

What does the evidence tell us about the type of support that would have the most impact on ensuring our care leavers can make a successful transition from being a supported young person into an independent adult, including the transition from education to work?

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Executive Summary

Overview

One of the key duties of a Local Authority is to support its young people with care experience until age 25. The transition from care into independence can be a time of great upheaval for young people. Young people must quickly adapt to independent living and greater responsibility at a time when support is reduced. Many YP leaving care struggle to adapt to their new circumstances.

Young people with care experience have worse employment, education, and health outcomes than the general population. This does not need to be the case. Young people with care experience are often victims of circumstance but have the potential to lead successful adult lives.

This report focuses on how Cambridgeshire County Council can aid its young people as they transition from care into independence. The report takes seriously the concerns of Cambridgeshire's young people and outlines a series of targeted policy interventions aimed at supporting the transition.

Recommendations

Accommodation

1. Have a permanent funded Accommodation Officer/Team.
2. The Accommodation Officer/Team should focus on improving the current accommodation process.
3. Act as a rent guarantor for YP with care experience, with a particular focus on helping those engaged with low-income employment and apprenticeships.
4. Work with District and City Councils to remove homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience.
5. Secure emergency accommodation for YP who are faced with homelessness or tenancy breakdown.

Finances

1. Provide Council Tax relief to YP with care experience until age 25.
 - a. See [Section 5 Part 8](#) for updated recommendations.
2. Increase provision of internal work opportunities and work experience at CCC for YP with care experience.
3. Create a designated money and budgeting page in CCC's Local Offer which guides YP in/leaving care to financial services and courses as well as charity/private support.
4. PAs and care home staff should have more thorough training and guidance on how to provide financial education.
5. Pathway Plans for YP in care should have a specific section dedicated to the development of knowledge and skills required for independent living.

Mental Health

1. Create a clear and well-advertised guide to accessing available mental health services including charity-based support.

2. Develop a comprehensive training programme covering mental health first aid and up-to-date research on childhood adversity and mental health for the Leaving Care Team, PAs, and foster/residential carers.
3. Employ a senior, designated mental health professional with expertise in the diagnosis/treatment of mental health conditions and awareness of broader risk factors common in YP in/leaving care.
4. Adult Social Care should assess YP in care before they leave to identify the support the YP will need once they are living independently. Adult Social Care can then make recommendations and put support in place or refer them for more advanced support before the YP leaves care.
5. Change the language that is used to describe these YP. "Care leaver" is somewhat dehumanising and should be replaced with more person-centred language such as "YP with care experience" or "YP leaving care".
6. Encourage communication between Councils regarding mental health support for YP in out-of-county placements.
7. Where it is safe to do so, regulated visits with family members may be beneficial for the mental health of YP in/leaving care.
8. Establish feedback sessions with YP to give them space to express their concerns and for the council to learn how to improve from their experiences of the care system.
9. Lobby at the national level to increase mental health of YP leaving care as a priority.

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Abbreviations

YP	Young people
LA	Local authority
UASC	Unaccompanied children seeking asylum
CCC	Cambridgeshire County Council
PA	Personal advisors
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
EET	Education, employment or training

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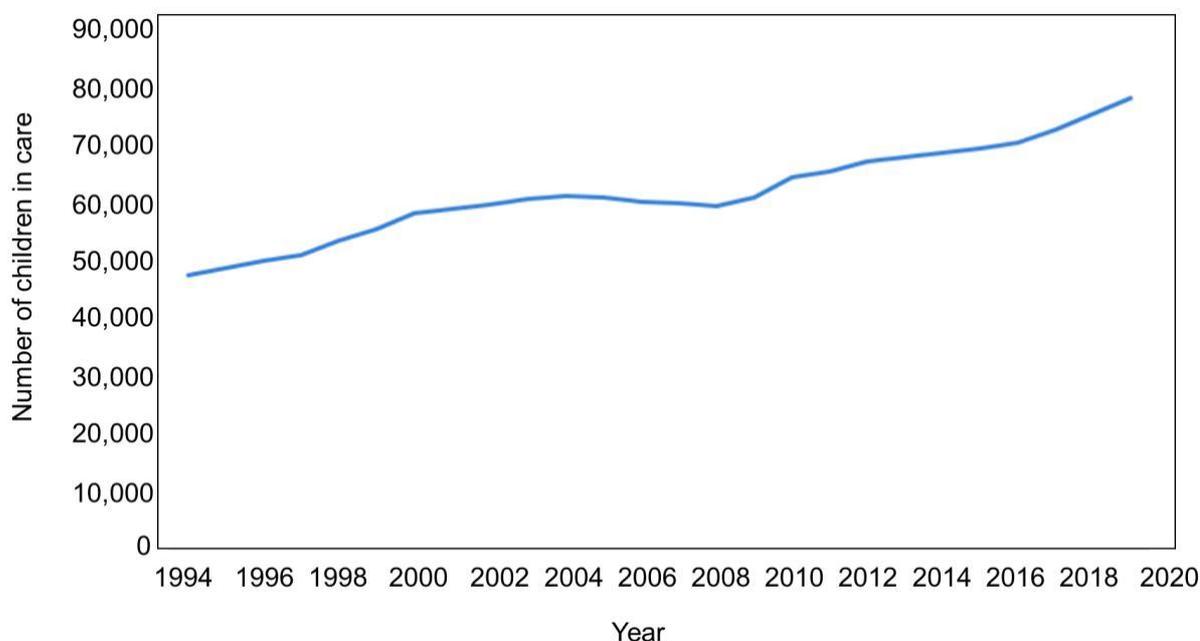
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Section One. Introduction

1. Background

More than 75,000 children and young people (YP) in England are in care. This number has been increasing since 2010 (Figure 1) [1], yet the number of adoptions has decreased [1]. Care experience is associated with higher risk of poor outcomes, including mental health problems, social marginalisation, homelessness, unemployment, custody and early death [2]. For example, 39% of YP leaving care are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared with 12% of YP in the general population [3]. Steps must be taken now to protect these YP and to prevent future costs that will arise as the size of this group grows.

Figure 1. Number of children in care in England from 1994 to 2019.



1.1. Defining YP with Care Experience

Care leavers are adults who have spent time living in care. This report uses “YP with care experience” and “YP leaving care” as person-centred alternatives to “care leavers” (Section 8). These individuals are typically aged between 16 and 21 when they leave care. If they are in education, they may leave care between age 16 and 25.

As a Corporate Parent, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) has a duty of care towards its YP with care experience. This includes CCC’s YP living in Cambridgeshire as well as those living out-of-county. It excludes external YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire.

1.2. Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood

YP leaving care face a difficult transition into adulthood. They often have to overcome a number of hurdles when they leave care. Coleman's focal theory suggests that adolescents can manage their problems successfully by dealing with them one at a time [4]. Dealing with multiple issues at the same time therefore makes it harder for YP to cope with these issues. The challenges and changes facing YP when they leave care often occur in a "compressed and accelerated" period of time compared to their peers [5]. YP leaving care face upheaval of their lives at a time when support is being withdrawn [5-7].



The challenges facing YP when they leave care often occur in a "compressed and accelerated" period of time compared to their peers.

A typical transition from care to independence includes:

1. Transitioning from education to employment, training or not in education, employment or training (NEET) status;
2. Moving into semi-independent or independent housing and having to leave foster care or residential care;
3. Having to transfer from Children's Social Care which involves a Children's Team to the Leaving Care Team, changing from an allocated children's social worker to a PA from the Leaving Care Team;
4. Transition from minimal financial independence to complete financial freedom and control.

YP in the general population now have a more gradual transition into adulthood compared to previous decades [9,10]. Popular media has labelled YP who fluctuate between dependence and independence as the Boomerang Generation [2]. YP are often dependent on their immediate family for longer with many individuals in the UK still living with their parents their 20s and 30s [11]. YP leaving care often do not have this option. In their transition from care to independence, these YP are deprived of the financial and emotional support that family homes can provide [12]. Therefore, it is not surprising that YP leaving care find it harder to adapt to adult life than their peers.

