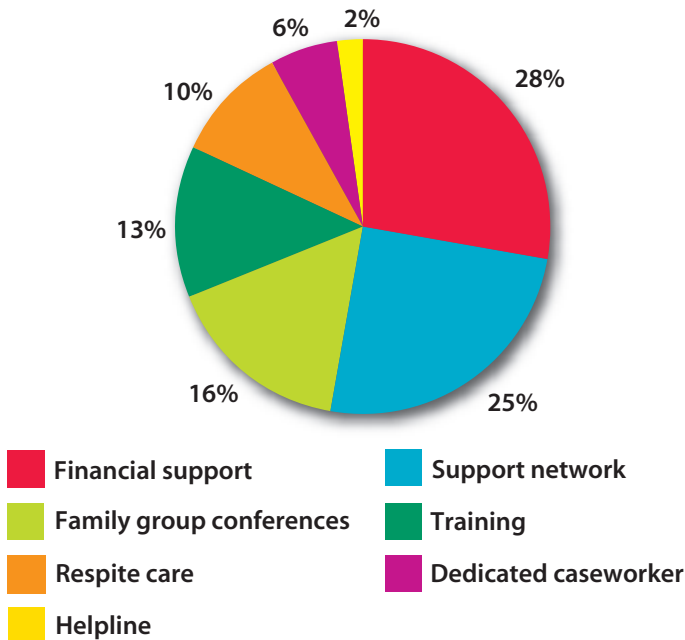
- 2.11 Many of the children and young people we have spoken to thought that it was vital to keep siblings together wherever possible. Where this is not possible, maintaining contact with siblings is very important to young people. This finding has been echoed in a recent survey by A National Voice where over three quarters of the young people asked felt they did not see enough of their brothers and sisters and would like to see them more.

"I didn't want to be separated from my brother but I was."

Young person

- 2.12 Children and professionals felt that there should be more support for kinship care. A number of organisations submitted a joint response on family and friends care which set out key recommendations "to prevent children being raised outside their family unnecessarily". The recommendations are based around keeping more children with their families, and providing better support and recognition for those children living with other family members outside the care system. Several organisations would welcome having a definition of family and friends care, clear statutory guidance and standards, as well as access to the ongoing financial support, training and recognition that other carers receive.

What more could be done to support family and friends carers?



Response to the written consultation

2.13 The Green Paper proposed promoting wider use of family group conferencing. This has been almost universally welcomed. Many people felt that alongside this there should be a range of interventions and support available to families. Respondents have raised concerns about the current inconsistency of practice in offering family group conferencing, which they say depends very much on where the family lives and who their social worker is.

“The key to ensuring the earliest intervention at the point of least existing problems must be to empower the individual to seek and secure the help, support or advice they seek at the earliest point they feel they would benefit from it.”

The Children’s Society

2.14 People thought that there should also be a drive to ensure that universal, preventative programmes reach vulnerable families and are non-stigmatising. A large number of people felt that there should be better access to respite and short breaks, both for young people and parents.

Links between adult and children’s services

2.15 Care Matters set out a belief that there needed to be closer links between adult and children’s services, particularly in relation to mental health support and substance misuse.

2.16 Respondents felt that it was important for agencies to work together to ensure a more consistent approach across adult and children’s services. Most respondents felt that cooperation and links between children and adult services needed to be improved. It was noted that moving to adult services could be a very stressful time for young people, and it is vital that the transition between services is as seamless as possible.

“Improvements to the way in which adults and children’s services work together is essential.”

Cheshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team

2.17 Many respondents highlighted the need to increase the access of children in care to continuous, consistent mental health provision. There were many concerns that access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) ceases when a child reaches the age of 18, which is often a time of stress and upheaval for young people in other areas of their lives. People suggested raising the age limit for children’s services to match the proposals for young people to stay in care until 21.

2.18 People thought that communication was key to improving the link between children’s and adult services. Specific suggestions included the formation of integrated teams, cross-service policies and protocols, joint planning meetings, pooling of budgets and shared information systems.

“We welcome the acknowledgement that links between children’s and adults’ services need to be improved.”

NSPCC

2.19 The Green Paper proposed encouraging local pilots of specialised family drug and alcohol courts, building on known good practice. This proposal has been widely supported. Many people have acknowledged that parental substance misuse is often a factor in children coming into care and support a whole family approach to ensuring support and services for both children and parents. Respondents felt that longitudinal evidence would be crucial in assessing the impact of these pilots.

2.20 Respondents felt that there should be better links between adult drug and mental health support needs and care proceedings. The NSPCC recommend that all children and young people who are cared for by adults with a known mental health condition or substance or alcohol misuse issues be automatically assessed using the multi-agency Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

The Future of Care

“Some children could be forced to stay at home when really care is best for them, because of targets and statistics.”

Young person

2.21 The Green Paper asked whether it was right for us to work towards an increase in the number of children supported in families and as a result a smaller younger population. A large number of respondents agreed with the idea of working towards an increase in the number of children supported in families but warned that the individual child’s best interests and their wellbeing must be properly safeguarded and protected.

“We feel strongly that a smaller care population should not be the goal in itself. What matters most is that the children who are in care are there because care is the right place for them to be at a given point in their lives.”

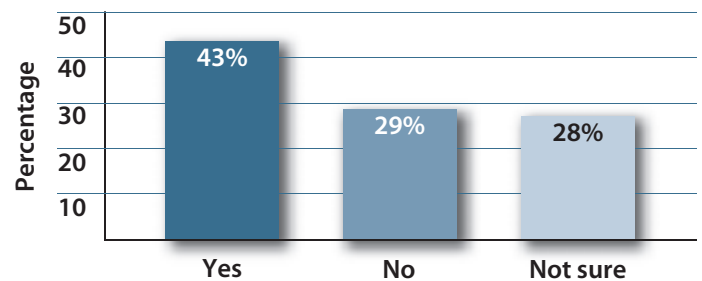
British Association of Adoption and Fostering

2.22 Children and young people who were consulted agreed that children should be supported at home where possible as long as children are not left in unsafe environments.

“It’s not fair for kids to be in care unless they really need help.”

Young person

Do you think the Government’s idea of having a smaller number of children in care is right?



Young people’s response to the written consultation

2.23 Children and professionals felt that decisions to take a child into care should be based on individual needs. Many respondents were concerned that a Government drive to reduce the size of the care population could result in local authorities raising the thresholds for children coming into care, and thus compromise the safeguarding of children.

“The children you don’t take into care could be in danger.”

Young person

2.24 Several respondents commented that there may be some children for whom care was a better option than others. Some people felt that better assessment of need and earlier intervention could actually lead to an increase in the number of children in care. Several people thought that thresholds in some areas were too high, and that there were a significant number of children in need for whom care would actually be the best option. Several respondents felt that care should be used as a positive option and not simply as a substitute for lack of proper support.

Disabled Children

2.25 One criticism of this chapter was that it did not address the particular issue of preventing children with disabilities from coming into care. The Children's Commissioner, amongst other respondents, felt that children with disabilities on the edge of care were a particular group who were not receiving appropriate services and were not sufficiently protected.

“Some of our most vulnerable children – for example, those with disabilities – are not receiving appropriate services and are not sufficiently well safeguarded.”

The Children's Commissioner

2.26 Respondents felt this could be prevented by greater use of short breaks to offer support to disabled children and their families. People were concerned that there is not sufficient availability of short break provision, and responses highlighted the benefits that short breaks can give to both children and families in offering respite and support. Some organisations thought that there should be a full review of children receiving short breaks, leading to the development of statutory guidance to assist local authorities in provision of short breaks for disabled children.

2.27 We have also been told that there is confusion and differing practice about whether disabled children who receive short break services are considered 'looked after'. Organisations have called for clarification from central Government about this.

3: The Role of the Corporate Parent

“There is too much corporate and not enough parenting.”

Young person

- 3.1 Chapter 3 set out proposals to strengthen the role of the corporate parent. The proposals in this chapter have been widely debated, with strong views both advocating and opposing policies such as ‘social care practices’. Many respondents felt that the proposals in this chapter could potentially have the biggest impact on the outcomes of children and young people in care, and emphasised the importance of local authorities constantly asking ‘would this be good enough for my own child?’ There was disappointment that there was not more mention of the role of elected members in improving outcomes for children in care.

Workforce

80% of young people surveyed at the WMTD consultation events believed that there were too many professionals involved in making decisions for children in care and care leavers. 87% believed that a young person should have one consistent lead professional throughout their time in care.

- 3.2 Many young people talked about not seeing their social worker enough, social workers not keeping appointments, social workers not having the power to make decisions and the huge turnover of social workers during their time in care. Other young people were more positive about their experiences, and it was clear that good, effective social workers,

of whom there are many, can make a huge difference to the lives of children in care.

“Stop selling being in care as a bad thing – it’s a good service.”

Young person

- 3.3 Some respondents felt that there were wider workforce issues that were not dealt with in this chapter, particularly around the recruitment of more, higher quality, social workers. The majority of respondents acknowledged that there were particular issues to address in the social care workforce, such as freeing social workers up to work more directly with children and increasing stability.
- 3.4 Many respondents believed that there should be a drive towards reducing caseloads, streamlining bureaucracy and increasing investment to support the recruitment of more social work staff. Many believed that a general culture change in the social care workforce is needed: the professional status and respect that is afforded to social workers should be reflected in pay, conditions, caseloads and opportunities for professional development.

