

RESPONSE FROM SOCIAL WORK SCOTLAND TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON MOVING ON FROM CARE INTO ADULTHOOD

October 2024

Introduction:

Social Work Scotland (SWS) is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. The introduction of statutory aftercare and subsequent extension of this in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and related introduction of continuing care were welcomed across the sector. Achieving and expanding the principles of good transitions support over this critical phase in the care journey has been given further focus with the publication of the Promise in 2020, and work since then. Our members are acutely aware of the criticality and complexity of transitions and welcome this opportunity to continue to actively contribute to discussions about how best to achieve the right support for those with experience of care as they move into adulthood.

The principles on which the social work profession is built are those of human rights, and as such as a profession we align to the principles of continuing care and aftercare covered in this consultation. We particularly welcome the linkage with the Principles of Good Transitions, principles designed by young people and those who support them, and applicable for all transitions stages. As an organisation Social Work Scotland also operate in a space where we seek to ensure that legislation and good practice can be put into practice and achieve its intended goal and improvement. Implementation of continuing care and aftercare has been fraught with complexities; many unseen at the point where the

legislation was initially enacted. This has been exacerbated over recent years by challenges in demand, resources, finance and workforce; matters which form the necessary foundation on which the improvements sought by young people, practitioners, leaders and government can be achieved – and something acknowledged in the Promise foundations. Social Work Scotland are fully committed to the vision of improving our care system and the support provided to enable young people to move into adulthood with the tools to become successful adults and members of society. However, seeking to extend that provision without the existing foundations being secure is likely to lead to ongoing confusion and inequality which will not meet our shared objectives and will bring further distress to the young people we seek to serve. Underlined and reflected in this response is the importance of attention to those foundations necessary for successful implementation and achieving the improved outcomes for our care leavers we all desire.

As an organisation we work closely with our partners to shape policy and practice and improve the quality and experience of social services with commitment to achieving better outcomes in continuing care and aftercare of our looked after children in Scotland. This response is gathered from ongoing discussions with partners, alongside the views and reflections of our membership which spans local authority and third sector organisations across the range of social work provision. We have particularly sought the views of those working directly with young people in or opting into continuing care and aftercare, as well as managers and those with strategic responsibilities.

Consultation Questions

Planning and preparation for moving on from care into adulthood

Positive transitions for those moving on from care go some way in improving the opportunities and likelihood of positive destinations. We know that the planning and preparation for transition should begin as early as possible and that the young person, supported by the adults in their lives, should be at the heart of all planning and decision making.

ARC Scotland's Principles of Good Transitions advocate that planning should start early (from the age of 14) and should continue to age 25 (up until a young person's

26th birthday).

A pathway plan is produced which aims to prepare young people for leaving care. It sets out what is required to make sure the young person feels confident about making the transition to more independent living. This might include information on suitable accommodation, mental health, education, counselling or advice and skills to manage their home, health, and income. During 2022-23, 71% of children who were 16 years or over on the date they ceased to be looked after had a pathway plan upon discharge and just over half (52%) had a pathway co-ordinator. Planning can, and should, begin before the young person turns 16. Sharing knowledge and information is crucial to build confidence in young people moving on from care into adulthood.

We want to improve our understanding of how we can better support caregivers and care providers to support positive transitions for our young people leaving care. We know that caregivers and care providers are facing increased pressures and challenges, linked to matters such as workforce gaps, the financial climate, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. How can we ensure that young people, and those who support them, are given enough time, advice and resources to effectively prepare them for moving on from care? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

As Promise¹, research² and practice tell us, moving on from care is not a single event, and one approach will not suit all young people. As such consideration of the principles which underpin the journey into adulthood are critical, with less emphasis on age and process, and more on the young person's individual journey. This asks more of those involved, and requires understanding, flexibility and training from all those working with a young person, from carers to family and social work staff.

¹ <https://thepromise.scot/>

² <https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/search-bank/continuing-care-exploration-implementation>

None of these things come without attention to time and skill. The current workforce and financial climates mean that critical front-line services (and the back room support which frees up front line staff time) are being cut at a time when demand and expectation is increasing. Time to maintain relationships and for training all suffer as a result, with the consequent impact on young people and others with whom social work engage.

The work to ensure the right bespoke support is available for young people is undertaken and maintained by dedicated staff but will not be improved and developed until the fundamental issues of funding and workforce are dealt with³.