1.3. Corporate Parenting Duty

The Department for Education lists Corporate Parenting duty as one of most important responsibilities of a Local Authority (LA) [15]. Corporate Parenting responsibilities extend to YP with care experience [16]. LAs have the "legal and moral duty to try and provide the kind of loyal support that any good parent would give to their children." The question LAs should ask themselves is: "would this be good enough for my child?" [15]. LAs with a strong Corporate Parenting ethos understand that the care system should not only keep YP safe but also promote their recovery, mental resilience and physical wellbeing.



LAs have the “legal and moral duty to try and provide the kind of loyal support that any good parent would give to their children.”

A positive shift in policy relating to YP with care experience has taken place over the past two decades. The statutory responsibility of a LA to its YP was extended from age 21 to age 25 [7]. The Staying Put scheme was introduced to allow YP to remain with their foster carers until age 21 [17]. These policies are an acknowledgement that YP leaving care are often propelled into “instant adulthood” without sufficient support or experience. The introduction of these policies led to an update of the Corporate Parenting principles (Box 1) [15].

- 1) To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people.
- 2) To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- 3) To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- 4) To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- 5) To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- 6) For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- 7) To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Box 1. Corporate Parenting principles.

Nationally and locally, YP with care experience have worse health and socioeconomic outcomes than their peers. This disparity between those with and without experience of the care system indicates that LAs, as Corporate Parents, must do better to support YP in/leaving care.

LAs are expected to recognise their responsibilities as Corporate Parents. LAs should base their care duties on the Corporate Parenting principles to ensure that YP in/leaving care receive the best possible support [15]. These principles are also an important part of Ofsted inspections; they are used in the Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework ([Section 1 Part 2](#)) [18].

1.4. Local Offers

LAs should also exemplify the Corporate Parenting principles in their Local Offer. The Children and Social Act (2017) requires LAs to publicise all the services they offer to YP leaving care [1]. The Department for Education provides detailed guidance for LAs on how to present their Local Offers with examples of essential content [19]. Local Offers should be accessible and clear to make it easy for YP leaving care to find out about available support.



The Children and Social Act (2017) requires LAs to publicise all the services they offer to YP leaving care.

1.5. PAs and Pathway Planning

YP with care experience (aged 16 to 25) are entitled to the support of a PA during the transition from care into independence. Supporting YP during this transition is a key responsibility for PAs. PAs should ensure that YP are given both emotional and practical support, such as advice on how to face potential barriers during this transition. PA support may be direct or indirect. Indirect support may include facilitating the development of a positive social network [20]. PAs should be a dependable and constant source of support for YP throughout the transition into independence.

PAs are also involved in all stages of pathway planning. Pathway plans are statutory documents that follow YP through their transition from care to independence. The pathway plan aims to identify areas in which an individual requires improvement or additional support. These areas may include independent living skills, money management, educational achievements or mental wellbeing [24]. An inadequate pathway plan can influence the success of a transition strategy [21-23]. YP leaving care often feel that pathway planning is a bureaucratic and depersonalised “tick box exercise” which is not used to prepare for adulthood [32,22,26]. This opinion is prevalent among YP despite clear guidance on how LAs should create pathway plans.

2. Cambridgeshire Context

Cambridgeshire has a high proportion of YP with care experience compared to many other Local Authorities (LAs). In December 2019, CCC had open cases for 416 YP with care experience below age 25. 223 (53.7%) of these individuals live out-of-county. 193 (46.3%) of YP with care experience live in-county. The number of open cases (416 YP) does not include YP aged 21 to 24 whose cases have been closed. As such, it is difficult to accurately capture the number of YP with care experience below the age of 25. The number of YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire has been rising since 2015. This increase is reflective of CCC’s acquisition of Corporate Parenting responsibilities towards unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC) [4], and the nationwide increase of YP in the care system [5].



In 2019 Ofsted noted that CCC “requires improvement.”

Since January 2018, Ofsted has monitored LA services according to the ILACS framework. In the latest inspection of CCC in January 2019, the overall effectiveness of the Council was judged as “requires improvement” [29]. Only 15 of the 102 LAs in England that had been assessed under the ILACS framework scored worse than CCC in their overall effectiveness (Table 1) [29]. This report will support CCC to make changes to improve its support for YP.

Table 1. Ratings of LAs in England according to Ofsted ILACS framework.

Ofsted “Overall Effectiveness” rating	LAs in England
Outstanding	17
Good	36
Requires improvement	34
Inadequate	15
No data	49

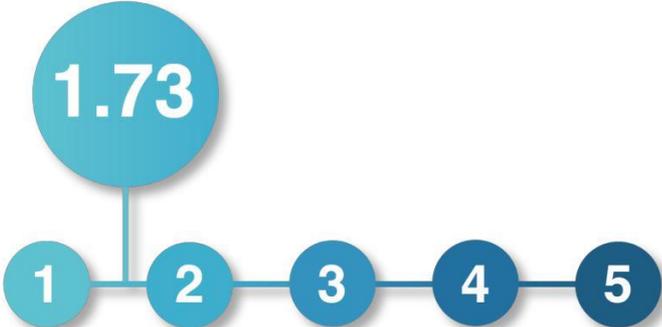
ILACS also evaluates the experience of children in care and YP with care experience. In the 2019 inspection, CCC was rated as “requires improvement” [29]. CCC is in the minority of LAs at the national and regional level that have received a rating less than “good” (Table 2). While Ofsted’s report notes that the quality of services received by YP with care experience was improving, it also stated: “work to prepare children in care and care leavers for independence is not strong” [29]. CCC has already started to address some of the issues raised in the Ofsted report ([Section 1 Part 2.1](#)). This report will support CCC to further improve the support for YP leaving care.

Table 2. Ratings of local and national LAs according to Ofsted ILACS framework.

Ofsted “Experience and Progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers” rating	LAs		
	In England	In East of England	Among Cambridgeshire’s statistical neighbours
Outstanding	13	--	1
Good	45	5	3
Requires improvement	36	3	2
Inadequate	8	--	1
No data	49	3	3

In 2019, CCC issued a survey for its YP which had 11 respondents ([Section 1 Part 3.5](#)). Given that this survey had a relatively small uptake it should not be taken as representative of the views of all of CCC’s YP (see [Section 1 Part 3.5](#)). The 2019 survey asked respondents to rate from one to five how well they felt that CCC had prepared them for their transition to independence, with a lower score indicating a lower level of preparation. The overall score was 1.73 (Figure 2).

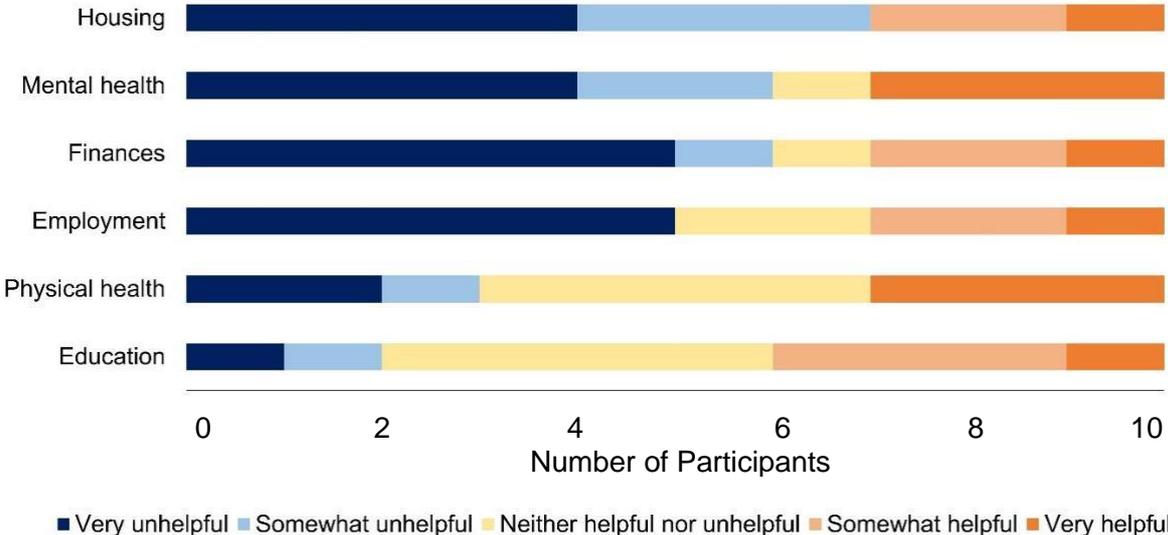
Figure 2. 11 responses to CCC’s 2019 survey asking whether they felt prepared to transition from care to independence (1=not at all prepared; 5=very well prepared).