Social Care Practices

“I always go through the boss. It’s not the social worker’s fault but young people should go direct to the manager. Social workers have no power.”

Young person

- 3.5 The Green Paper proposed exploring ‘a model of ‘social care practices’: small groups of social workers undertaking work with children in care commissioned by but

independent of local authorities'. The Department for Education and Skills has established a working group to explore the feasibility of piloting social care practices, which is due to report shortly. There has been a very mixed reaction to the proposal of social care practices, and many organisations were themselves split internally on their views towards this policy.

- 3.6 There is general agreement, from both advocates and opponents of the policy, that piloting social care practices will require careful planning, support and evaluation to assess the benefits of this model to children in care. Many respondents pointed to the need for children and young people to be actively consulted during the pilots on their view of social care practices. Some local authorities welcomed the opportunity to pilot, but were concerned about wider roll-out.

"My social worker doesn't spend enough time with me."

Young person

- 3.7 Most children did not comment on the idea of social care practices specifically, but on what they wanted their own relationships with social workers to be like. Children in care wanted a promise from the local authority that social workers should be effective, easier to get hold of, and that they will keep the promises they make to children. Many children told us about the number of social workers they had had, and how difficult it was to build relationships with them with such high turnover. Those young people who were consulted on social care practices were initially confused by the concept, then sceptical about if they would make any difference.

94% of children supported the idea of social workers spending more time with the children they were working with.

- 3.8 The Children's Rights Director asked children to vote on what they thought the most

important thing was that local authorities should promise to children in care. Children voted the second most important thing 'being able to get support from a social worker 24 hours a day, 7 days a week'.

Supportive Responses

- 3.9 Many respondents agreed that social care practices could address the problem identified in the Green Paper that social workers often do not have the freedom to work with children on a sustained basis due to the bureaucratic systems in which they work, high case loads and crisis managing.
- 3.10 Members of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) who supported social care practices noted that within the practices the decision-making hierarchy would be shorter, giving social workers freedom to be more responsive to the needs of children in care. Many responses acknowledged that the lack of independence of social workers under the current system means that they may not always be in a position to deliver what they would like for children.

"The NSPCC believes there is much to be welcomed in the development of social care practices, including the empowerment of social workers through independence; scope for the development of specialist teams; and the potential for the development of multi-disciplinary teams."

NSPCC

- 3.11 Several respondents thought the structure of a social care practice had the potential to improve the status of social workers and improve information and planning for children. Some organisations thought that social care practices would provide social workers with a framework which would allow them to spend more time working directly with children, building stronger relationships, which would lead in turn to an increase in workforce stability.

3.12 People also pointed to the fact that because local authorities have such a broad range of responsibilities, there is an inevitable tension between the needs of children in care and the needs of children in general. Resources and staff move between these agendas within local authorities. Social care practices offer an opportunity to bring about a more focused, disciplined approach to the planning and resourcing of services for children in care.

“Shaftesbury believe that the proposal for social care practices is the single most important idea within this Green Paper. We hope that the Government will recognise that all the ‘noise’ around this proposal indicates that it could be a driver for real change.”

Hilton Dawson, Shaftesbury Homes and Arethusa

3.13 Respondents highlighted the possibility of ‘specialist’ social care practices, such as one for unaccompanied asylum seekers or for disabled children.

3.14 Many respondents thought social care practices would encourage innovative methods of working, particularly with the involvement of the voluntary, community and private sectors, from whom there has been a great deal of interest. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) for example has strongly welcomed the proposal to pilot social care practices. Certain respondents, including young people, pointed out that good practice of private sector involvement with children in care already exists, such as in children’s homes, independent fostering agencies and leaving care services.

Non-supportive Responses

3.15 Many respondents feared a possible dilution of accountability and questioned the extent to which local authorities can, or should, delegate their ‘corporate parenting’ responsibilities. Contracting would have to be managed extremely carefully and thought

needs to be given to how the local authority would be held accountable for the actions taken in its name.

“There are those who believe that it should not be possible for a corporate parent to devolve its responsibility to an external organisation for the exercising of its legal responsibility of care.”

British Association of Social Workers

3.16 Respondents also feared the creation of a two-tier system, which risks complicating the care system and adding bureaucracy rather than reducing the complexity of the system. Respondents such as the LGA were concerned that social care practices could introduce an additional move for the child.

3.17 The Association of Directors of Social Services outlined their main concerns about social care practices, which reflect many of the concerns also raised by other respondents. They fear that social care practices may:

- Distort and dilute lines of accountability;
- Lead to avoidable and damaging role conflict requiring complex dispute resolution procedures;
- Result in duplication of effort;
- Inhibit the recruitment and retention of local authority-based social work staff;
- Reduce direct investment in frontline services for children in care as a result of the perverse impact of the ‘profit motive’; and
- Ossify patterns of expenditure, precluding strategic redirection of resources over time towards earlier, preventative interventions.

3.18 Some respondents were concerned that those social workers attracted to social care practices are more likely to be experienced and confident, leaving the less experienced social workers to work within the local authority. Other respondents believed that

social care practices would have no more ability to recruit and retain staff than a local authority.

“It is queried why, when the Every Child Matters agenda advocates we join services together to create a Children’s Service Authority, that we are seeking to create practices that will produce gaps and fragmentation in provision”

A local authority

- 3.19 The statement in the Green Paper that practices “would be free to retain unused funds – either as a profit or for reinvestment” has engendered much opposition.

“How appropriate is it that a private business is permitted to take public money and then not spend it on services for the children and young people they exist to work with, but instead pass it on as a dividend to shareholders and partners?”

Pan-London IRO managers

- 3.20 Some respondents pointed to the fact that the jury is still out on fund-holding GP practices, a model which social care practices could be based on. Several respondents believed that we should wait until we have learnt lessons from GP commissioning before developing the model of social care practices.

Budget-holding for Lead Professionals

- 3.21 The Green Paper proposed piloting budget-holding by the lead professional for children in care, to see how effective the role can be. The pilots would test out the impact of differing amounts of money, offering social workers far greater freedom in how they address the needs of children, and involving children themselves more in how the budget should be spent.

“I would like to be able to have the money to make sure that my young people have shoes and leave with a coat on in the winter.”

Professional at WMTD event

- 3.22 There was a positive response to this proposal. Children and young people felt that it could relieve some of the burden on social workers, allowing them more time to spend with the child. Respondents thought that budget-holding lead professionals would bring decisions about spending closer to the child and allow professionals to respond more quickly to their needs and requests.

77% of young people at the WMTD consultation events thought the lead professional should be able to make financial decisions about a young person without having to ask a manager.

- 3.23 Young people felt that at present their social workers had to go through lots of layers of bureaucracy to secure things for children. They felt that social workers holding a budget themselves would speed things up, reduce the levels of bureaucracy that social workers had to go through and help relieve the high turnover of social workers.

“If it meant having a social worker for a long time that would be a good thing.”

Young person

- 3.24 Children felt that the lead professional should not necessarily be the social worker – it should be someone whom the young person can relate to and get on with. Some young people suggested that individuals such as carers, social workers, independent visitors or Connexions advisers, should be trained to be a budget-holding professional up to a certain amount of money, enabling the child to choose who the lead professional would be. Many professionals thought that this policy was an opportunity to locate day to day parenting decisions in the hands of ‘up-skilled’ foster carers and residential workers.
- 3.25 Some respondents wanted the pilots to explore certain aspects of the model in detail, including accountability in relation

to outcomes and use of finances and performance management of the lead professional. Respondents also pointed to the need for clear guidance that describes how decisions are to be made and who should be involved in that process.

Independent Advocates

- 3.26 The Green Paper proposed revitalising the existing independent visitor scheme to introduce advocacy as a key element of the role (and renaming the scheme ‘independent advocates’), and consulted on how best to offer an ‘independent advocate’ to a wider group of children in care than those out of touch with their birth families.

“[An] advocate is there for complaints and reviews and IVs are there to support you. The government wants to save money by changing two roles into one.”

Young person

- 3.27 There was general consensus that the proposal to change the name of independent visitors to independent advocates was misguided. People felt that this would confuse two different roles, which could lead to dilution of both. Many children and young people commented that they were unclear about what was meant by the term ‘independent advocate’.

“We wish to state in the strongest possible terms that the roles are not ones that could or should be merged.”

NSPCC

- 3.28 There was widespread support for the proposal to extend access to independent visitors to a wider group of children than at present. Most young people felt that all children in care should be entitled to one. Some commented that all children in care should be treated equally. Some respondents felt that whilst they supported expansion of the scheme, it can be hard to recruit good,

quality independent visitors, and expanding it would require significant investment in terms of recruitment and training.

- 3.29 Other respondents felt that there were groups of children who could benefit most from an independent visitor. The Minister for Children and Young People met with a group of disabled young people who stressed the importance of this role in their lives. Some people felt that unaccompanied asylum seeking children would be another group who might benefit most from entitlement to an independent visitor.