2. Are there any barriers to starting the process of planning and preparing for young people leaving care at an early stage? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

No, but no young person's care journey is the same. For some who are in stable long-term placements with positive and lasting relationship with their carers, discussion about moving on can be less of a direct focus – young people are likely to feel stable and safe and know instinctively that those around them will be there for them. In such situations preparation for moving on is often more natural. For others, this is not the case; they may have come into care at a later stage in their childhood, or their situations may be unsettled, and without the strong structure and relationships around them to support any transition. In those scenarios, planning often needs to be more targeted.

Feedback from members is also that a focus on moving on at particular stages can in itself be unsettling for young people and can push them into thinking about life several years ahead at a time they are already facing uncertainty and distress and need stability 'in the moment'.

This underlines the importance of the transition to adulthood being incorporated into 'normal' children's assessment and planning processes, rather than a specific focus in time. This is in line with Principles of Good Transitions. To achieve this there needs to be good

³ <https://www.celcis.org/our-work/research/childrens-services-reform-research-reports>
<https://socialworkscotland.org/reports/settingthebar/>

understanding and application of skill in how to plan and work with young people within the framework of GIRFEC without adding to the burdens and pressures young people may already be dealing with.

Social Work Scotland are supportive of the Principles of Good Transitions and that consideration of the journey into adulthood should begin to be in the mix from the age of around 14 years, managed according to the young person's needs and with more of a focus as the young person reaches the actual transition

Accessing information, services and support

Every young person will need different support, but services should align in a way that supports their needs so that children and young people can thrive. Similar to their peers, people leaving care may have additional needs, for example, due to disabilities or complex health needs. Consideration should be given to all the support young people may need when they are moving on from care into adulthood and, where possible, more independent living.

A community is stronger when all its people feel supported and with the right scaffolding in place, young people can thrive during the transition to independent living. All young people, including those with experience of care may need additional help in the form of guidance, emotional support or practical support. Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide support to people leaving care where there is an eligible need.

Support could include signposting to financial and non-financial services that support people leaving care. It could include a wide range of support in line with a holistic understanding of wellbeing from the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) framework. Emotional support could include counselling, peer support and continued relationships with caregivers. Practical support could include support and learning related to key life skills such as paying bills and managing finances, personal care, arranging medical appointments and basic household management skills such as cooking and laundry.

We have been told by people leaving care, and the adults in their lives, that information on what services and support are out there for young people moving on from care is not always easily accessible.

The Promise tells us that children and their carers must have access to information about their individual rights and entitlements at any point in their journey of care. It also notes that the workforce must be supported to be the trusted adults that children need to help them access their rights and entitlements, ensuring that all children can achieve their rights and live their lives to the full.

**3. How can we ensure young people receive the right support and guidance to build the life skills they need for adulthood before they move on from care?
Please provide suggestions in the open text box.**

Many of our members have noted material, guidance and training developed and in place which outline the range of skills young people moving on from care should be supported to develop - and programmes for carers to support this learning and application. Other members note the importance of making young people aware while they are in care or continuing care of the 'informal' support which will be available to them e.g. from previous carers, via support groups and Champions Boards, as well as the support from aftercare teams. Some areas transfer case responsibility for young people to aftercare teams early to ensure that those relationships are well established before a young person begins their moving on journey.

All underline that the emotional support is as important as the focus on practical skills, and the role of wider corporate parents in working together to support young people before, during and after they move into adulthood.

The trauma of the separation of parent(s) and their child can be profound and lifelong. The Promise tells us that families who have had a child removed should not be abandoned. These families must continue to be provided with therapeutic support, advocacy and engagement in line with principles of intensive family support. For some young people leaving care, returning home to live with their birth family

may be the best option for them. However, we must support families to ensure it is safe and in the best interest of the young person to return home.

4. What services and support should be considered and provided to a care leaver who returns home to live with their birth family? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Support for families has long been part of the services provided for children in the care system – most young people who come into care return to their families, and many come into the care system due to issues related to their families. SWS members recognise the level and complexity of emotion and often trauma that is involved in having a child removed, and the draw on older young people back to their birth families. There is a duty to support young people whatever setting they move on to on leaving care,

They also note that the level of involvement with families differs depending on the position of the child. If a return home is envisaged – and this is always the first option - contact and support will be extensive to support the changes required to make this safe and lasting. Where this is not an option, they recognise that support to the family often decreases, or changes in nature to maintaining a relationship rather than rehabilitation.

In principle SWS is supportive of individual and ongoing support to families but note that this in itself requires financial and workforce resource, and training. The nature of this support will be different to that where rehabilitation is being considered and is likely to be more therapeutic in nature. There are some examples of practice in this area which members are happy to share. For children and families social workers, the duty is to the child, and work with families will be focusing on how positive relationships and inclusion with family will enhance the child's wellbeing

5. Can you provide examples of good practice where services have worked together in a holistic way to support birth families and young people moving on from care when the young person returns to live with their birth family? Please provide any examples and share your views in the open text box.

