

TITLE OF REPORT: OFSTED REPORT: [‘Ready or not’ – care leavers’ views of preparing to leave care](#)

Purpose of the Report

To share this research report, which includes recommendations for the Corporate Parenting Board.

Background

For many children in care, approaching adulthood and leaving the care system is a time of extra challenges, anxiety and fear. This report looks at the planning and preparation that happens before leaving care.

Ofsted carried out an online survey of children in care (aged 16 to 17) and care leavers (no age limit) to explore whether the help they got when getting ready to leave care was what they needed, and how involved they were in the decisions made about their future.

Findings reflect what care leavers told Ofsted about their experiences through the survey and interviews. As people do not always recognise or accurately remember the help they get, the research can only report on care leavers’ perceptions of the preparation they received.

Findings are not necessarily representative of all care leavers’ experiences. Some of the main findings are summarised in the section below, and expanded on in the [report](#).

Summary of key findings

- More than a third of care leavers felt that they left care too early. This was often because the move out of care happened abruptly and they were not ready for all the sudden changes. Of those who did feel that they left care at the right time, not all felt they had the required skills to live more independently. Many care leavers told us that they were not taught essential skills, such as how to shop, cook or manage money.
- Many care leavers felt ‘alone’ or ‘isolated’ when they left care and did not know where to get help with their mental health or emotional well-being. Many care leavers had no one they could talk to about how they were feeling or who would look out for them. A third of care leavers told us they did not know where to get help and support. For many, no plans had been made to support their mental health or emotional well-being when they left care.
- Although statutory guidance requires that young people should be introduced to their personal adviser (PA) from age 16, over a quarter of care leavers did not meet their PA until they were 18 or older. Care leavers saw PAs as helpful in preparing to leave care, but a fifth felt they met them too late. Two fifths of the children still in care told

us that they did not yet have a PA, meaning that some about to leave care still did not know who would be helping them.

- Some care leavers could not trust or rely on the professionals helping them to prepare for leaving care. Care leavers needed someone they could rely on for help when they felt scared or worried, but sometimes they felt that professionals were 'rude' or 'uninterested', or showed a lack of respect, for example by cancelling meetings, turning up late or ignoring their feelings.
- Care leavers were not involved enough in plans about their future. Around a quarter of care leavers reported they were not at all involved in developing these plans. Some felt that, even when they expressed their wishes, they were not listened to, or that they did not fully understand the options. Some felt that plans did not match their aspirations. For many, this had a long-term impact on their education or career path, as well as their emotional well-being.
- Many care leavers had no control over where they lived when they left care, and many felt unsafe. Only around a third of care leavers had a say in the location they'd like to live in and even fewer (a fifth) in the type of accommodation. One in 10 care leavers never felt safe when they first left care. Many care leavers were worried about the area or people where they lived. Sometimes the area was completely unfamiliar to them or was seen as a crime and exploitation hot spot. Many care leavers also felt unsafe living on their own.
- Many care leavers felt unprepared to manage money. Some were not aware of what bills they needed to pay, or how to budget. In some cases, this led to them getting into debt, losing tenancies, or not being able to afford food or travel. Some care leavers were still in debt years later. When they were asked what made them feel unsafe when they first left care, being worried about money was the most common reason reported. A few care leavers reported getting into crime when they left care in order to get money, or because they were not able to manage their finances.
- Some care leavers said they did not find out about their rights until they were already in serious difficulties. In some cases, care leavers were already in debt or homeless before they were told about the help they could access. Only around half remembered being told about the support and services available in the local care leaver offer. A similar proportion reported being told how to complain and even fewer were told how to get advocacy support. Care leavers (or their carers) who had engaged advocacy services had found this help to be vital.

Recommendations for corporate parents

Many of the findings highlighted in this research are not new and are related to existing statutory guidance. However, the fact that many children in care and care leavers, including those who left many years ago, continue to share similar experiences and feelings about the preparation they got for leaving care shows that there is more that corporate parents could do to satisfy themselves that they are meeting their duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The recommendations specifically for corporate parents are included as [appendix 1](#) and are set out to prompt discussion and identify any actions for Gateshead.

Proposal

1. It is proposed that Corporate Parenting Board self-assess against the recommendations and include any identified actions within the CPB action plan.

Recommendations

2. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note the contents of the report and identify any actions.

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Appendix 1

	Recommendation	What do we do in Gateshead?	What do we need to do?
1	Allocate children in care to a PA as close to age 16 as possible, in line with statutory guidance.		
2	Involve children in care and care leavers in developing their plans for after care. Plans should take account of young people's wishes and concerns, when possible, including those related to feeling safe, where young people want to live, and what they want to do with their future.		
3	Plans should pay sufficient attention to social, emotional and mental health needs. They should be developed early but at the young person's pace and in an incremental way.		
4	Young people should be prepared for:		
	<input type="checkbox"/> managing finances and budgeting, including understanding what bills they have to pay, what benefits they are entitled to, how to budget, and how the money they get will change at different ages		
	<input type="checkbox"/> handling safety and risk, including about the area and accommodation they live in, what risks they may face, ensuring they know who they can call for help, and what they can do in an emergency		
	<input type="checkbox"/> accessing health services, including helping them to register with GPs, dentists and opticians, and ensuring that they know what services are available if they move area		
	<input type="checkbox"/> supporting mental health and emotional well-being, including knowing who they can call if they need help or someone to talk to (any known mental health problems should be incorporated into the plan so that these are considered across all aspects of planning). If care leavers have long-term physical or mental health conditions, corporate parents should help them to navigate the transition to adults' services.		
5	Publish and publicise the local authority's care leaver offer in accessible ways, in line with statutory guidance. Ensure that care leavers know what they are legally entitled to and are helped to access support after they leave care. Review the care leaver offer in partnership with care leavers.		
6	Ensure that all children in care and care leavers know how to make a complaint and have access to advocacy services.		