Advocacy

- 3.30 Some commented that although independent visitors should not be combined with the role of an advocate, there is also a need for better access to advocacy services for children in care. Young people felt that they should be entitled to an advocate not only during complaints processes but at other times throughout their time in care. Access to a ‘champion’ or advocate was one of the promises that children and young people felt should be a core part of the local authority pledge.

“Advocacy offers crucial protection where children face particular complex circumstances, are in contact with different services, or have communication difficulties”

Children’s Commissioner

- 3.31 Several responses, including those from the Children’s Society and the Children’s Commissioner, have highlighted the key role that advocacy can play for disabled children. They point to the crucial role of advocacy services in enabling disabled people to exercise choice and control over their lives, and to the need for trained, professional advocates for disabled children due to the complexity of their needs. Several respondents felt that there is a general failure to take the views of disabled children

and young people into account in decisions that are made about placements and provision of services.

Care Plans

- 3.32 The Green Paper proposed clarifying the use and role of care plans, as well as requiring that care plans for all children in care must set out long term ambitions. These ideas have received strong support during the consultation.
- 3.33 In his consultation of children and young people, the Children's Rights Director found that children had 6 main ideas to make care plans work better:
- The child should have a say in what goes into the plan;
 - The plan should be explained to the child;
 - The child should have access to their social worker whenever they need it;
 - Care plans should be reviewed more often;
 - Care plans should be more 'child-friendly'; and
 - Children should always get a copy of their care plan.
- 3.34 Young people in general wanted to be given more opportunity to contribute at review meetings and put their own views across. They should not only have the opportunity but should be actively encouraged to participate.

4: Ensuring Children are in the Right Placements

“It has to be somewhere where you have a constant loving family who are there when you need them no matter what”.

Young person

- 4.1 This chapter set out proposals to radically reform the placements system, by improving the number and quality of foster and residential carers, and increasing the stability of placements for children in care. The proposals in this chapter have generally been supported, with agreement that improving the quality, choice and stability of placements is vital and urgently needed. There has been support for considering carers as a priority group within local Homebuy schemes and for the proposal to develop multi-dimensional treatment foster care pilots for younger children.
- 4.2 In discussions about the local authority pledge, young people ranked stability of placement as top of the list of things which Government should promise. They also wanted choice in where they were going to live and felt it was important that they could see their placement before they moved in.

Beverley Hughes MP met with young people from North Lincolnshire and East Riding of Yorkshire, to discuss their experiences of care and their views on Care Matters. Stability of placements was a key message which emerged in their presentation. “As care leavers we believe that more stable placements should be provided in the care system as we have all experienced having to move between different placements. This causes emotional upset and creates low self-esteem that can affect the young person’s future.”

Tiered Framework

- 4.3 Care Matters proposed developing a national ‘tiered’ model of placement types, underpinned by a national qualification framework for foster and residential carers. There were mixed views on this proposal, but on the whole respondents were supportive.

61% of respondents thought that a tiered approach should be developed, whilst 30% were unsure.

“I think that this would help to ensure that the right placement is made.”

A local authority

- 4.4 Respondents felt that the tiered framework could help to increase stability for children in care through improvement of placement matching – those with most need could be matched with the most highly trained carers. Some people thought that at present children with complex needs are often placed with inexperienced carers because it is the only available option.

4.5 The framework was seen as a good way to give carers specialist training in areas to enhance their skills. Respondents thought that there would be a lot of benefit in providing effective, up-to-date, and easily available training. It was noted that some carers might wish to develop a specialism such as caring for babies, adolescents or children with disabilities, for which they should be supported with appropriate training.

70% of children in the written consultation thought that carers and staff should get more training.

4.6 Young people submitted their views on what they thought carers needed training on. The top two ideas were training on how to communicate with children and young people, and how to manage difficult behaviours. Young people felt that these two areas would have a positive effect on the number of placement breakdowns and would help to increase stability. Some respondents felt that too little is done in evaluating the factors responsible for placement breakdown, with too much emphasis being placed upon difficulties with the individual child, rather than possible inadequacies on the part of the carer.

“I’ve had loads of different [carers]. The problem is you get to know them then they move on and you get another”.

Young person

4.7 Other areas that young people would like carers to have further training on included:

- Health and well-being;
- How to teach basic life skills;
- Sexuality;
- Different cultures and religions; and
- How to support children better in their education.

4.8 The LGA pointed out that many local authorities have arrangements in place for recognising the skills and experiences described in the tiered model. They thought the tiered model would go a long way to formalising these arrangements.

4.9 Not all respondents were convinced that the tiered framework idea would deliver tangible improvements for children in care. Several respondents questioned how the tiered framework would be implemented. They thought that the approach set out was difficult and complex and would be costly and require a huge number of additional carers to allow flexibility within the framework.

“While we welcome the intention to ensure that all foster care is of high quality, we do believe that it is a complex task and cannot be developed as though it were an occupation that falls easily within the usual approach of standardised job description and person specification.”

British Association of Adoption and Fostering

4.10 Some respondents felt that the tiered framework may actually have the adverse effect of compromising stability, as a child may be moved to a lower tier placement as their needs diminished. People thought that there needed to be considerable flexibility in the system to be able to adapt to change and were opposed to a rigid means of classifying carers and children.

4.11 Other concerns raised about implementation of the tiered approach included:

- Assessments of need will have to be applied more rigorously to ensure the right support is identified;
- Difficulty could arise if a child is in need of a particular level of care but the carers in that tier are not available;
- As a child’s assessed needs change there may be pressure to move them to a cheaper lower tier placement, or to remain

in an existing low level placement because of cost; and

- Would foster couples be employed in the same tier even if they had different training and skills?

- 4.12 Many respondents raised questions about fees paid to carers under the tiered model. There were several comments made that the current level of allowances is inadequate at reflecting the financial and emotional cost of providing care. It was hoped that fees under the tiered system would better reflect this.
- 4.13 A number of respondents feared that there might be a financial disincentive built into the framework, in that if a child's level of need improves and is therefore classed as in a different 'tier' the carer's fee would decrease. Some people felt that carers should be paid according to their experience and competence, rather than the complexity of the needs of the child in their care.

Qualification Framework

- 4.14 The Green Paper proposed that the tiered framework for placements should be underpinned by a formal qualification framework. This proposal was generally welcomed. It was felt that the qualification framework should include residential carers, although the framework must acknowledge that their skills and training needs would be different to those of foster carers.

65% of respondents in the written consultation supported the introduction of a formal qualification framework, with only 9% disagreeing.

- 4.15 Respondents felt that a formal qualification framework would help professionalise the care workforce, raising the status of carers and giving them greater credibility in dealings with other professionals. People thought that this might help improve the

recruitment and retention of carers, with more prospective carers seeing it as a career choice.

"I think a foster carer's personality is what makes a good foster carer. I am not interested in what qualifications my foster carer has. I am interested only in their kindness and understanding and commitment to me."

Young person

- 4.16 The British Association of Social Workers would like to see more qualifications developed at foundation and degree level, based on social pedagogy, with skills and resources channelled to promote access to these programmes for carers. Respondents felt that some carers would like the opportunity to gain formal recognition of their knowledge, skills and past experience and felt that work-based learning and previous experience must be essential parts of gaining a qualification.
- 4.17 There was fear from some people that a qualification framework could act as a disincentive for some carers. It was thought that older carers who had no recent experience of learning, or carers who held negative memories of schools could find the idea of working towards a qualification daunting. Several organisations thought the qualification system could be optional, ensuring that it did not deter those people who were willing to become carers.

Recruitment and Registration

- 4.18 Many respondents were concerned about the recruitment of foster and residential carers, pointing to the existing shortage of carers. They were concerned that the tiered framework and proposals to allow young people to stay in care longer will require much more capacity in the workforce. People thought there must be more effort put in to recruiting and retaining carers, and a need to pay more attention to the calibre of

individuals recruited. Some respondents felt that there should be a national recruitment campaign as well as targeted local campaigns.

“We would support a national registration scheme for foster carers, which would offer status and recognition for their roles and qualifications, and safeguard standards.”

The Magistrates’ Association, Youth Courts Committee

- 4.19 Few people commented on the proposal to introduce a mandatory registration system, but those who did felt that this, alongside the formal qualification framework and national minimum standards, could help to professionalise foster caring. Respondents also felt that registration would help with regional or national commissioning, and enable carers to relocate more easily. Some people felt that the body which registers carers could monitor continuing professional development and set standards for training.

Regional Commissioning

“Improving the quality, choice and stability of placements is vital and needed urgently.”

A National Voice

- 4.20 Care Matters proposed piloting new regional commissioning units to secure better value for money and to ensure children are offered a choice of placements. Children and young people rated having a choice of placements very highly in their response to the consultation.
- 4.21 There was general agreement with the idea of piloting new regional commissioning units. Some respondents felt that local authorities require support to enable them to commission services effectively and called for wider use of pooled budgets.
- 4.22 The LGA agreed that there were grounds for testing the benefits of regional commissioning but felt that this will not negate the need for ongoing local commissioning and local innovation. Several

respondents pointed to existing good practice in local authorities working together to commission services and develop best practice models at regional and sub-regional levels. There were some concerns raised that the role of regional commissioning units would be purely to drive prices down rather than raising quality.