Individual authorities are best positioned to provide examples. Many local authorities have excellent Aftercare Teams.

SWS would comment that good support is required regardless of where a young person is living – the principles are the same and flexibility of approach and skill is critical

6. How do we ensure that young people with care experience, and those who provide them with care, can easily access information about entitlements and support? Please provide any examples of good practice you are aware of in the open text box.

As part of the pathway planning processes, many members have noted the information provided to young people – verbally, using apps and via written material, alongside ongoing conversation with carers and support staff. Note has also been made of the role of reviews, where checks and oversight can ensure that information has and is being provided in a manner which is appropriate and accessible to the young people. Some local areas also note the role their advocacy services and children's rights officers, and local services such as CAB play in underlining the support available e.g. the care experienced grant.

Continuing Care

Continuing Care effectively offers eligible young persons the entitlement to remain in their care setting up to their twenty-first birthday where they cease to be looked after by a local authority. People leaving care may also be offered Aftercare until their 26th birthday, and potentially beyond, if they are found to have eligible needs.

During 2022-23, 911 young people aged 16 years or over ceased to be looked after and were eligible for Continuing Care. Of these, 29% (261) entered Continuing Care. The Promise is clear that young people should not have their care brought to an end when they do not want to leave and are not ready to. It says care settings should be supported and resourced to keep places open for young people in line with legislation.

The CELCIS report, Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation highlighted barriers to the implementation of Continuing Care across Scotland, with practitioners

agreeing upon the importance of ensuring that Continuing Care is the default provision for young people who are looked after.

The CELCIS report is clear on the financial and resource challenges we are facing and the impact this can have on services. We cannot shy away from this financial fact, but we can make sure that what is out there for young people is clearly signposted and supported for access. We can also work to ensure that the agreed best practice models are followed, in a way that works for young people, practitioners and the adults who support them.

7. Are there any changes you would like to see as part of the eligibility criteria for Continuing Care? Please provide details of your suggestions in the open text box.

No. SWS members are strongly of the view that we need to ensure that containing care under the current eligibility criteria is working well and is properly resourced before considering any extension to eligibility. We are not supportive of any extension at this time and, while we strongly agree that all children should have the support they need, we would particularly oppose any suggestion that eligibility for continuing care should be extended to apply to non-looked after young people. We are of the view that this would confuse the legislative landscape, result in additional inequalities and be difficult to apply given the range of situations which might be in scope. We underline though that while we consider continuing care to be inappropriate for non-looked after children e.g. those subject to a Kinship Care Order or Adoption Order, it is important that as a society we consider how support is provided to those young people and their carers.

We also note that continuing care is complex – many young people remain in their placements, but this is inevitably those who have existing relationship with their carers. Those who arguably need it most tend to be those who leave at 17/18 years. These placements are also often not ‘brought to an end’ which suggest that the agency or carers have forced a young person out of a placement when they wished to remain in; often the young person opts to leave, against the advice of those caring for them, or they move on because a carer is not willing to continue a placement due the challenges that exist. Despite this many carers (foster carers and residential carers) offer extensive and positive

ongoing support, achieving the aims of good transitions. Members have provided examples of foster carers who are clear they are foster carers and not supported carers, but who gradually helped young people into their own flat nearby and provide ongoing practical and emotional support. The same approach as taken with their own birth children with each situation having positive outcomes.

Attention is required to the wide support young people need as they move towards and beyond their care experience and the purpose of this support (wherever and however this is provided) rather than too much focus on the important but not only aspect of whether a young person continues to reside in their last care placement.

There are additionally extensive costs implications. Members over many years have noted the current under-resourcing of continuing care, and are now facing significant additional costs for the extensive increase in residential care placement costs (now sitting at anything between £4,500 to £7,000 week per child with some beyond this), alongside the need to source external foster and residential placements as internal placements are taken by those in continuing care. This is not an argument against the policy or principles, but the hard financial reality facing local authorities. Members are worried about the increasing need to prioritise certain provision to the detriment of other provision and the impact this has on young people and the local authority. Any extension of eligibility for continuing care would increase this challenge. Several members have noted that some residential provision is fully committed with continuing care placement necessitating external placement for young children. This is positive for those in continuing care but has significant ramifications for those still in the care system. At a time of shortage of workforce and finance, to extend pressures on an already under resources service would in the view of some members be irresponsible and risk further impacting on children's rights rather than enhancing them.

Issues of risk assessment and balancing the rights and needs of younger children with those in early adulthood now also arise more frequently with some members noting that in those situations, the right of the individual to continuing care supersedes the right of the child to local placement.