The 2019 survey produced by CCC gave respondents the opportunity to express their own, personal views, in relation to why they scored CCC as they did. Some of the respondent’s comments reflected their view that there was a lack of support (in areas related to mental health and employment) and a lack of communication, and there was some confusion as to what kind of financial support they were entitled to. These are individual responses, and cannot be taken as representative of the views of CCC’s YP.

For this project, a new survey was created, which had ten usable responses (Part 1 Section 3.6). Again, this represents a relatively small uptake and the results should not be taken as representative of the views of all of CCC’s YP (see Part 1 Section 3.6). Respondents were asked how helpful was CCC in relation to housing, mental health, finances, employment, physical health, and education. The majority of the ten respondents found CCC to be ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ unhelpful in relation to housing, mental health, and financial concerns, and half found CCC to be unhelpful with employment concerns (Figure 3).

Figure 3. CCC’s effectiveness according to ten respondents to the 2020 survey.

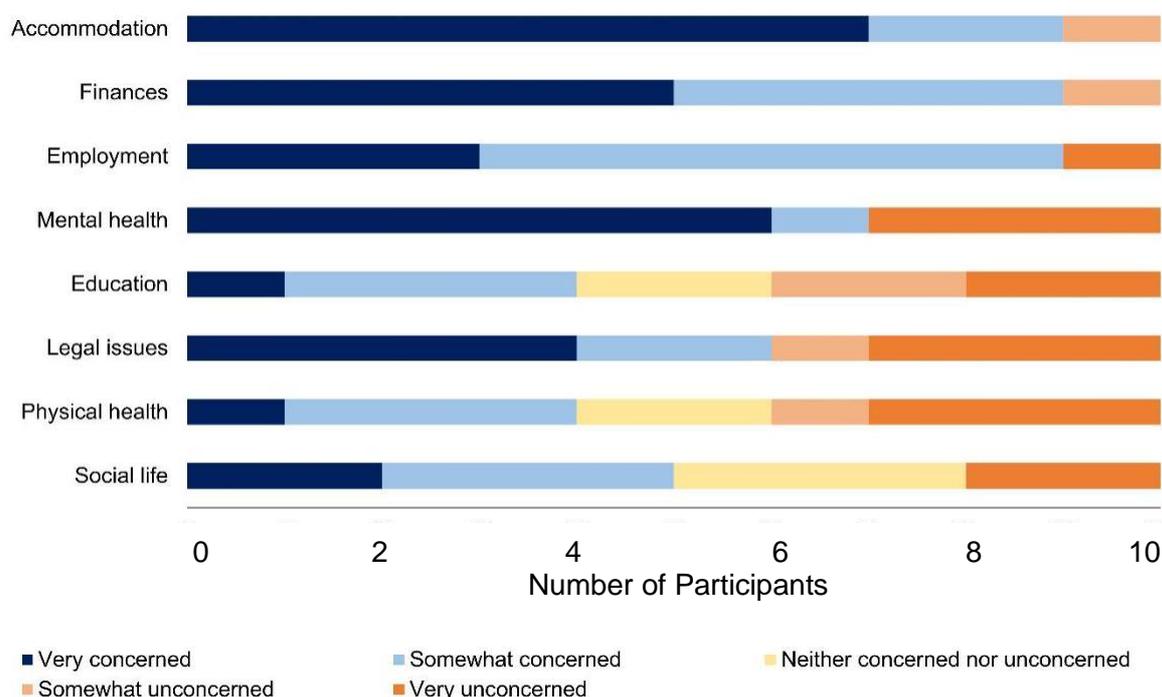


Our 2020 survey also asked about the biggest challenges facing YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire. Accommodation, finances, and mental health were by the biggest concerns raised by the ten respondents (Figure 4). In free text responses, where respondents were given space to express their own, personal, views one YP expressed difficulties affording rent and managing independently, while another noted that they felt that there was a lack of support in terms of finding work or further education. Other respondents highlighted multiple concurrent challenges in the areas of housing, mental health, and lacking a support network. Seven out of the ten respondents felt that CCC did not focus on issues relevant to them. This report thus will focus on the issues raised by survey respondents.



7 out of the 10 survey respondents felt that CCC did not focus on priorities relevant to them.

Figure 4. Concerns among the ten respondents to the 2020 survey.



Some respondents to the 2020 survey felt negatively about their experiences of leaving care. When given the opportunity to express their individual views, which are therefore not representative of all of CCC’s YP, in free text sections, some respondents noted that they found the transition into independent living a difficult process, with one YP noting that they “[We] need to have more gradual easing into independent living.”

The results of the 2019 and 2020 surveys and the comments of YP suggest that some YP feel unprepared for independent living. As noted, and as will be discussed at much greater length in [Part 1 Section 3.5—7](#), the uptake of the 2019 and 2020 surveys was relatively low and the results and comments of the surveys do not reflect the views of all of CCC’s YP. However, that the issues raised by the 2019 and 2022 survey respondents are not isolated concerns is suggested by a recent national survey for Ofsted released in January 2022 (after the main research period represented by this report) which attracted 255 responses from YP on the cusp of leaving care, those classified as ‘care leavers’ and older individuals who had care experience [35]. It reported that a third of ‘care leavers’ felt they had left care too early and that they were not ready for independent living; many other respondents to this national survey felt alone or isolated after leaving care, and a third of ‘care leavers’ did not know where to go for support. Other respondents to Ofsted’s report of this national survey had concerns about managing their mental health and wellbeing, accommodation, and finances [35].

CCC has a clear desire to act as a good Corporate Parent. CCC’s 2021 to 2025 Strategic Framework outlines its strategic priorities [30]:

1. Communities at the heart of everything we do;
2. A good quality of life for everyone;
3. Helping our children learn, develop, and live life to the full;
4. Cambridgeshire: A well-connected, safe, clean, and green environment;
5. Protecting and caring for those who need us.

Supporting YP in their transition from care to independence aligns with this strategic vision. This research has the potential to advance CCC’s priority outcomes ([Section 9 Part 2](#)), and to fulfil its Corporate Parenting responsibilities ([Section 9 Part 3](#)).

2.1. Progress Since Ofsted Report

This report comes at a time when CCC is already making changes across its care services. Since Ofsted’s 2019 report, CCC has been working to improve its services for YP leaving care. This is a welcome development indicating CCC’s desire to deliver its Corporate Parenting responsibilities in the best possible way. The recommendations in this report will support the improvement of care services in line with Ofsted’s report.

CCC has identified various remaining gaps in its approach. One of these is to “improve delivery for preparing care leavers for independence.” This report focuses on the transition from care into independence and aims to fill some of the remaining gaps.



Remaining gaps at CCC: “Improve delivery for preparing care leavers for independence.”

We received details about the initiatives undertaken by CCC in response to Ofsted’s 2019 report at the final stages of preparation of our report. The recommendations are therefore independent assessments of how CCC can help its YP transition into independence. Where relevant, we highlight how our recommendations may complement the changes currently being developed by CCC.

3. Methods

3.1. Rapid Literature Review

Evidence came from a variety of sources including government, non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation reports, peer-reviewed academic papers, and grey literature.

3.2. Comparative Approach

Evaluating CCC against national, regional and local comparators is a key part of this report. LAs apply their Corporate Parenting responsibilities in different ways. The report examines a range of LAs in England, including Cambridgeshire's geographical and statistical neighbours. Geographical neighbours are upper tier LAs in the East of England's Local Government Association. Statistical neighbours are determined by the National Foundation for Educational Research [31].

The report considers relevant Local Offers and relevant policies for benchmarking purposes. Further evidence is incorporated from existing data sets and comparative tools, including the Local Authority Interactive Tool and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum's Local Offer comparison tool.