Out of Authority Placements

- 4.23 The Green Paper proposed introducing a requirement that local authorities can place children out of authority only if no suitable placement exists within the home area. Many people agreed with a focus on reducing the number of children placed out of authority where this was appropriate, but were concerned that in many situations the right placement for a child, particularly those with complex needs, may lie outside the home local authority.

“Traditionally children placed away from home have often been consigned to an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ approach and their needs neglected.”

The Who Cares? Trust

- 4.24 Many people thought there should be additional provision for those children who are placed out of authority. The Who Cares? Trust, for example, called for a requirement between local authorities for children placed out of authority. They felt that these agreements should cover all services to be provided by the local authority in which the child is placed, and that there should be no difference in treatment offered to ‘home’ or ‘out of authority’ children.

Disabled Children

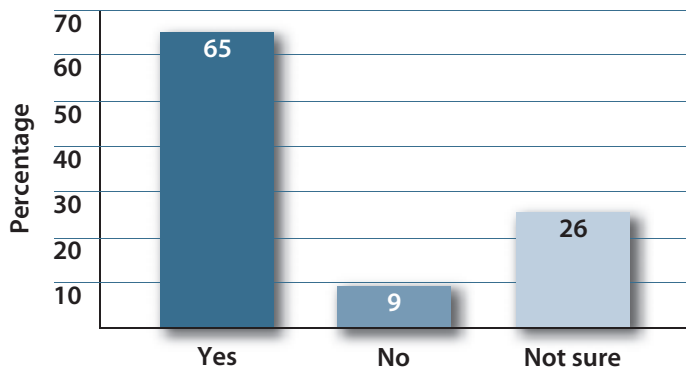
- 4.25 Over the last few months we have consulted on the idea of whether local authorities should be required to consider – in consultation with parents – whether disabled children in residential placements should have looked after status.

“Disabled children are extremely vulnerable and should have as much protection as all other children in care, if not more.”

Professional

4.26 Most respondents agreed that disabled children placed in 52 week specialist accommodation should be entitled to looked after status. It was felt that they are extremely vulnerable and should have as much protection as children in care. The benefits of this would be placements being visited and reviewed by an independent person and the review system would ensure the package of support is co-ordinated, reviewed and changed as needs change.

Should local authorities be required to consider whether disabled children in 52 week residential provision should have the ‘looked after status’?



Response from written consultation

4.27 Some respondents felt that parents may feel this would question their parental ability and stigmatise their child. It was suggested that looked after status be presented to parents as a partnership between them and the state to ensure that such children are fully protected. Other respondents suggested the introduction of a new additional status, which would not raise issues about parenting capacity, but could still ensure high standards of care.

4.28 The Council for Disabled Children believed that training and qualifications for the workforce looking after disabled children,

through the widest possible routes, is essential. At every level the proposed tiered framework and qualification structure should include the specific needs of disabled children.

Residential Care

4.29 Respondents felt that the tiered framework should also apply to residential care and welcomed the revised national minimum standards. Many people thought that improving standards in residential care should be a priority in taking forward the Green Paper. It was recognised that some residential homes need to improve in standards and workforce training as the current NVQ level of training is believed to be inadequate.

4.30 There was a feeling that the Green Paper saw residential care as a last resort, when in fact some children’s needs are best met in a residential setting. People thought that residential care should not be seen as a second choice after foster care, but as a legitimate option which could best meet some children’s needs.

“Both are good for different people.”

Young person

4.31 People welcomed the moves to become more stringent on providers failing to meet standards. The Independent Children’s Homes Association, who supported this move, were concerned about the consistency of approach of individual inspectors, particularly given their current lack of experience in residential care in some cases. They were also concerned that this may become more apparent after the transfer to Ofsted. Shaftesbury Homes would like there to be raised standards, more effective inspection and enforcement to drive out poor quality providers.

4.32 Many children and young people thought that failing children’s homes should be given a chance to improve as this would stop

homelessness and that it was better than having no place to go. There was universal support for the proposal that there should be a statutory duty for social workers to visit children in children's homes.

- 4.33 The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) believed that there needs to be a more systematic approach to children with complex needs and challenging behaviour. They pointed to a small minority of children who are extremely vulnerable and at risk of self-harm or suicide, and those children who frequently abscond or pose a risk to others. At present many of these children end up in secure children's homes, custody or psychiatric hospitals.

“These are the most vulnerable children within the care system but little is known about the size of this population, their needs, the placements provided for them, support services and, most importantly, their outcomes.”

National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care

5: A First Class Education

“Schools need to stop judging young people on their care status.”

Young person

- 5.1 The policy ideas set out in Chapter 5, ‘A First Class Education’ aim to ensure that every child in care is in a good school and is given the support they need to make the most of being in that school and to progress on to further or higher education, employment or training. The recommendations in this chapter have been generally supported, although there has been some concern raised about how policies will be applied in reality.

Being in a Good School

- 5.2 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 introduced a new power for local authorities to direct schools to admit children in care, even where the school is already fully subscribed. The Green Paper proposed supporting this by encouraging local authorities to place children in care in top performing schools and undertaking a review of the location of children in care in schools. This has generally been welcomed. Many respondents said it needs to be accompanied by a culture change in schools, to dispel the myth that children in care are troublemakers.

“Young people in care are often scapegoats.”

Young person

- 5.3 Young people in general welcomed this idea but some concerns were raised over what a ‘good school’ for children in care might be.

People thought that the emphasis should be on choosing a school which has the best resources to meet the particular needs of the young person and stated that it is often the lower attaining schools that have the best pastoral support and evidence of strong inclusion policies.

- 5.4 Young people also raised concerns about being stigmatised because they are in care and about confidentiality – staff and pupils knowing why they got into that school when it was oversubscribed. A few people felt that there should be equal rights and treatment for all and that children in care should not get preferential treatment.

“The young person should be asked what they actually want.”

Young person

- 5.5 A few respondents were opposed to this policy. Instead, they believed that there should be protocols for placing ‘hard to place pupils’, which could include children in care. Many people misunderstood that the new power to direct would apply also to Academies through their funding agreement with the Secretary of State and that the timescales involved in the direction process for maintained schools and Academies are similar.
- 5.6 Many respondents, particularly carers, felt that the issue of exclusions had not been addressed adequately in the Green Paper. People pointed to the fact that children in care are nine times more likely to be excluded than their peers and thought that schools needed to be better supported to

ensure that children in care are not disproportionately excluded.

Staying in a Good School

"I want more help. I don't understand my teacher. I don't understand my work."

Young person

- 5.7 The Green Paper proposed creating a presumption that children should not move schools in years 10 and 11, and offering a free entitlement to transport for children in care to allow them to remain in the same school after a placement move. People have endorsed these ideas, pointing to how fundamental stability of school is to improving the education of young people. Some respondents wondered whether the presumption could be extended to other years.
- 5.8 Several organisations felt that the issue of attendance had not been dealt with sufficiently in the Green Paper. The National Association of Head Teachers felt that improving the attendance of children in care at school is key to improving their outcomes. They felt that there is a particular culture of non-attendance in children's homes, and this is something that we have also come across during conversations with children in residential care.
- "In residential care they don't make us go to school."*
- Young person*
- 5.9 Almost all the young people that we have met who have experienced residential care have been very negative about their experience of education. The young people we met in young offender institutions had almost all been in residential care and the majority of them had not properly engaged in secondary education. One 18 year old we spoke to had never been in a secondary school at all.

Officials visited two young offender institutions and an adult's prison to talk to young people who had been in care. The young men we met had experienced disruption to their education, and some had never attended secondary school. They commented that they didn't like the way things were taught at school, that children's homes couldn't make them go to school and that often barriers were put in their way when they were ready to re-engage with education.

- 5.10 One suggestion made by a group of young people that we met was that the prosecution of parents for non-attendance of their children should be replicated for children in care. The local authority should be prosecuted and held to account for those children who do not attend school.

"We pursue and prosecute some very vulnerable families who have neither the resources or capacity to ensure children attend school. Local authorities have no such excuse."

National Association of Head Teachers

Designated Teacher

- 5.11 The Green Paper proposed placing the Designated Teacher on a statutory footing, setting out clearly what their role and functions should be. There was strong support for this proposal from the majority of respondents.
- 5.12 Most children thought that having a dedicated person to support them at school was a good idea. Children and young people had mixed views on the effectiveness of Designated Teachers at present - some children did not even know that the role existed. One theme which emerged was that it was important to them that extra support did not result in children in care feeling singled out or stigmatised.

“Provide the necessary support and don’t treat them different because of their situation.”

Young person

5.13 Respondents were keen on having clear guidance to spell out the responsibilities of the Designated Teacher and respondents also pointed to the need for the role to have greater authority. Many respondents thought the role should be supported by further training and networks. Several respondents believed that the role of the Designated Teacher should be extended into Further Education colleges.

“Training is absolutely vital if the named teacher is to understand the issues that LAC face.”