8. What additional support do you think is required for families, professionals

and practitioners who are responsible for providing Continuing Care arrangements? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Please see earlier response to the questions on preparation and support

9. How do we ensure that young people, and their views, are heard during discussions on Continuing Care which impact them? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

UNCRC⁴ indicates that young people have a right to have their voice heard in circumstances affecting them and local authorities a duty to seek and take into account the views of children and young people, particularly where those young people are in care⁵

GIRFEC⁶, our overarching model of practice for children and young people, also underlines inclusion of the voice of children and young people and provides a framework for assessment of need which includes that voice.

Additionally, the childcare, continuing care, and aftercare requirements for reviewing of plans enshrines the importance of the voice of young people. This is further protected and highlighted by advocacy and local authorities' Childrens' Rights Officer provision, specifically to uphold the rights of looked after young people.

Overarching all the above, Scotland also now has UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024⁷ which enshrines UNCRC in law, including Article 12 - the right for children to have their views heard and opinion considered in matters affecting them. This is a statutory requirement on public bodies. SWS members view is therefore that there is a strong legislative context, underpinned by practice which is well embedded – even where it is not possible to meet the wishes of a young person.

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/contents>
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/8/contents>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/1>

Aftercare

People leaving care are entitled to Aftercare, which is the advice, guidance and assistance provided under section 29 of the 1995 Act. Any young person who ceases to be looked after on or after their sixteenth birthday and is less than twenty-six years of age is eligible (between sixteen and nineteen) or potentially eligible (between nineteen and twenty-six) for Aftercare.

If a young person over the age of nineteen is applying for support and is deemed to have eligible needs which cannot otherwise be met, the local authority is under a duty to provide the young person with such advice, guidance and assistance as it considers necessary for the purposes of meeting those needs (potentially up to their twenty-sixth birthday).

Aftercare support will vary based on an assessment of each young person's needs and care arrangements, for example; where they have lived in residential/foster care; if they are an asylum seeker; or if they have a disability. When a need is identified, the local authority must develop and record a pathway plan which clearly identifies how this need will be met.

The Promise states that all decisions must be made in the best interests of the child or young person and not on the strict application of age criteria. Aftercare must take a person-centred approach, with thoughtful planning so that there are no cliff edges to care and support.

10. How can we make sure young people can access the range of support they need when they leave care through the provision of Aftercare? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Assessment of need is the 'door' to provision of service, and the framework for all service provision. For many young people, their needs will be ongoing and met by aftercare or similar teams. Some young people opt not to engage, and members note that however much the need may exist, they must respect the young person's decision while retaining an

open door for young people to return at a later date. They also note that much of the support required by care leavers is related to housing, employment or learning, and that while prioritisation of care leavers is useful for some, many do not want the care 'label' and prefer access to housing and support to be less stigmatising.

Members also note that there will always be points where some provision is no longer available e.g. a child becomes legally an adult and certain provision is no longer available. Thus, a level of 'cliff edge' (not a phrase members feel is particularly helpful) is unavoidable, but can be minimised by good planning and a team or place they can use to 'touch base' whenever the need arises.

11. Are there any changes you would like to see as part of the eligibility criteria for Aftercare? Please provide details of your suggestions in the open text box.

No. SWS members consider the current eligibility to be appropriate and in line with growing knowledge about brain development and trauma. We welcome recent changes to include those who have been in secure care.

Members also note the importance of ensuring that the current support to care leavers is consistent and right before looking at any extensions, the resource implications (financial and workforce) of extending the criteria and the importance of discussion with adult services about how all those who may need additional support in adulthood are able to find that support through universal services.

12. What do you think the challenges would be in changing the eligibility criteria for Aftercare? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

*-Resources – both financial and workforce - at a time when frontline services are being cut across agencies and services, and the nature of the support needs of care leavers
-Legal challenges should eligibility be extended to some non-looked after young people
-Children's sector/adult sector challenges around working out who is 'responsible' for meeting those needs*

These are existing issues. To add additional groups into aftercare entitlement would require huge additional investment currently not there for existing provision without adding more, and time to develop workforce capacity. It should also be noted that any aftercare workforce would be competing with other social care and social work workforce demands.

SWS also notes that these are foundation aspect highlighted by Promise. Until they are dealt with, any proposals for extension or enhancement of provision cannot be safely considered or progressed

Lifelong Care

Continuing Care ends when the young person reaches their twenty-first birthday. The young person is then entitled to apply for Aftercare, until their twenty-sixth birthday. Young people have voiced concerns that at the age of 26 years and beyond they may still require access to services and continued support as a result of being care experienced.