3.3. Think Communities Approach

The Think Communities approach, which Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have recently adopted, frames the recommendations in this report. One of the aims of this approach is to build community resilience. This new approach focuses on people, places, and systems (Figure 5) [32]. This report follows a people-centred approach. The voices of YP with care experience must be heard. They are in the best position to comment on the most beneficial types of support. YP with care experience are thus at the heart of our recommendations. The opinions of CCC's YP can be seen throughout the report. These quotes came from stakeholder engagement and survey responses.

Think Communities aims to support community-led solutions to problems. Children and YP are a Think Communities priority group, particularly YP leaving care and/or NEET [33]. Social mobility is a desired outcome of the Think Communities initiative [34]. The recommendations in this report are largely LA-led. For CCC's YP to properly engage with community-led action, more needs to be done to facilitate communication. Various barriers may prevent YP leaving care from engaging with their local community and Cambridgeshire's wider care network. Issues specific to this group include accommodation, finances, and mental health. These must be adequately addressed to promote community engagement.

Figure 5. Think Communities framework for community resilience.



3.4. Stakeholder Engagement

YP with care experience are primary stakeholders in this report and in CCC's Corporate Parenting duties. When opportunities arose, we engaged with YP with care experience in interviews and focus groups. These meetings supplemented the survey responses in delivering these YP's views. We also interviewed care professionals working directly or indirectly with YP in/leaving care. Finally, we interviewed key CCC members to understand how CCC fulfils its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. These perspectives provided insight into the problems facing YP with care experience and potential difficulties with particular recommendations. Engaging in interviews and focus groups as well as promoting the survey was made more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. Issues relating to the survey responses are noted below in [Part 1 Section 3.7](#) (and reiterated throughout the report). Where appropriate, we also drew on other surveys of YP not specifically related to Cambridgeshire (for instance, national surveys).

3.5. 2019 Survey

Before this research was commissioned, a survey was distributed to YP who left care on 13 November 2019. This was carried out by Joe Gilbert (Specialist Personal Advisor (PA)); the research team was not involved. This survey received 11 anonymous responses. We had access to this survey from an early stage of research. Most respondents to the 2019 survey were living in the City of Cambridge, Fenland, or out of county (Table 3). There were no respondents from South Cambridgeshire or the City of Peterborough. All respondents left care between age 16 and 21. Most YP left care between age 18 and 21.

Table 3. District of residence of survey respondents.

Cambridgeshire district	YP living in district – no. (%)
City of Cambridge	3 (27.3)
Fenland	3 (27.3)
Out of county	3 (27.3)
Huntingdonshire	1 (9.1)
East Cambridgeshire	1 (9.1)
South Cambridgeshire	0 (0)
City of Peterborough	0 (0)

3.6. 2020 Survey

We designed a second survey about experiences of care which was distributed to CCC's YP in September 2020. The survey questions were based on: (i) responses to CCC's 2019 survey; (ii) focus group meeting with YP with care experience; and (iii) discussions with stakeholders. Our 2020 survey covered demographic information, accommodation, finances, and mental health. It contained multiple-choice questions, scaling choice questions, and opportunities to give free-text responses.

Our survey included a comprehensive participant information sheet. This sheet included: (i) who can answer the survey; (ii) the personal data collected; (iii) who has access to this data; (iv) the purpose of the project; (v) benefits and risks of participating; (vi) how data is collected and what happens to this data; and (vii) researcher contact information.

Participants were required to confirm that they read the participant information sheet and agreed to take part in the survey. They also had to confirm that they understood: (i) who to contact if necessary; (ii) the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey; (iii) the possibility to withdraw at any time; (iv) their answers would be used in this report. Of the 11 respondents who completed the survey, one individual did not consent to these statements, leaving 10 valid responses.



11 YP responded to the 2019 survey and 10 YP responded to the 2020 survey.

Our survey was anonymous to allow respondents to freely convey their views and experiences. Free-text answers were not included in the report when we felt a respondent could be identified. Individuals who completed the survey were entitled to reimbursement for their time in the form of Time Credits. Time Credits can be used instead of money to access services. To maintain anonymity of participants, a separate Time Credit form was created to collect a name and delivery address. Participants also had to give consent in this survey. A link to the Time Credit form was given at the end of the main survey. This meant that personal information could not be linked between the two surveys. We passed on the names of individuals who responded to the Time Credit form to CCC. Of the 11 individuals who gave survey responses, two completed the Time Credit form.

Our survey was first reviewed by CCC officers. We then sought the advice of a University of Cambridge ethics committee to minimise the risk that our survey would cause relived trauma for participants. The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee performed an ethical review of the survey. The ethical protocol of the survey was considered satisfactory. The survey was also approved by senior leadership in the People and Communities directorate at CCC. The survey was then delivered to YP via email.

Five out of the 10 respondents to the new survey were male, four were female and one did not want to give their gender. Four out of 10 respondents were age 21 to 24, another four were age 19 to 20, and the final two respondents were age 16 to 18. The majority of respondents identified as White British (eight out of 10).

The results of the 2020 survey were received at a relatively late stage in the research stage of this report; the responses therefore only formed one part of a wide array of research evidence that influenced the conceptualisation and research focus of this report.

3.7. Survey Limitations

The sample size for both surveys was small. Members of CCC distributed the surveys to YP with care experience via email; email may not be the most effective way of engaging with these YP, but it was the most practical way of delivering the survey. From the relatively large quantity of potential respondents (~200 were emailed), uptake of the 2020 survey was relatively low, with only 10 valid responses, a very small sample of CCC's YP. Engaging YP with care experience can be difficult and the pandemic exacerbated this issue. We therefore only have the views from a specific subset of YP with care experience and we do not know how these views correlate with other YP who did not complete the survey. It is important that the views of those young people who did respond are acknowledged, however, following feedback from members of CCC's Children's Services ([Part 1 Section 3.8](#)) we have

removed most direct quotations from the survey were appropriate and replaced these with paraphrase. The majority of respondents to the surveys expressed a negative view about the support they received from CCC, but the small sample size means that these views cannot be considered as representative of the views of CCC's YP. Where appropriate, we have utilised other surveys not specifically related to Cambridgeshire (for instance, national surveys) that relay the experiences of YP. The responses to the 2019 and 2020 surveys formed one part of a much broader body of evidence, including existing literature, examples of best practice, CCC's people-centred approach, face-to-face interviews, and other surveys.

3.8. Implementation of Feedback

In 2022, after the research for this report was complete, the researchers had the opportunity to engage with and receive feedback about the report from the previous Director of Children's Services, Lou Williams, and the current Director of Children's Services, Nicola Curley. Concerns relating to the utilisation of results from the 2019 and 2020 survey were raised, given the low response rate to both surveys.

Following written feedback, most direct quotations from the surveys were removed from the report as these are not necessarily representative of the views of all of CCC's YP. The views of YP as expressed in free text sections have therefore been relayed in a paraphrase format. The 2019 and 2020 surveys formed but one part of a much wider basis of research and evidence used in the conceptualisation and formation of this report. The limitations of these surveys are outlined in detail in [Part 1 Section 3.7](#) above, however, we have added qualifications throughout the report that reiterate that the survey results are not necessarily representative of the views of all of CCC's YP.