Professional

5.14 Some organisations believed that further evaluation of the role is needed to assess its effectiveness, particularly to assess what barriers Designated Teachers face in carrying out their role and what further support they require.

5.15 Specific suggestions to strengthen the Designated Teacher included:

- Clear guidance spelling out the responsibilities of the role and how performance in the role would be inspected;
- They need to have the power to make decisions and should be on the senior management team;
- Mandatory training;
- Children in care could be involved in interviewing for the role;
- They should be able to access the staff development opportunities available to children’s services staff;
- Designated Teachers could be part of the virtual head teacher’s team;

- Job description needs to be agreed centrally and used as a blueprint for all schools;
- Requirement to be involved in the development of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and to attend PEP reviews; and
- Having a ‘Designated Governor’ for children in care to support the Designated Teacher.

Personalisation

5.16 The Green Paper proposed making available a personalised annual budget of around £500 per child per year for social workers to spend on each child in care to support their education. Generally this idea has been welcomed.

5.17 Children and young people were generally supportive of this policy. Many had questions about it, and some thought that £500 is not enough to make a difference. When asked what the £500 could be spent on, children’s responses included school revision books, extra tuition, college courses, stationary, computers and equipment, school trips, PE equipment, and musical instrument and tuition.

5.18 There have also been a few comments from professionals on how this will be implemented such as:

- How the money will reach the social worker;
- What would happen if one child needs a lot of support and another doesn’t;
- How this fits with the Department’s commitment to personalisation and the funding for that;
- Whether social workers having this fund might lead to the school shirking their responsibilities; and
- How the money will be managed with children moving in and out of care.

5.19 Local authorities have raised concerns about the implementation of this policy. The LGA supports the proposed £500 personalised budget to support the education of each child in care but is adamant that this must be new money, not a diversion of the child's mainstream support in school through the Dedicated Schools Grant. Some respondents worried that if schools became aware of this funding they would cut back on their support to children in care.

60% of young people at the WMTD events thought that if social workers had an extra £500 to spend on their education this would help improve education success. 26% disagreed and 14% were unsure.

5.20 Some people were concerned that many social workers would not have sufficient understanding of the child to decide what this money should be spent on, and carers may be better placed to make decisions regarding this funding. Some wondered whether it was realistic for social workers to have the time to administer and supervise the spending of the £500. Concerns were raised about whether this policy would be an additional burden on social workers.

5.21 Care Matters proposed investigating the feasibility of an online learning resource for children in care. People felt that this was a good idea which was urgently needed. Respondents also thought there should be more done to ensure all children in care have access to computers and the internet.

Relationship between Schools, Carers and Social Workers

"Carers need help not to feel that they have failed if there is something they are struggling to help a child with."

Young person

5.22 Respondents emphasised the key role that carers play in the educational success of children in care and felt that we could invest

more responsibility for education in carers. Carers themselves have said they would like to be more empowered. Many respondents felt that carers should receive training to enable them to understand the education system and how to support their children's learning at home. Understanding the role of carers in supporting children and young people's education should be built into induction and ongoing training for carers.

5.23 Respondents also thought that regular contact between the school and the carer would help to reinforce the educational role of the carer. It was suggested that they needed to feel more included by being invited to school for regular meetings to discuss their child's progress, being helped to understand school jargon, encouraged to maintain their child's homework diary and attend parents' evenings and sports days.

5.24 Some respondents suggested that schools could run short training courses for carers, tailored to the age of the carer's child. Teachers should also be given a greater understanding of the role of carers during their training. Many respondents highlighted a lack of understanding of fostering and the needs of children in care within the education workforce.

"We strongly advocate that teachers training programmes are required to cover the looked after system and the role of foster carers in some depth in order to make them better teachers of those children who most need their support."

Fostering Network

5.25 Other suggestions to reinforce the role of carers in education included:

- Clarification that for education purposes the carer should be treated as a parent to the child they foster;
- Support and information for carers about SEN statements and route of appeal to

Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal;

- Having a named contact, possibly the Designated Teacher, who can support carers to support children for whom they care;
- Support from schools to help carers support their child into the system, particularly for those joining a school mid-term;
- Social workers should help carers identify what their own educational needs may be such as literacy and numeracy skills; and
- The Designated Teacher should meet with the carer of every child in care in their school in order to understand the needs of the child.

Virtual Head Teacher

“A real opportunity to give leadership to other Heads while advocating on a strategic level.”

Professional at What Makes the Difference event

- 5.26 The Green Paper proposed piloting the introduction of a ‘virtual head teacher’ in a number of authorities. The virtual head teacher would be a senior individual working for the local authority, tasked with raising educational standards of children in care across the local authority.
- 5.27 There has been a mixed response to this proposal, partly due to confusion over what the role is or who would fulfil it. Some respondents felt that the term ‘virtual’ was not appropriate for this role – it implies distance and no real contact with the child. Respondents wanted clarity on what the role of the virtual head teacher would be, particularly in terms of how they relate to ‘real’ head teachers and local authorities, and their lines of accountability. Some suggested that it might be more appropriate to call the role the ‘virtual school head’ or ‘head of the virtual school’.

“This will be good because the young people will have someone on their side to support them.”

Young person

- 5.28 Many respondents embraced the idea of having an individual with a strategic overview of all children in care in a local authority. It was felt that the virtual head teacher could bring a coordinated approach to working with children in care across the authority, particularly sharing and promoting good practice. People thought that the role should be used to support Designated Teachers, monitor outcomes, provide support networks and to be a link between schools and the local authority social care workforce.

“This is an excellent proposal which should be given high priority in any implementation plan.”

Thomas Coram Research Unit

- 5.29 In taking this policy forward stakeholders have warned that it is imperative that the responsibility and accountability of ‘real’ head teachers are not diluted. They also warn that the post must not divert any resources away from schools themselves. Many respondents agreed with Care Matters that ideally the virtual head teacher will have had experience as an actual head teacher, and should be in a position to challenge the local authority, rather than becoming subsumed as another layer of bureaucracy within local government. Many people mentioned the need for training and support for the virtual head teacher.

Boarding Schools

- 5.30 Care Matters stated that for some children, boarding school could provide an excellent means of stability and support and that we would consult on whether the use of boarding provision could usefully be expanded.

67% of young people and 64% of professionals at the WMTD consultation events felt that young people in care should have the opportunity to go to a boarding school as an alternative placement.

- 5.31 There was support for this proposal as long as any decision to place a child in a boarding school was based upon the best interests and needs of the child. Some concerns were raised by young people about lack of contact with family and friends and not being able to fit in. Other people were wary of the proposal as they thought that some social workers might use boarding schools as a means of placing difficult young people or as an 'easy option' if no other placement can be found.

"There is a danger that boarding schools become a back up plan if no care placement can be found for a child – and it might not be a good choice for them."

Professional at WMTD event

Progression

- 5.32 The Green Paper set out a range of proposals to increase progression to Further Education and to support the transition from school. Proposals included:
- Exploring flexible start dates for young people in FE settings;
 - Piloting models of pastoral care for FE providers;
 - Creating an entitlement for children in care to have access to a personal adviser until the age of 25; and
 - Making clear to local authorities that the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) should not be taken into account when determining the level of financial support to be provided to a care leaver.

- 5.33 Although there was support for the proposals in the Green Paper, many people were unsure whether the proposals were sufficient or a coherent package to achieve a step change in outcomes for young people in and leaving care. The response of Ofsted sums up many responses in relation to the FE proposals:

"The measures, themselves, are appropriate, laudable and well focused but demanding.... Without a strategic rationale, the proposals run the risk of being seen as a series of uncoordinated actions and requirements rather than a planned sequence of events."

Ofsted

- 5.34 There was overall support for the entitlement to a personal adviser to be extended until 25, although young people were not always sure that Connexions would be the best agency to provide the service as advisers are not trained to deal with specific issues arising from care. Many people thought that the personal adviser should be located in the leaving care team.

85% of young people at the WMTD events thought they should have access to a personal adviser until the age of 25.

- 5.35 Respondents supported the commitment of DfES to making clear to local authorities that they should not take the EMA into consideration in setting levels of support but felt that more could be done to reduce the financial pressure young people faced when opting for further education. Specific suggestions included enhancing the rate of the EMA, providing free transport, providing accommodation during college breaks and reassessing the benefits system for young people in college and therefore not seeking work.

6: Life Outside School

“As many people that are in care or leaving care tend to have nothing to do when it comes to leisure time, we felt that help with these activities will help prevent boredom that can lead to crime and anti-social behaviour.”

Young people

6.1 This chapter set out how we can improve the experience of children in care so that care can be a positive influence in their lives. The proposals in this chapter were based on the concept that children in care should have ‘things to do and places to go’, be supported to remain healthy and safe, and to avoid crime and antisocial behaviour. The proposals have received endorsement but many people felt that the proposals around health are not sufficient to deliver real change for children in care.