The Promise says that older people with care experience must have a right to access services for as long as they are required. We recognise that the impact of care experience can be lifelong and that Scotland must care for and nurture our young people.

13. What do you think would be the best way to provide long term support and services to adults with care experience? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The principle of lifelong support is understandable and attractive; the reality is complex and in the view of many members, probably not achievable. Issues raised are:

-How this the provision defined

– Is it any support needs someone who has been in care requires e.g. health, emotional, practical? How is it determined that this relates to their care experience or is that irrelevant?

-Where would the duty to support sit? With local authorities, IJB's or a future National Care Service? Lifelong aftercare could involve provision of services ranging from transitioning into adulthood through to elderly care, mental health care and wider needs.

-Who assesses eligibility? This will have huge resource implications.

-How is it funded and what does it cover? Could it be an advice line centrally funded by government and signposting to universal or targeted adult services, or is the idea of lifelong aftercare to include the current assessment of need and provision?

-Capacity to undertake such a wider ranging service?

-Might upskilling existing adult services better meet the need and also avoid additional stigmatisation?

Care experienced individuals can also be disproportionately represented in the criminal justice and prison system- often suffering with trauma, mental health, substance problems. There are increasing numbers with neurodiversity issues.

Social Work Scotland suggest that significant further consideration and consultation is required to consider what this might look like and where this duty would sit and how it might best be achieved if desirable.

14. What do you think the challenges would be in providing support and services to adults with care experience? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

See answer to Q13 above.

Support for specific groups of people leaving care

Support for young people leaving secure care

Young people leaving secure care require support to ensure the transition out of such a controlled environment happens with understanding, planning and care. Depriving the liberty of a young person is a significant decision, and where this happens, support should be provided to ensure the young person has what they need to go on to live a fulfilling life in the community at the end of their stay in secure accommodation.

The Promise recommends that any young person who is 'looked after' and is in secure care and turns 18, must retain social work support upon leaving secure care. Young people in secure care with additional support needs require access to support and services which allow them to achieve the best possible health outcomes.

15.What improvements do you think could be made to the support given to those leaving secure care? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

SWS welcome the addition of those in secure care in terms of eligibility for aftercare.

This is a complex area where the needs of young people are varied and significant. Moving on from secure also encompasses young people who are not at aftercare stage, and we suggest that support for those leaving secure care is progressed as part of the Reimagining Secure Care work.

This is particularly the case as young people leaving secure are also in danger of somersaulting into the criminal justice system, unless bespoke support/supervision is available. Understanding the difference between the hearing and justice systems may present issues for some young people and awareness and mentoring is crucial to avoiding contact with the justice system. Justice aftercare processes also provide a level of experience about what is helpful - young people who leave YOI (whether remand or sentenced) are entitled to a voluntary through-care/mentoring service for up to 12 months. This can be provided either by local authority justice social workers or third sector.

16.How do we ensure all young people in Scotland get equal access to the support services they need during the transition from and after leaving secure care? Please provide examples or suggestions in the open text box.

See answer to Q15 above. These young people are amongst the most vulnerable and will always be a priority

Support for young people leaving young offenders institutions and prisons

When people leave prison, they often face obstacles, making it hard for them to

adjust to this next stage in their lives. The Scottish Government has committed to ensuring that young people under the age of 18 are no longer placed in young offenders institutions and we are prioritising the commencement of the relevant provisions of the Children's Care and Justice (Scotland) Act 2024 to achieve this. Despite this positive step, it remains critical that those young adults with care experience who are in a young offenders institution or prison, have the right bridges in place, such as stable relationships and person-centred support when they leave.

17. What improvements could be made to the support given to people with care experience at the transition point from leaving young offenders institutions or prison? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

This is a specialist area, and one where members had limited experience. Justice colleagues note that provision in YOI and adult prisons is now significantly more informed about the impact of life experiences, and how the care journey impacts on individuals and are therefore able to take this into account. We suggest that continuing the trauma informed work already underway in YOI and prison's is the best approach.

18. How do we ensure all young people get access to the same support services when they are leaving young offenders institutions or prison, regardless of where they are located in Scotland? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Though young people may reside in a YOI or prison in a specific area, their home area remains the same. Communication and good relationships are critical.

Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people leaving care

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in Scotland are also Scotland's children for the time they are in our care. We must look after them in the same way we would want others to care for our own children. Many young unaccompanied asylum seekers come into care at a later stage than many Scottish-born children and young people with care experience, which leaves less time to prepare for the transition to adulthood. We also understand that young unaccompanied asylum seeking people in this situation may have reduced social networks due to their

circumstances. They may also have additional mental and physical health needs related to adverse events they have experienced prior to their arrival.