4. Scope and Aims

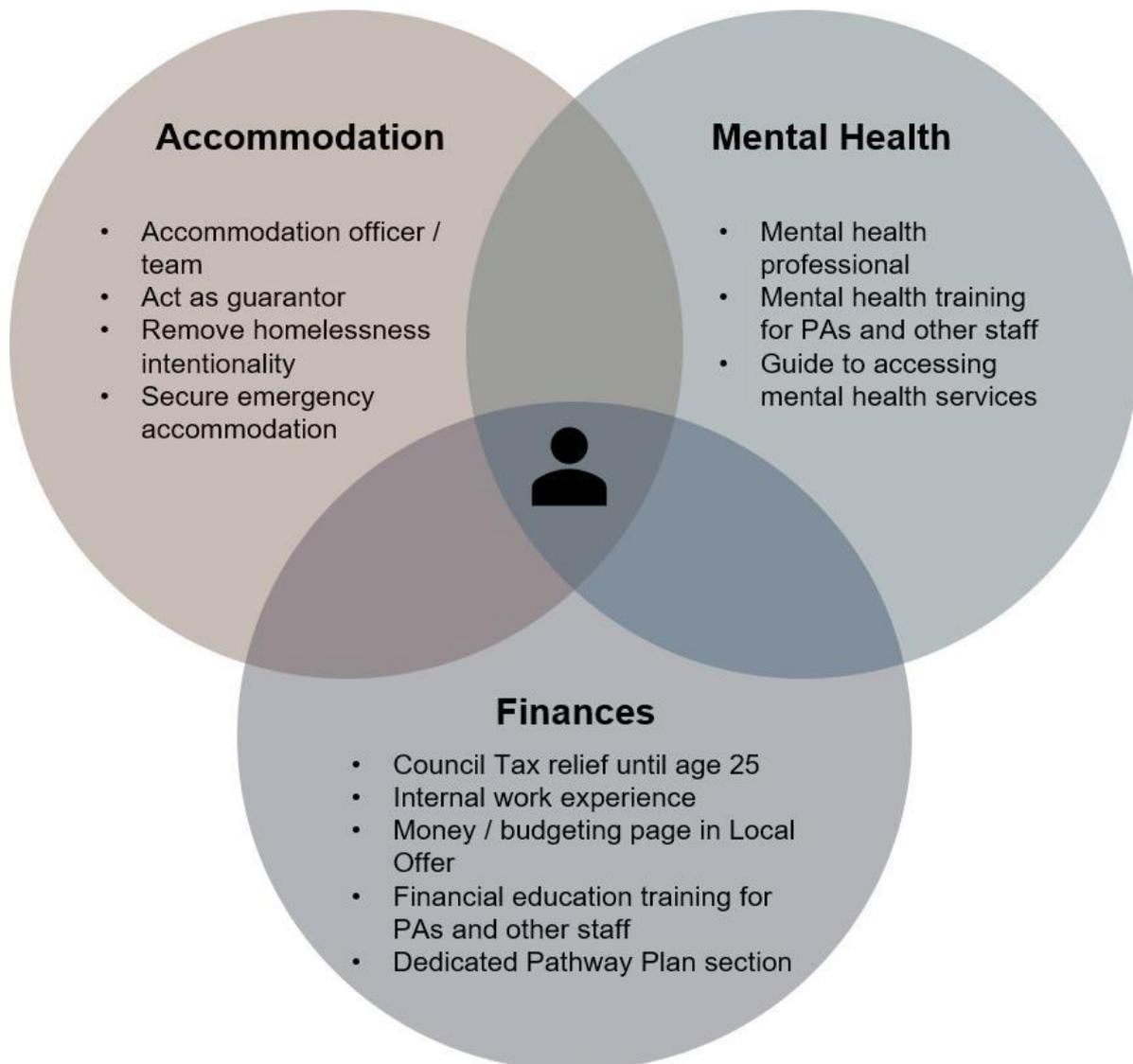
The recommendations in this report provide targeted policy interventions to support YP as they transition from care into independence. The views and experiences of CCC's YP should help frame how CCC supports its YP during this important transition. We identified the following issues as key areas for improvement: accommodation, finances, employment and education, and mental health. These issues directly affect YP once they leave care.

We focused on a specific part of the care journey, namely the point of transition into independent adulthood. Our report does not consider other stages of the care experience, although interventions during earlier periods are clearly important for a successful transition through care and into independence. There is room for further initiatives aimed at YP before they leave care as well as beyond age 25 and we encourage CCC to commission research in these areas.

5. Summary of Recommendations

Our recommendations cover access to suitable accommodation, guarantor provision, homelessness prevention, Council Tax relief, employment opportunities, financial education, and mental health support (Figure 6). These areas are interlinked. Without simultaneous improvement across all areas, the desired outcomes for YP (and CCC) will be difficult to achieve. Implementing the recommendations will improve the lives of YP when they leave care and will show CCC's dedication to its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Please see [Section 9](#) for a comprehensive list of the recommendations.

Figure 6. Summary of recommendations.



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Section Two. Accommodation

Overview

Accommodation is a basic need but stable and secure housing remains a concern for many YP with care experience. Gaps exist in LA provision of housing which has led to low levels of satisfaction among YP in this area. Some of the gaps in accommodation services have already been addressed based on a recent Ofsted report. This section highlights the need for a dedicated Accommodation Officer/Team. Implementing a permanent Accommodation Officer/Team is key to fulfilling CCC's Corporate Parent responsibilities and improving economic and health outcomes for YP with care experience. This recommendation complements the Joint Housing Protocol which was implemented by CCC following Ofsted inspection.

Key recommendations

- **Have a permanent funded Accommodation Officer/Team.**
 - **The Accommodation Officer/Team should focus on improving the current accommodation process by:**
 - a) **Extending the Staying Put scheme from age 21 to age 25;**
 - b) **Removing the reduction of allowances for carers when YP join the Staying Put scheme;**
 - c) **Ensuring more frequent visits and rigorous individual assessments of foster placements;**
 - d) **Allowing priority social housing applications any time before age 25;**
 - e) **Granting access to all housing options and increasing housing allowance costs for YP waiting for asylum.**
-

1. Introduction

1.1. Cambridgeshire's Accommodation Problem

Unaffordable housing is a widespread problem across Cambridgeshire. Fenland has the lowest number of people in affordable accommodation in the county while Cambridge has the highest (Table 1) [1]. Affordable rent is defined as no more than 80% of the local market rent. Affordable housing covers social rented and shared ownership housing [1,2]. LAs own and rent social rented housing. An individual is eligible for affordable housing if they cannot rent or buy housing supplied by the private sector.

Table 1. 2011 Census for the housing market tenure in Cambridgeshire.

LA	Base (households)	% owner occupied	% private rented	% affordable (rented & shared ownership)
Cambridge	46 714	47.5	27.8	24.7
East Cambridgeshire	34 614	68.5	15.7	15.7
Fenland	40 620	70.0	17.0	12.9
Huntingdonshire	69 333	71.2	15.1	13.6
South Cambridgeshire	59 960	70.3	13.4	16.4
Peterborough	74 023	59.3	20.3	20.4
East of England	2 423 035	67.6	16.0	16.4

In the past decade, house prices have not risen in the UK, except for in London, the South East and the East of England. House prices have increased by up to 30% in these regions, making it hard for YP to save enough money for a deposit (more than six months' income is usually required for a 10% deposit on a median-priced property) [1,2]. The Institute for Fiscal Studies concluded that increasing housing prices have exposed intergenerational inequalities where older generations benefit at the expense of younger people [2].

The disparity between income and house prices in Cambridgeshire means that home ownership is often unachievable for individuals on low incomes (Table 2) [1]. Many YP in the general population instead turn to renting or the social housing sector. The majority of YP with care experience will also end up renting or staying with a foster family. However, the availability and production of new social housing has been decreasing since the 1980s. Only 6463 new social renting homes in England were available between 2017 and 2018, leaving over 1.15 million households on a LA waiting list with waiting times of decades. Centrepoint found that eight out of 10 housing associations agreed that the lack in social housing has particularly affected YP and their ability to access affordable housing ([Section 2 Part 1.3](#)) [1-3]. YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire need better access to social housing options.

Table 2. Income to house price ratio across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Higher numbers indicate more unaffordable housing (relative to income).

LA	Income to House Price Ratio 2018
Cambridge	13.0
East Cambridgeshire	10.7
Fenland	8.5
Huntingdonshire	9.4
South Cambridgeshire	10.3
Peterborough	6.8

YP with care experience are at higher risk of homelessness than their peers. Prevention of homelessness is already a top priority for CCC but additional safety nets are required to ensure that none of its YP become homeless (Section 4). In England, LAs have the statutory duty to secure accommodation for YP leaving care before age 21 (and up to age 25 for vulnerable YP). This means that CCC is legally responsible for the accommodation of its YP until they become 25 years old [1,3]. Guaranteeing secure and appropriate accommodation for all YP leaving care is one way CCC might reduce homelessness. A dedicated Accommodation Team would focus efforts to reduce homelessness among YP with care experience.