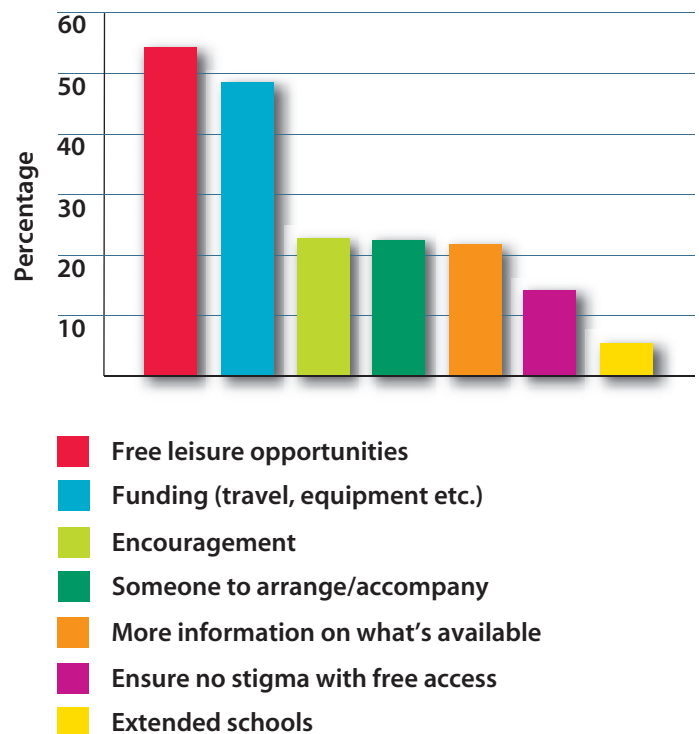
Enjoying and Achieving

6.2 The majority of respondents believed that ensuring children in care were given free access to sporting, leisure and cultural activities was a good idea. Cost was identified by many children and young people as the main barrier to undertaking activities such as sports. Respondents thought that foster families should be encouraged to participate as a whole family.

6.3 Respondents welcomed the proposals to provide packs to carers setting out the

activities available in their area, but felt that more could be done to promote what was on offer within each local authority, through schools or websites.

What more could we do to help young people in care to participate in sporting, leisure and cultural activities?



Young people’s response to the written consultation

6.4 There was also a feeling that young people should be encouraged to take part in activities because of the benefits of developing social skills and staying healthy. Specific suggestions to inspire young people to participate included having a mentor or independent visitor, or having visits from famous sports or music personalities.

- 6.5 In taking this policy forward, respondents warned that if young people were openly identified as looked after they might be deterred from accessing free activities. Some people thought that it might be preferable for carers to be funded directly to remove the stigma of a free pass, and also to enable carers to cover additional costs such as sporting equipment.

52% of people in the written consultation thought that the right features were set out in the comprehensive model of health care for children in care.

“Health has been marginalised in the Green Paper which following the publication of Every Child Matters is not how the needs of this or any group of children and young people should be considered.”

Derby City Primary Care Trust

Being Healthy

“The features in the comprehensive model of healthcare are correct, however, we must express the gravest concerns about this model being comprehensively implemented... without clear and protected funding to meet associated costs.”

NSPCC

- 6.6 The Green Paper set out a model of comprehensive health care for children in care and proposals to support delivery of the model, including:
- A named health professional for every child;
 - Expectation that primary care trusts and NHS providers work together with local authorities to deliver Local Area Agreements in their areas;
 - Access for advice for carers on health needs; and
 - Dedicated or targeted CAMHS.
- 6.7 Respondents generally agreed that the Green Paper set out the right features of a comprehensive model of health care, although there was concern about the feasibility of the model being delivered. Respondents said that health should cut across every chapter of the Green Paper, as health underpins every part of a child’s development and attainment.
- 6.8 Health professionals are waiting with anticipation for the updated guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children. Many primary care trusts and other health professionals mentioned the need for them to be consulted and involved in the update of this guidance, and some respondents said that they hoped it would impose statutory responsibilities on key agencies in relation to the health of children in care. Other issues which people felt should be addressed in this guidance include clarification of responsibilities over children placed out of authority, and the effective tracking of a child’s medical history.
- 6.9 One particular area which respondents identified as a gap was the mental health needs of children in care, and access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Respondents believed that there is a need for better assessment on entry into care, particularly of emotional health needs; better training for carers and social care staff; and clear thresholds for access to specialist services such as CAMHS. People thought that there should be long term access to CAMHS, not just at times of crisis, as many children in care ‘revisit’ their loss or trauma much later in life and more emphasis on therapeutic interventions.
- 6.10 The Green Paper proposed introducing screening for substance misuse as a routine part of regular health assessments so that young people can receive appropriate

support and interventions. Many respondents were concerned that this could stigmatise children in care and deter them from attending health assessments. It was suggested that this might prove more acceptable if it were made a requirement for all young people, or if it was only carried out on those young people who had a history of substance misuse.

- 6.11 Respondents have generally supported the approach to teenage pregnancy, particularly the proposal to ensure that children in care and young people in care who become pregnant have a personal adviser. Teenage pregnancy specialists have also pointed to the need for training, perhaps through the tiered framework proposed, for foster carers in supporting pregnant teenagers or teenage parents.
- 6.12 A National Voice raised concerns that young parents who have been in care often find themselves the focus of unfair attention when other young parents aren't. They call for guidance to be given to child protection teams to ensure young people who have been in care are not singled out:

“Care-experienced young parents sometimes need additional support but do not deserve to have their parenting skills analysed without due cause.”

A National Voice

Avoiding crime and antisocial behaviour

- 6.13 Care Matters proposed an approach to managing challenging behaviour and supporting young people in custody, based on an emphasis on managing behaviour and supporting children in care if in custody. Respondents agreed with the approach to supporting children in care who enter youth custody, welcoming the proposals for local authorities to treat young people voluntarily in care as 'looked after' during their time in custody.

“Help to get them back on the right track.”

Young person

- 6.14 Officials have been to talk to young people in young offender institutions (YOIs) and prisons to hear about their experiences of care and the support they receive whilst in custody.
- 6.15 One issue that young people in custody brought up, which has been echoed by professionals in other areas, is the lack of boundaries in children's homes, and the role this can play in children going on to offend. Many of the young people felt that this lack of boundaries had had a negative impact on their behaviour. It was felt that children's homes were powerless to stop young people committing offences, or to manage their behaviour at all.

“In residential care, there aren't many rules and punishments are slack...”

Young person

- 6.16 Staff at one YOI suggested that prison staff could usefully share good practice in terms of behaviour control, such as de-escalation techniques, with residential care staff and suggested secondments between the two settings as a means of taking this forward.

“It is not against the rights of the child to say 'no' but it may be an abdication of your duty of care to keep saying 'yes'.”

National Association of Head Teachers

- 6.17 This fits with other messages that we have heard in the consultation that there needs to be an emphasis on prevention strategies to reduce the number of children in care going on to enter custody. Respondents welcomed the proposal to include approaches to behaviour in training for carers, and particularly the proposal to include behaviour management strategies in the training for managers of residential homes.
- 6.18 Another issue which arose during the consultation in YOIs and prisons was the importance of bridging the gap between

social care and youth custody. Professionals that we talked to spoke of a lack of understanding on both sides and problems of joining up services because of this. Suggestions to address this included a requirement for social workers to be employed in young offender institutions and clarification of the responsibility of the local authority whilst a child was in custody and when they leave.

- 6.19 The contact young people had with their social workers whilst they were in custody varied from frequent to non-existent. Some of them felt that they had no support or security waiting for them on the outside, and did not know what support they were entitled to.

“They’ve forgotten about us.”

Child in care in young offender institution

7: The Transition to Adult Life

“Young people should have a choice to leave care between 16 to 21 years old so that they leave when they feel ready”.

Young person

- 7.1 The proposals in Care Matters in Chapter 7 signalled a turning point in the way young people are treated as they get older. The Green Paper set out the premise that young people should be able to move on from care in a gradual, phased and above all prepared way. Respondents in the consultation signalled their agreement with this premise. Indeed, the proposals in Chapter 7 have received the most positive support compared to any other chapter in the Green Paper.

Entering Adult Life at the Right Time

“Support them as parents do ‘til ready to leave”

Young person

- 7.2 The Green Paper proposed piloting giving young people a veto over any decisions about legally leaving care before 18 and piloting allowing care leavers to continue to live with foster families up to the age of 21. These proposals have received widespread support in the consultation.

93% of respondents to the written consultation answered ‘yes’ to the question “should young people be allowed to remain with their foster families up to the age of 21 including when the young person is at university?”.

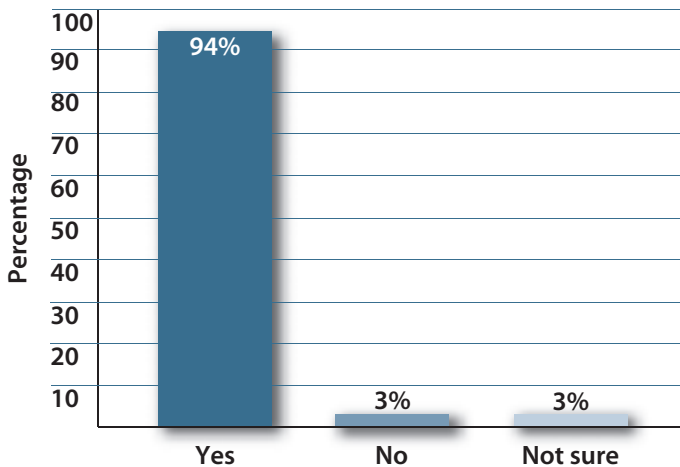
- 7.3 Children and young people agreed strongly with the proposals to help them stay in care longer and to have a smoother transition to adulthood. The main reasons they gave for this were:
- Young people are often not ready to leave care at 16;
 - Young people would feel more secure and settled if they knew they could stay in care longer;
 - It is important to be able to choose when they are ready to leave care; and
 - At present young people can be in a happy settled placement and then forced to leave.