19. Can you share details of any services that are already working well to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people transitioning out of care? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Local areas can best answer this question

A Scottish Government and Cosla joint data collection exercise in autumn 2023 also gathered examples of the challenges, costs and good practice in this area and may provide relevant material and examples

20. What supports and/or improvements do you think could be implemented to ensure we meet the particular needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people transitioning out of care in Scotland? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Nationally and locally, there is a significant level of attention being given to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. In a short period, the care population has changed and learning about how to best meet the needs of a large and varied population of young people whose experiences are very different to other parts of the care population is ongoing. There are also additional aspects to consider such as age disputes, the impact of asylum system itself, and the knowledge base and skills needed in the workforce. This includes cultural and language understanding, knowledge of the specific traumas experienced and how to deal with those therapeutically and finding and resourcing the accommodation and provision needed.

Noting earlier points about foundations and infrastructure, this is a largely under-resourced area and a particular additional pressure for local authorities on an already stretched system. Local authorities also have little control over this area or ability to manage demand, The NTS rota is dependent on arrivals and weather, and adult asylum hotels are positioned in areas by the Home Office with no reference to the local authority with the resultant increase in spontaneous arrivals and age disputes. There are, however, many examples of

creative and caring responses, and a real commitment from across our members to doing all they can in what is at times impossible circumstances.

Support for disabled young people leaving care

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the experiences of disabled young people making the transition into adulthood and aims to publish Scotland's first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for disabled young people by the end of this year.

Some care-experienced young people making the transition to adulthood will also be disabled. The needs and requirements of disabled young people moving on from care into adult life should be planned and considered carefully to ensure the young person has what they need to have a positive and supported experience. Additional consideration may need to be given to issues such as guardianship, accommodation, social care and health care needs.

21. Can you tell us about any specific services or supports that already work well for disabled young people or people with complex health needs leaving care? Please provide details in the open text box.

Again, local areas can best provide specific examples.

Social Work Scotland would note that the Principles of Good Transitions was originally developed by and for young people with disabilities as they move into adulthood. Many of those young people will be care experienced by reason of receiving short breaks.

The transitions for young people with disabilities has additional complexities as many require provision for health purposes, as well as adult services. Others may have needs which do not meet the criteria for an adult service, and they are dependent on continuing care an aftercare provision from children's services, or are not eligible and they and their families continue to struggle. The role of health in such situations also varies. Clarity around those roles and knowledge of the duties of continuing care and aftercare amongst adult providers would be helpful

22. What improvements do you think could be made to ensure disabled young people leaving care have the support they need when they make the transition into adulthood? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Use the learning from the Principles into Practice pilot sites and consider how this can be rolled out. This needs to be a joint health, children's and adult piece of work. Consider the work already underway through the Transitions Strategy and ensure joined up policy and practice.

Support for people leaving care who are parents

All new parents and families, regardless of their circumstances, need support to care for and nurture their children.

We have been told that parents with care experience often face stigma at the early stages of becoming a parent. The Independent Care Review heard reports of structural discrimination within the forms that need to be completed and some people reported facing inappropriate questioning from GPs, Midwives, Health Visitors and other healthcare professionals. This type of experience can compound some of the challenges people might face as a consequence of being care experienced.

23. What improvements can you suggest in the support provided to young people with care experience as they prepare to give birth or become parents? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Social Work Scotland members provided some details of packages of support provided to young care experienced individuals who became parents e.g. supported tenancies, home support, parenting provision, mother and baby placements, all based on GIRFEC and providing the right support at the right time. Our view is that improvement in this area is about attitudinal and cultural change across the spectrum and particularly in health and related professions

24. How can the workforce be better supported to help care experienced people

as they become parents? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

See answer to Q23 above.

25. How can children's and adults' services better work together to provide whole family support for parents who are care experienced? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

SWS would reference learning from GIRFEC and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. Clearer guidance around responsibilities and working together may assist. The demand on all services means that there remains a tendency to see families as the responsibility of children and families services, and an ongoing challenge to ensure that all services work together – though one which SWS is alert to and seeking to enable cross sector approaches and work.

Forms of support for care leavers moving into adulthood

Peer support and maintaining lifelong links

Children told the Independent Care Review of their need for safe, loving and respectful relationships. The report noted that these relationships can only exist when carers are permitted to form meaningful connections based on instinct and judgement and those in care are supported to form lifelong links with their carer, when appropriate. The review goes on to stress that these relationships are about developing and nurturing relationships as opposed to professionalising the process.

Programmes such as Lifelong Links, where a trained coordinator works with children and young people to find and safely connect with relatives and others who care about them shows it leads to a stronger sense of identity for children and young people, more stability in their living arrangements, better mental health, and more positive relationships they can rely on.