Young people with care experience are at higher risk of homelessness than their peers.

1.2. Accommodation Responsibilities of Officers

YP's accommodation concerns are dealt with by various members of the Leaving Care Team. The Leaving Care Team includes social workers, PAs, team managers, independent reviewing officers, the director of Children's Services, advocates or children's rights officers, participation officers, independent visitors, virtual school head teacher and a designated teacher, as well as a designated nurse. All of these individuals carry out specific tasks to support YP in/leaving care [4]. On top of their usual responsibilities, these officers have a number of accommodation-related duties. For example, PAs must oversee the matters given in Box 1. Officers also have to keep up-to-date with the changes to housing regulations made by central Government and implement actions within these regulations. If these additional accommodation-related matters are not dealt with by PAs or other officers, YP with care experience are left to sort out these issues by themselves [3,4].

Accommodation is a complex issue which requires specific knowledge of current housing options and frequent training. A dedicated Accommodation Team would provide the attention and expertise this matter deserves. Introducing an Accommodation Team is a

sustainable solution to the overwhelming number of responsibilities that face officers in the Leaving Care Team. High workload among officers may lead to accommodation becoming a secondary priority. The current distribution of accommodation matters within CCC highlights vulnerability in the system which can be addressed by introducing an Accommodation Officer/Team [3,4]. Accommodation affects all YP in/leaving care and deserves a higher level of attention and focus.

- Search for suitable accommodation
- Providing information, advice, and guidance on options
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing their new home
- Support during a housing crisis e.g. being at risk of losing a tenancy
- Attending university and finding accommodation for students during the holidays
- Funding the cost of accommodation and the advice on how to fund accommodation
- Housing options for asylum seekers (who may not have access to all the housing options available)
- Advice and help on setting up the Housing Element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit
- Obtaining a grant from Cambridgeshire Local Assistance scheme to pay for essential basic household furniture and white goods, and food packs during emergencies and times of hardship
- Staying Put scheme
- Moving back to live with family
- Supported lodgings
- Semi-independence
- Social housing
- Private renting
- Obtaining previously looked after YP discounts and savings (when buying personal or household goods)
- Setting up home allowance (leaving care grant)
- Homelessness

Box 1. List of accommodation responsibilities for PAs regarding YP in their care.

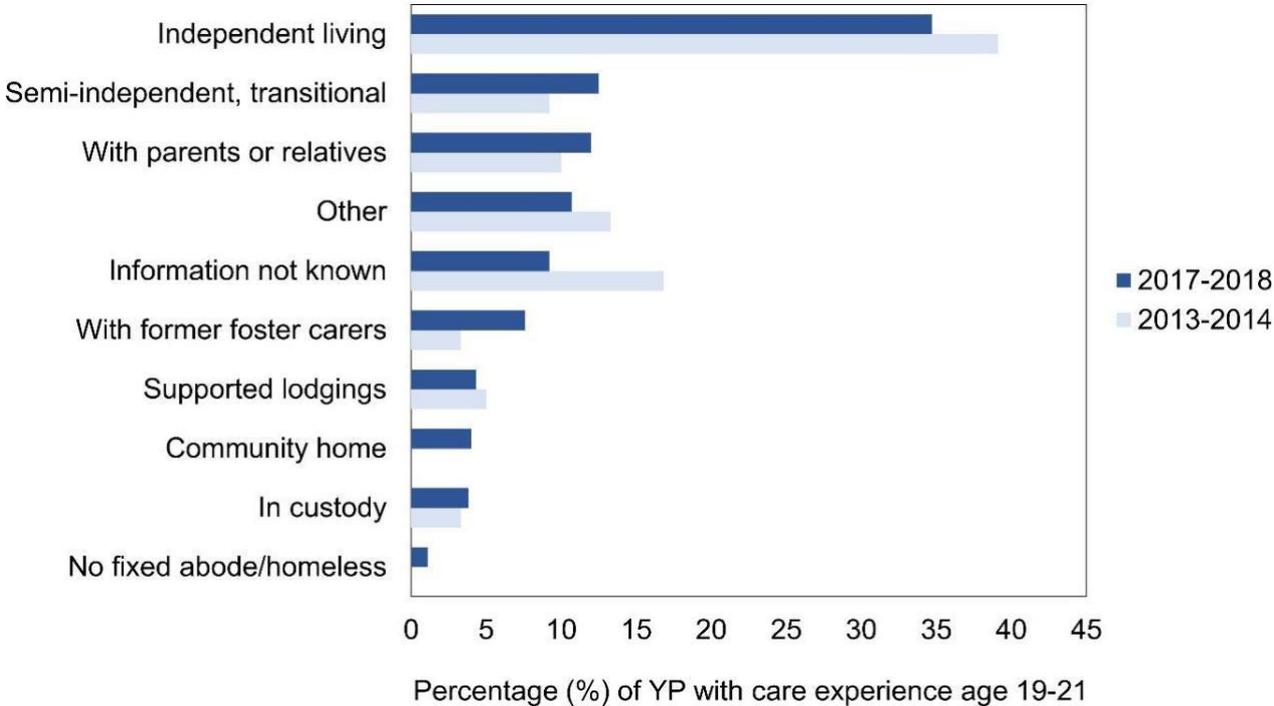
1.3. Lack of Suitable Housing

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness reported that LAs do not always carry out effective assessment of their YP's needs [5]. The report highlighted that assessments to establish the suitability and adequacy of accommodation were unsatisfactory. These assessments are used to determine the "intentionally homeless" (Section 4). The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) recommended the introduction of personalised plans as a solution to homelessness intentionality [6]. LA assessments must include specialised tasks such as assessing housing needs and the suitability of

accommodation. A dedicated Accommodations Officer is required to develop personalised plans with YP, as it is unrealistic for PAs to assume this responsibility.

Fewer YP with care experience are living in independent accommodation than in previous years. In 2014, CCC had 27221 YP with care experience. By 2018, this number had increased by 4.7% to 28510 individuals. In 2018, 34.7% of YP with care experience lived independently with a further 12.5% in semi-independent, transitional accommodation (Figure 1) [7]. These numbers represent a 12% decrease in YP with care experience living in independent accommodation between 2014 and 2018. By 2018, there were also 3040 YP with care experience living in “other accommodation” (Figure 3) [7]. Other accommodation includes ordinary lodgings, foyers, emergency accommodation, bed and breakfast etc., as well as YP abroad, deported, homeless, or in unknown residence [3,4]. Accommodation affects all YP in/leaving care and an Accommodations Team would be beneficial to support the logistical aspects of transitioning from care into independence.

Figure 3. Living situation for YP with care experience age 19 to 21 in Cambridgeshire.



This decrease in independent living may be a result of the ever-increasing price of renting or buying a house, the availability of social housing, and systematic failures. Greater effort is required to determine why there has been a decrease in YP with care experience living in independent accommodation. As a Corporate Parent, it is the duty of CCC to provide support "good enough for their own children" to help YP with care experience transition into independence and independent living [3,7].

CCC’s Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 to 2018 states that it will provide safe, appropriate, affordable housing for YP with care experience [8]. CCC has also noted the lack

and quality of supported tenancies/accommodation as a major concern within Cambridgeshire. Available accommodation that may be deemed suitable for YP with care experience is often not sustainable on benefits. More affordable housing is required.

CCC's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 to 2018 also states that it is "imperative that the District Councils, in partnership with other housing providers, are committed to working to increase the number of properties available for YP with care experience post-18 years old" as well as ensuring "there is a joint protocol with Housing" and stating that "it is important that housing providers work with Children's Social Care and partners to ensure there are robust and varied packages of support to enable YP to maintain their accommodation provision" [8]. These somewhat vague statements are long-term solutions which are ineffective in the short-term. YP with care experience that need safe and suitable accommodation now must not be forgotten.