“Kids need more help with adulthood”

Young person

- 7.4 Some young people were a bit worried that being guaranteed support until 18 or 21 might make children less motivated to become independent and supportive.
- 7.5 There were many concerns that young people are leaving care too early, often because of financial reasons, even where the young person and the carer agree that they should stay.

Should young people have the right to a ‘veto’ to enable them to stay if the local authority wants to move a young person from care before the age of 18?



Young people’s response from digi-voting at What Makes the Difference events

“Despite the good intentions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, too many young people still leave care at too young an age and struggle to survive independently.”

A National Voice

- 7.6 Respondents believed that as well as offering children a ‘veto’ to stay in care until 18, young people should be encouraged to stay, and there should be a presumption that young people will stay until at least 18, where this is appropriate. It is also key for them to be taught life skills such as cooking and managing finances.
- 7.7 One issue that has emerged from the consultation is concern that the proposal to enable young people to stay in foster care until 21 is not mirrored for those young people in other types of placement. Many people have asked if young people in residential care will also get the option to stay in care until 21 and feel strongly that young people in residential care have as much right to stay until 21 and would benefit as much as those young people in foster care.

“What about residential care? This is discrimination against young people in residential care. Young people in residential care need choice to stay longer as well.”

Young person

- 7.8 A lot of young people thought they should be able to have a trial period of living independently, or some kind of staged process, where they live on their own for half a week and with carers for the other half. It was felt that if a child left care before 21, but then decided that this was the wrong decision, they should get a second chance to return to care.

“I would like to have a trial to see if I can handle moving out, or I want it. That way I have the choice to go back home if I can’t cope.”

Young person

- 7.9 Local authorities and other organisations, whilst supportive of the proposals, have raised concerns that these policies will restrict the pool of foster and residential carers available to have children placed with them. Respondents were keen to point out that the proposals need to be properly resourced. The additional number of carers needed as well as additional social workers and pressures on supported living provision and securing suitable residential care for older young people will need to be taken into account.

Accommodation

“Find them a place to live. Don’t put them in places where they can fail, give more support.”

Young person

- 7.10 The Green Paper proposed evaluating existing models of supported housing for care leavers and establishing a capital investment fund to support the provision of dedicated accommodation. Again, these proposals have received widespread support throughout the consultation. Respondents

pointed to how crucial having a safe and secure place to live is to making a successful transition to adult life.

- 7.11 Many people provided views on how to increase the availability of supported accommodation for young people, and how to improve supported housing as an option for those young people for whom this is appropriate. The LGA advised that particular attention would have to be paid to the implementation of the investment in those authorities where housing and children's services are separate. Other suggestions included:
- Regular inspection of supported accommodation according to a set of clear standards;
 - Tiered approach to supported accommodation, including intense training and support for those who need it;
 - Clear accountability for authorities who fail to provide support for young people – legal responsibility on the local authority for the quality and effectiveness of supported accommodation;
 - Duty on local authorities to ensure care leavers are a priority for quality housing; and
 - 24/7 support lines for young people living alone.

Financial Support

- 7.12 Care Matters proposed providing an extra £100 per year to the Child Trust Fund accounts of young people who spend a year in care to provide a more significant asset for them on entering adult life. This has been welcomed by both children and young people in care and professionals, as a step to normalising the support that young people receive to facilitate their transition to adulthood.

- 7.13 There were a few concerns raised that this will only impact on a small percentage of the care population and there should be opportunities for all children in care to develop assets for use when they reach 18. Some people thought that £100 was not a large enough amount to make a difference.

Increasing Participation and Support in Higher Education

“There should be an extra sum of money as not only would it give the young person something to aspire to it will also give them a sense of self worth.”

Young person

- 7.14 The Green Paper proposed a range of methods to incentivise and support children in care to enter higher education, including:
- The introduction of a national bursary of £2000 for all young people in care going on to higher education;
 - Targeting young people through Aim Higher to increase participation;
 - Promotion of good practice in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark;
 - Training for key staff in universities; and
 - Encouraging HEIs to have a dedicated member of staff with expertise in supporting care leavers
- 7.15 This package of proposals has received widespread support, and people welcomed efforts to increase the level of participation of care leavers in higher education which respondents acknowledged was ‘appallingly low’.

83% of young people at the WMTD events thought that the £2000 bursary for higher education was a good idea. 73% thought it would encourage more young people to go on to higher education.

7.16 Several universities and Aim Higher partnerships commented that more could be done to highlight and promote case studies of graduates who are care leavers. Many people noted that there was a need to raise aspirations among children in care. As a child at one consultation event said, you have to “think positive and aim high”, and this can be helped by adults working with children “making them feel good about themselves”. There are many examples of good practice in outreach work to children in care and supporting young people once at university and more could be done to disseminate this practice.

“Young people should have extra money for university but there should also be systems in place for nurturing/parental support throughout the university years.”

Young person

7.17 The £2000 bursary has generally been welcomed, but there have been questions raised about whether this will be for one year or for each year at university. Young people think that this should be paid in instalments as many young people have not been taught the skills of managing money. Some respondents felt that £2000 was an insufficient amount to support young people moving on to higher education. People pointed to local authorities that already offer higher bursaries than this, and raised concerns that these authorities might lower their bursaries to £2000.

7.18 Another issue that was raised repeatedly by young people at consultation events is that young people going on to more vocational courses, at Further Education colleges for example, will not get the benefit of proposals such as the national bursary. Some young people felt that the Green Paper placed higher value on young people entering higher education than those continuing education or training in other settings.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

“We recognise that the presence of UASC causes specific pressure on many local authorities, in terms of budget, locating suitable placements and transition to leaving care, but we would assert that they are children first...”

West Midlands Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support

7.19 Many respondents felt that Care Matters did not address the specific problems faced by unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). There has also been disappointment that the Home Office consultation on these issues was not launched alongside the Green Paper. There have been several requests for a clear statement from DfES confirming that the recommendations in the Green Paper will be universally applicable to UASC. There have been calls for clear joint guidance from the Home Office and DfES about transitions at 18 for UASC, and who is responsible for what.

7.20 We received several responses from groups of young people seeking asylum. One group of young people consulted felt that asylum seeking young people should be aided to integrate rather than be placed with ‘special’ foster placements. Other respondents felt that there was a need for specialist training to be available so that carers can better understand the immigration and asylum process.

“They need to know about the asylum process. Mental and emotional health support. Especially they need to know about different foods, religion, language and countries of origin to better understand asylum seekers.”

Asylum seeking young person

7.21 Respondents felt that the needs of UASC often differed from other young people. Many enter the care system at 16 or 17 years old, and their needs for education and

training at this stage can be significantly different, such as the need for support and training in learning English. Other specific barriers to a smooth transition to adulthood which respondents felt were not addressed in Care Matters include:

- Delays or uncertainty regarding final decisions from the Home Office on their cases;
- Inconsistency of support across regions;
- Lack of specialist knowledge of the asylum process amongst social care staff; and
- Specific health issues which many UASC face.

“[The ability to recognise and respond to children’s diverse needs] would be dependent upon the cultural competence of the social worker and a thorough knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting ethnic minority children”.

Commission for Racial Equality

Black and Minority Ethnic Children

7.22 Similarly, several respondents have felt that the Green Paper did not deal sufficiently with specific issues that black and minority ethnic children face in care. There have been several comments that the Government needs to think further about the over-representation of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in care. Respondents think that there is a need for further research to better understand and address this over-representation and to improve data collection on ethnic minority children in care.

7.23 People have raised concerns about the lack of availability of black and minority ethnic foster carers, and in particular those who are able to cater for the specific needs of children in terms of language, culture and location. Some young people spoke of experiences where they had been placed with carers who had no knowledge or experience of their religion, language and culture. There is a need to ensure that social workers and other members of the social care workforce receive support and training to develop these skills.

8: Making the System Work

“I believe people in power should listen to young people in care because they never will have gone through half of what we have. They need to understand so that they can do more.”

Young person

- 8.1 The final chapter of Care Matters set out proposals to ensure that system failure for this group of vulnerable children is identified and addressed. All parts of the system should be genuinely held accountable and children in care should have the opportunity to feed their own views into how the services they receive are provided. Respondents were positive about the need to give children in care a greater voice and to involve them in holding the system properly to account, although there were mixed views on the best way to do this.