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Peer support works alongside the care provided by a corporate parent to offer a wider range of scaffolding options. Young people speak about the importance of peer

support. Peer support can offer a community and sense of belonging as a young person or caregiver. This type of support could be particularly helpful in supporting people leaving care and their caregivers during transition stages.

26. In what ways would you like to see peer support used by people leaving care and/or caregivers during a young person's transition from care into adulthood? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Champions Boards and similar networks have enabled peer support to effectively help many young people as they move into adulthood. SWS members are supportive of such approaches but note that there are costs related to this valuable method of engagement in terms of enabling young people to engage with systems and processes.

Additional comments are around the benefits of older young people taking responsibility for mentoring younger individuals still in the care system and the positive impact this has on both those moving into adulthood and those remaining in the care system.

27. Do you know of any examples where peer support networks have had a positive impact on the experience of leaving care, either for care leavers or those who supported them? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

See answer to Q26 above

28. How can we better enable young people and the supportive adults in their lives to maintain healthy relationships once the young person has moved on from care? Please provide any suggestions or examples you may have.

Need varies from one individual to another. The network of support and relationships available and needed should be part of the pathway planning and care plan/review process.

Out-of-hours services providing support and advice

Support in the transition to adulthood is needed for all young people, but particular

attention must be given for a young person who is transitioning from care and into adulthood. We understand during this period there may be an increased need for advice and support as the young person navigates independence. Most services are not available every day or at all times of the day, which can mean young people and the adults who support them do not necessarily have access to support at the point of need.

29. What types of support and advice do you think should be available to care leavers as part of an out-of-hours service? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Currently there are a range of approaches to out of hours provision of social work, from rotas of social workers whose primary responsibility is covering the daily aspects of social work, to dedicated small teams covering several local authority areas e.g. the West of Scotland or Forth Valley areas.

Core to all provision though is that this is for emergencies out with normal office hours and that staff on duty cover all out of hours child protection and ASP investigations, mental health officer duties, placement breakdowns, individuals in custody and asylum issues amongst others. Teams are also small, in some areas one social worker with another 'on call'. As such, any general provision, however important, is at best likely to be limited to advice and a suggestion that a care leaver calls the local team in the morning.

Out of hours provision could benefit from review but to change the current emergency focus and approach would require major investment in infrastructure, funding, and workforce. SWS members consider that more time and detailed discussion would be required to consider if a dedicated out of hours service focus for one group would be viable and appropriate, with some initial comments about discrimination and capacity. This would be particularly relevant for rural and island communities where demand would be low, but this aspect was also raised by others. Potential for exploring more imaginative approaches was suggested e.g. utilising existing residential provision where staff are already available 24 hours day

If specific out of hours support for care leavers is being considered, then this too has the same resource issues already noted. Even if delivered by third sector colleagues (and there are critical issues to consider around whether this would be viable) it requires a service level agreement and funding and attention to interface issues and wider out of hours services.

Health and wellbeing

Children and young people who are care experienced can face adverse health outcomes such as the risk of higher mortality, hospitalisations related to mental health, chronic conditions and injuries. Evidence has shown that when young people move on from care to adult life, their health and wellbeing needs can increase; and the transition from child to adult services may present additional challenges at a time when a young person is already experiencing many changes as they move towards independence.

People who are care experienced may need help from a wide range of services to support both their physical health and mental wellbeing. It is essential that services are readily available and accessible, as well as being tailored to the needs a young person leaving care and moving towards towards adulthood and more independent living.

During the transition phase, people leaving care may need to contact a variety of services to support their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and it is crucial that appropriate health services are readily available and accessible to support individuals during the transition to adulthood.

The Promise tells us there must be criteria free, community based access to therapies that do not stigmatise, but help and support children and young adults to work through difficulties they are facing. There must be greater availability of family therapy, for all families (kinship, foster, adoptive, family of origin) so that accessing support is not stigmatised, but seen as something that a range of families may require throughout life.

Access to timely, appropriate therapies must be available to, but not limited to, those who have experience of care. Many care experienced children and young adults told the Independent Care Review that they were unable to access mental health support at the point it was needed. They were often required to be 'stable' before receiving a service, with long waiting times and limited services not providing what they needed.

30. What improvements do you think could be made to ensure care leavers have access to services which support their physical health, and mental health and wellbeing? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Care leavers should have the same access to supports as any other individual. Understanding amongst wider professionals of what care is and is not, and the impact of earlier adverse experiences would assist in ensuring that universal services understand and approach young people with sensitivity and acceptance. Knowledge and understanding of the care system across the board would also assist, and attention to avoiding the unnecessary and unhelpful negative portrayals of care in media.