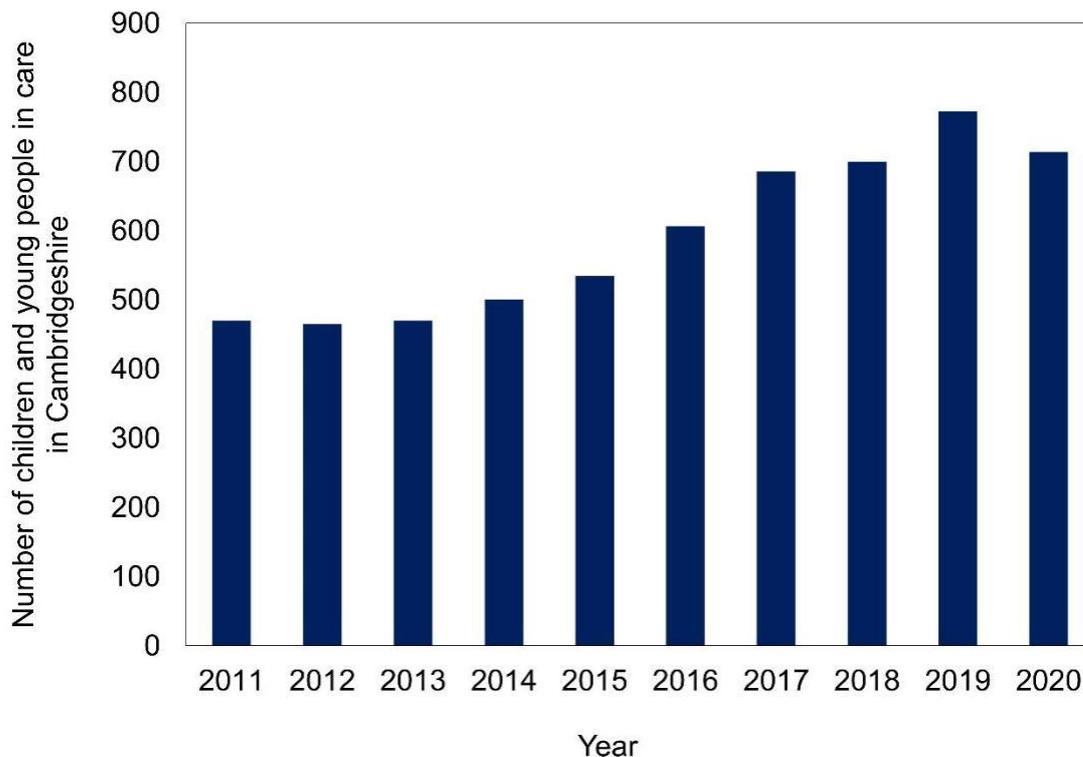
The ideal scenario would be to provide more accommodation options and individualised housing packages. Currently many of Cambridge's YP do not obtain suitable and affordable accommodation. CCC's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 to 2018 suggested collaboration between Housing and Children's Social Care and partners to address this problem [8]. Collaboration is important but could result in the housing needs of YP being lost or overlooked as information is transferred between groups. A dedicated Accommodation Team would streamline the housing process and ensure sufficient attention is given to individual issues.

1.4. Inefficiencies in Accommodation Services

LAs have a duty to ensure that YP with care experience have suitable and safe places to live. This responsibility includes incorporating YP's housing preferences into their pathway plans, advising YP if accommodation issues arise, and promoting the Setting Up Home Allowance of £2000 [9]. Greater demand on accommodation services, due to the increasing number of children and YP entering care (Figure 4) [10], has affected capacity. CCC's People and Communities Sufficiency Statement recognises the issues associated with increased demand for care services, including housing benefit, housing provisions, and fostering providers (Box 2) [11]. The statement indicates that better communication is required to increase the stability and suitability of housing provisions within Cambridgeshire.

PAs are the main point of contact for CCC's YP to find suitable accommodation. PAs minimise logistical hurdles during the accommodation process by working with both YP and the District Council. This means that YP with care experience do not have to explain their requirements to a large number of people. However, PAs may not have in-depth understanding of accommodation issues as they deal with accommodation on a case-by-case basis [11]. Housing requests are currently passed from YP to PA to District Council. The numerous steps in this process introduce room for error, increasing the risk of information being lost, misinterpreted, or ignored. The number of (emergency) referrals to CCC further highlights that the current accommodation system needs improvement (Box 2) [11]. An Accommodation Team would allow YP to voice their housing concerns to a dedicated team, helping to reduce referrals and reducing workload for PAs.

Figure 4. Number of children and YP in care in Cambridgeshire from 2011 to 2020.



LAs must incorporate its YP's accommodation preferences into their pathway plans. Poor relationships with PAs and social workers, inflexibility of pathway plans, and poor timing are barriers to effective pathway planning for accommodation [11-13]. Following a survey of 87 YP, Centrepont suggested that nationally the relevant support during the transition into independence is lacking [14]:

- 43% of YP with care experience felt their PA had been unhelpful when it came to thinking about future housing needs;
- 57% felt that their social worker was not helpful in the process of applying for council housing;
- 86% had slept rough;
- 57% felt unsafe in the area they first lived after leaving care;
- 58% did not feel ready to live independently when they left care;
- 39% felt that housing benefits were not enough to cover their rent; and
- 58% felt that they could not turn to their LAs for help.

Evidently, YP with care experience across England are unsatisfied with current accommodation provisions. The final bullet point is particularly pertinent for CCC as the council has no official housing-related position to help its YP with accommodation. Furthermore, staffing issues may contribute to YP not turning to their LAs for help. Around 65% of practitioners agreed that their LA does not have sufficient staff capacity to fulfil its duties to YP with care experience [14]. This is worrying since accommodation should be a top priority for CCC yet there are no dedicated staff to ensure this need is met.

Point 10.7. In the period April 2016 to March 2017, 158 referrals were made to supported accommodation providers, 68 of which were emergency referrals (required within 24 hours), and 47 of those 68 were for YP new into care. The housing benefit sustainable provisions have very limited capacity to take emergency referrals, so we rely heavily on provisions that are not housing benefit sustainable and not always in county. In addition, typically emergency referrals are for YP where either little is known about them or there has been a significant issue within their placement that has led to immediate notice being given, therefore their referral often presents them as being high risk or high need and therefore harder to place in provisions where support and supervision is minimal. Cambridgeshire have a need for resilient 16+ provisions better able to manage YP with complex and challenging behaviours, to help reduce the number of placements moves for this cohort of YP.

Point 10.8. Similarly, fostering providers, including our in-house service, have been unable to manage demand of placements for this cohort of YP. In the same period 24 referrals were made for fostering placements for 16- and 17-year-olds; only 7 of these placements resulted in a suitable fostering placement, and only 2 of those were with our in-house service. There is a need for Cambridgeshire to review processes which seek to avoid 16- and 17-year-olds from coming into care, and to increase suitable housing provisions within the district to meet the needs of this cohort. Whilst a significant proportion of Cambridgeshire's 16- and 17-year-old population are unaccompanied asylum-seeking YP the Local Authority has a duty to provide sufficient accommodation, and when those YP turn 18 their accommodation is able to be funded either by housing benefit (if the YP has leave to remain) or the Local Authority continues to have a duty to fund (until their status is determined).

Box 2. People and Community's Sufficiency Statement published by CCC.

A dedicated Accommodation Team could also focus on improving the collection and usage of housing data. Maintaining up-to-date records of YP's housing status should be a priority for the Accommodation Team. An Accommodation Team would be best-placed to maintain a housing database since they would deal directly with the housing issues of YP with care experience. Such a database would increase the speed at which YP living in inappropriate or unknown accommodation could be identified. In theory, flagging up YP whose accommodation status is unknown could help prevent hidden homelessness. Creating a separate database showing available accommodation would streamline the search, selection, and allocation process. By integrating artificial intelligence, this process could be automated to enable automatic updates to housing data, automatic removal of unsuitable accommodation from CCC systems, and automatic calculation of when, where, and for how long accommodation might be available [11-14]. Integration of new housing provisions would also be easier to track in an automated system. The changes would improve the efficiency of

the accommodation process, leading to more stable placements and fewer referrals. Both CCC and YP with care experience would benefit from more efficient use of accommodation data.