Ensuring Priority in Schools

- 8.2 The Green Paper proposed introducing a new power for local authorities to intervene in schools performing poorly for children in care. This was generally supported, with people feeling that this could compel schools to fulfil their responsibilities for children in care.

61% of respondents supported introducing a new power for local authorities to intervene in schools performing badly for children in care.

“Introducing a new power for local authorities to intervene may be a good thing, but only if the necessary incentives are then made available for that school to improve its performance and practice with extra training and funding.”

Fostering Network

- 8.3 Other respondents believed that there was no need for a new power for local authorities – that existing arrangements for school inspection and intervention were sufficient. They pointed to a number of factors outside the school’s control which could contribute to the lack of attainment for children in care, such as frequent placement change.
- 8.4 Several respondents felt that intervention into a school performing badly for children in care may be a disproportionate response as most schools will only have a handful of children in care. Respondents felt that it could be difficult to judge whether schools were failing looked after children, or merely having difficulties with one child.
- 8.5 Issues were also raised about those schools which were more willing to admit children in care than others. It was suggested that greater recognition should be given to those admitting children in care rather than penalising them. Respondents felt that where schools were struggling, they should be provided with the resource, expertise and training to achieve positive outcomes, rather than being threatened with intervention measures.
- 8.6 Some concerns were raised about what criteria would be used in order to judge schools as ‘performing poorly’. Many people felt that judging children in care purely on

targets such as achievement of five A* - C GCSEs could be inappropriate, and personalised targets for children in care might be more suitable, with associated learning plans and support packages in place to help children achieve these targets. Many people thought that 'softer' targets should also be used, such as attendance and behaviour and improving communication skills or other cognitive skills.

Monitoring Our Performance in Future

8.7 The written consultation asked what key outcomes we should measure to assess whether we are being successful in transforming the lives of children and young people in care. People felt that whilst measuring educational attainment is important, it is essential that it is not the only outcome measured. People thought that the existing outcomes measured were right, such as placement stability and health. It was suggested that particular aspects of health that could be measured included mental health, reduction in sexually transmitted infections, obesity, smoking, self-harm and suicide attempts.

8.8 People thought it was vital that children in care were asked which outcomes should be measured. It was felt that they were best placed to determine how to measure how things had changed for them. Most children and young people simply said that "people in Government should come and ask us". They want to be asked directly how they are doing and self-reporting should be a key part of assessing how the lives of children and young people are being transformed.

"All local MPs should visit all the care homes, good ones and bad ones."

Young person

8.9 There were many suggestions as to what other measures we should judge our future performance for children in care against such as:

- The 5 Every Child Matters outcomes;
- Secure employment;
- Longer term economic wellbeing;
- The ability to make enduring adult relationships;
- Ability to meet their own welfare needs;
- How far they had achieved their potential.

"Educational attainment is not the only way to measure success; we should also look at how well children in care are developing and achieving goals that are relevant to their individual circumstances."

A local authority

8.10 When looking at outcomes for children in care, respondents felt that it was important to look at the age at which they came into care and their progression or regression since coming into care. This would give a better sense of 'value added' or 'distance travelled' than the current fixed measures.

A Greater Voice for Children

8.11 The Green Paper sought to ensure that children in care have a say in the services that they receive. One of the key proposals to achieve this was to expect local authorities to have a 'children in care council', through which children's views would be collected. This has received widespread support from children and young people in care throughout the consultation period, as well as professionals.

"...just as children have direct links to their parents, children in care should have direct links to their corporate parents."

Professional at WMTD consultation event

8.12 Both young people and professionals strongly supported this idea. Some people thought that councils might be set up purely as a tokenistic gesture and not have any authority. Huge emphasis was placed on the need for children in care councils to have 'real

teeth', by sharing real power and decision-making with adults. It was suggested that the director of children's services and the lead member for children should have regular interaction with the children in care council to ensure it has status and power to influence the local authority.

89% of young people and 92% of professionals at WMTD events thought that children in care councils were a good idea.

- 8.13 Professionals pointed to existing good practice in many authorities that already have some form of children and young people's forum. They urged implementation of this policy to build on existing good practice. Some voluntary organisations have raised the possibility of being an umbrella organisation to help spread good practice in children in care councils and in encouraging other ways of participation and empowerment of young people.
- 8.14 Young people felt that it was also important to have other opportunities to have their say, as a forum or council environment may not be right for some people. A key message which has come out of the consultation is that children in care want, and deserve, not only to have their voice heard, but for the corporate parent to respond to that voice.

Independent Reviewing Officers

- 8.15 The Green Paper proposed that there is a need to achieve a greater degree of independence for independent reviewing officers (IROs) and a need to strengthen their role. Throughout the consultation views have been sought on how this can best be done, including the option of IROs being employed by an independent agency instead of the local authority.
- 8.16 There were mixed views from children and young people in care about whether IROs should be independent from the local

authority. Some children believed they should remain in the local authority, so that there is expertise and also children would feel safer if IROs were in larger organisations.

- 8.17 Other young people felt that independence might empower IROs to challenge decisions made by the local authority more. Some felt that this might also ensure that opinions are not biased.
- "Independent reviewing officers should be totally independent so that they can challenge social care."***

Young person

- 8.18 Several respondents felt that the role of the IRO was fairly new and so it needed more time to establish itself before making any radical changes. This was seen as a developing role and should continue to be developed and embedded within local authorities. Others called for an evaluation of the role to see how effective it currently is and with a possibility of piloting in different settings across the country. Some respondents felt strongly that there needs to be a thorough exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of the current system before rushing to structural change.
- 8.19 Most IROs themselves felt that they should remain employed by the local authority, with certain provisos such as increased separation of line management from operational activity; standardisation of monitoring and reporting; independent legal advice; and common agreement on the role and position of IROs in care planning for children in care.

"The present system is failing lamentably in many parts of the country, however... the issue of independence from the local authority, perceived or actual, is not, the central issue."

Family Justice Council

- 8.20 This view was echoed by other respondents including local authorities who felt that taking IROs out of the local authority would

weaken their power and influence, particularly over care plans, PEPs and monitoring progress. By working in local authorities they have the opportunity to build up knowledge and understanding of the LA processes: they have access to key information systems such as ICS databases and other information that would not be readily available if they were based outside. Some respondents suggested that local authorities should provide reciprocal arrangements for reviews for each other.

8.21 Other suggestions for strengthening the role of IROs within the employment of the local authority included:

- Local authority staff should get training on the role of IROs;
- Maintaining realistic caseloads to allow more time to follow up reviews;
- Providing training, particularly in human rights legislation, child protection, education and health matters;
- CSCI inspections of IROs; and
- Strengthen and clarify the status of the review.

8.22 The Family Justice Council felt that independence from the local authority is not the central issue, and that the current problems with the system could be solved through extensive amendments to the IRO guidance and ensuring IROs have authority and capacity to deliver this, with smaller caseloads.

8.23 Other respondents thought that IROs could be made more independent if they were removed from the employment of local authorities. Various suggestions were made as to how this could be done including:

- Employment by an independent agency;
- Employment by CAFCASS/DfES/Ofsted;
- Employment by regional government offices similar to CSAs;

- Employment by private agencies;
- Contracting out to a charity; and
- Establishment of a national IRO agency.

8.24 CAFCASS have indicated that they would be willing to take on the IRO service should we decide that IROs be removed from local authority control. However a few respondents felt that CAFCASS would not be the best place for this service due to their financial and practical restraints of this organisation and accountability issues.

*Come help me deal with my anger,
Don't just say I am bad,
In my life there has only been anger
Most of the time I was sad.*

*Not a kiss or a hug off my mother,
Just a slap and a kick off my dad,
There were times I lashed out in anger,
But don't just say I am bad.*

*The money for food was at the boozer,
The clothes on my back never new,
I sat in the cold and the darkness,
At that age what else could I do?*

*Then one day you came to my rescue,
You took me away from that place,
You helped me deal with my anger,
You helped put a smile on my face.*

*They say time is a healer,
And your love may ease the pain,
But my dreams will always be haunted,
And the scars will always remain.*

Reminiscence, by Danny Day, young person in care

Next Steps

Working Groups

Following the publication of Care Matters, working groups were set up to look at four specific areas of the Green Paper. The membership of these groups encompass a wide range of interests and expertise, and there is at least one young person with experience of care on each group.

- The Future of the Care Population group is chaired by Martin Narey, Chief Executive of Barnardos. This is exploring what our long term vision for the care system should be.
- Chaired by Professor Julian Le Grand of London School of Economics, the 'social care practices' working group is looking at the feasibility of piloting the practices that were proposed in the Green Paper.
- Lord Laming is chairing the group that is looking at placements. This is exploring the tiered framework of qualifications and placements proposed in Care Matters.
- The aim of the group chaired by Dame Professor Pat Collarbone is to create a vision of what excellent practice would look like in schools working with children in care.

The Chairs of the four groups will report back to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and the reports will be published later in the spring.

Next Steps

We are committed to keeping momentum up on taking forward the ambitious agenda set out in Care Matters. We will publish a White Paper later this year setting out exactly how we are taking forward policies to transform the lives of children and young people in care. In developing the policies we will take full account of the results of the consultation set out in this document, and the findings of the four working groups.

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