31. What improvements do you think could be made to ensure a smooth transition is made between children and adult physical health services, mental health services and wellbeing services? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

This is significant area for all children and families, and attention to provision of CAMHS and early intervention mental health provision for young people is required to then enable transition to adult services to be discussed.

Housing

As young people transition into adult life, they must receive support across a range of areas including housing. Research consistently highlights that care leavers are more likely than other young people to become homeless or experience housing Instability.

Support for care leavers to access appropriate housing should be inclusive,

accessible and bespoke to a person's individual circumstances, especially where they have additional support needs or a disability.

32. Please tell us about any good practice you are aware of that supports young people leaving care to find a home that meets their needs. Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Members noted a range of initiatives including care leavers receiving priority points for housing and discussion about where the most appropriate area for young people would be to avoid isolation or to ensure the right supports are available in the community. This often follows a period in supported accommodation. A range of supported accommodation models exist across the country designed to provide a gradual move to greater autonomy.

The country is however in a housing crisis, and options for imaginative housing and support for care leavers are becoming increasingly limited as competition for accommodation capacity increases amongst equally needy groups.

33. What do you think are the main barriers in securing appropriate housing for a young person with care experience? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The crisis in housing provision impacts on all group including care leavers – often the right accommodation is just not available. Capacity for housing services to provide accommodation which is suitable as supported accommodation is diminishing. This area is particularly impacted by the appropriate demands for accommodation for communities fleeing war or violence such as Ukrainian resettlement, and asylum accommodation

34. How can we ensure there is sufficient support, planning and preparation provided to care leavers moving into their own accommodation for the first time? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

This should be part of the wider planning and preparation for leaving care/moving on and encompassed in each individual care plan.

35. What forms of support do you think would help someone leaving care and entering their first tenancy to stay in that property for as long as they want to? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

This is dependent on the individual circumstances of the young person. Gatekeeping and support to manage this and the tendency are important.

36. How can we ensure the views and needs of people leaving care are taken into account when decisions are made about where they should live when they leave care? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The framework for this already exists in the pathway planning processes and taking account of individual views

Further and Higher education

Care-experienced young people and adults studying below HNC level are entitled to a College bursary of up to £9000 each year. For care-experienced adults entering Higher education, the Student Awards Agency Scotland Care Experience Student Bursary of £9000 each year is available to care experienced people with no age restriction. In addition, a Summer Accommodation Grant of up to £1,330 is available to support care-experienced students with their accommodation costs through the summer break. Some institutions may also offer discretionary support for childcare and travel costs or rent guarantees for private accommodation.

Every University in Scotland guarantees care experienced applicants who meet the minimum entry requirements a place on their chosen undergraduate course. Care experienced students in Higher Education are also eligible for a Special Support Loan of £2,400 from the 2024-25 academic year, bringing the total package of support available to £11,400 each year in Higher education.

37. In what areas would you like to see improvements to the service, support and funding for students who are care experienced? Please explain your answer and provide any suggestions in the open text box.

Members indicate that the current system works fairly well. Support in managing things like the care experienced bursary are critical though, as is understanding that this money at this level will not always be available to them

It is important we support young people in any way we can to help them stay in education and complete their course of study, if that is their preference.

38. How can we better support care experienced students to complete their studies? Please explain your answer and provide any examples of good practice in the open text box

See answer to Q37 above.

Employment

We know all young people have different goals when entering adulthood and considering their route into work. This can include employment, self-employment, apprenticeships, training or other education.

39. What would help young people with care experience find secure and fulfilling work, develop their skills or build their confidence? Please provide examples in the open text box.

Members note the importance of early support and working gradually with young people to ensure they have the skills for employment e.g. able to get up in the morning, appreciate the importance of the role of their boss etc. Approaches such as that followed by Mentor UK work well.

40. Can you share any examples of good practice, in the private and public sector, where young people leaving care have been supported into employment or training, or have been supported to build their confidence? Please provide examples in the open text box.

See answer to Q39 above.

41. How do you think employers can be better supported or encouraged to recruit, train, support and retain young people who are care experienced? Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Understanding of care is critical but so also is being aware that while some young people find help and support in being understood as a care experienced young person, others want an identity not linked to care. Understanding is also critical in ensuring that care experienced young people are not inadvertently pushed into careers in the care sector, or other challenging situations which could result in traumatisation without first having the time and support to reconcile their own pre-care and care experiences. They should be supported to be all they can and want to be. Training and knowledge amongst the public of care and more balanced and sensitive profiling of care would greatly assist in this area.