1.5. Voices of YP with Care Experience

As part of our 2020 survey, YP were asked about their experiences of accommodation. As discussed in [Part 1 Section 3.5—7](#), this survey had relatively small uptake and its results cannot be taken as representative of the views of all of CCC's YP. While survey responses must be considered in line with these limitations (specifically the small sample size), it is still important that the views of YP who completed the survey are given space. Respondents to the 2020 survey noted accommodation as a key issue of concern in Cambridgeshire. Seven respondents were 'very concerned' and two were 'somewhat concerned' about accommodation. Four respondents found CCC to be 'very unhelpful' and three 'somewhat unhelpful' with housing matters ([Section 2](#)).

Some respondents to the 2020 survey commented upon a lack of safe and stable accommodation provisions and communication issues between CCC and its YP. Responses from the survey suggest that the availability of accommodation for YP may be a barrier for YP progressing into independence and that YP with care experience need more consistent support as they enter independence.

Respondents to the 2020 survey raised safety and stability as key concerns about their accommodation. Four of the ten respondents did not feel they live in suitable accommodation and five felt they will not have suitable accommodation in the future. In free text comments, one YP mentioned that the price of rent was a major issue.

The 2020 survey asked whether respondents had 'suitable' and 'safe' accommodation 'right now' and 'for the future'. Respondents who answered that they did not have suitable and/or safe accommodation now and/or for the future were asked why they thought this was the case to better understand what YP considered to be 'suitable' and 'safe' accommodation. Respondents raised support and stability as key components of suitable accommodation. Two respondents did not feel safe in their current accommodation and five felt they will not have safe accommodation in the future.

As has been noted, the ten respondents represent a small proportion of CCC's YP and this should be kept in mind. However, the survey responses indicate that more resources and support are needed to help YP transition from care into appropriate independent accommodation. A permanent Accommodation Officer/Team could meet this need. It is the responsibility of the Corporate Parent to advocate for and support its YP and an accommodation Officer/Team could support this goal.

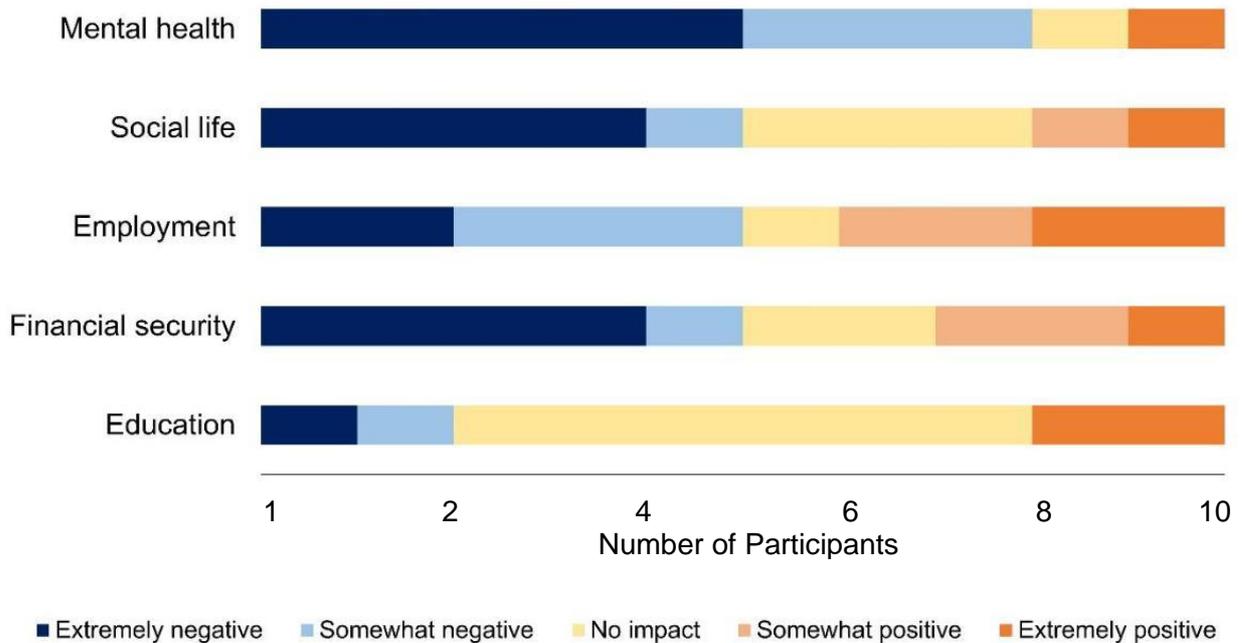


It is the responsibility of the Corporate Parent to advocate for and support its young people with care experience.

The 2020 survey gave respondents the opportunity to express their experience of finding accommodation and how being in care has impacted their lives through free text response boxes. While these are individual responses, and not necessarily representative of the views of all of CCC's YP, some respondents commented on a perceived lack of support and overall feeling of precarity in regard to their accommodation arrangements. Some of the respondents felt that their experience of being in care had created instability in their lives and led to worse outcomes in terms of accommodation and mental health than some of their peers who had not been in care.

Living conditions can also affect other aspects of YP's lives including mental health and financial security (Section 6, 7, 8). As part of our 2020 survey we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their housing situation had impacted other areas of their lives (Figure 6). Financial barriers included rent, deposits, and a lack of leaving care grants to cover carpeting and furniture. It is important to highlight that the areas of stable accommodation, financial security, and good mental health are closely linked.

Figure 6. How 10 survey respondents rate the extent to which their housing situation has impacted various areas of their lives.



Other LAs, such as Oxfordshire County Council, one of CCC's statistical neighbours, has found ways to incorporate the opinions of their YP into housing decisions ([Section 2 Part 2.1](#)).

The 2020 survey also gave respondents the opportunity to provide free text comments on their personal perception of the housing system in Cambridgeshire and how much input they felt they had in their housing arrangements. Again, these are individual comments and are thus not necessarily representative of the views of all of CCC's YP, however, some respondents shared concerns about the suitability of housing placements, finding accommodation, and the financial strains that come with this. Some also expressed concerns that they felt that their views were not being taken into consideration in terms of organising their housing arrangements.

In a national survey of people with care experience carried out by Ofsted in 2022 (which received 255 responses from people of a range of ages with care experience) similar experiences were reported [39]. In this survey, many respondents expressed that they felt that they were not involved enough in plans about their future and that when they did express their wishes they were not listened to or they did not fully understand their options [39]. Many noted that they did not have control over where they lived upon leaving care; only one third lived in a location that they liked after leaving care (with only one fifth living in a type of accommodation that they liked) [39]. Some respondents to this national survey expressed worry about the area they moved to in relation to their safety, their familiarity with an area, or living on their own [39].

Housing issues could be more effectively addressed by a separate Accommodation Team. An Accommodation Team could address the lack of available appropriate housing and communication issues, as well as stopping YP with care experience feeling overlooked. Implementing an Accommodation Team would ensure that all housing issues are dealt with by a single dedicated body. As such, PAs would not be responsible for accommodation on top of their workload, giving them more time to give YP the support that some of them feel that they lack. A centralised Accommodation Team would improve the housing allocation process, ensuring that YP leaving care have stable accommodation. This will reduce unwanted movements for YP. An Accommodation Team would streamline services and reduce the loss of information and miscommunication.

Respondents to our surveys have highlighted issues with their perception of the current accommodation process. Many of these problems arise from unnecessary complexities in the accommodation process. Accommodation across Cambridgeshire is currently shared by CCC and District Councils, making the distribution of housing complicated. An Accommodation Team could simplify this process by collating District and County level information into one place. The Accommodation Team should also have jurisdiction at the individual, CCC, and District Council level. This team would then be able to advocate and communicate more efficiently with YP with care experience to implement housing requests.

2. Current Interventions

CCC can improve accommodation for YP with care experience by learning from successful LAs. The focus of this section will be on the most successful Housing Officer models, namely Oxfordshire County Council, Gloucestershire County Council, and Devon County Council [15,16]. Oxfordshire County Council is significant as it is one of CCC's statistical nearest neighbours. Gloucestershire County Council is another example of a successful statistical neighbour.

2.1. Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council invites YP in care to a Housing Options meeting with a Housing Allocations Officer at age 17.5 [17]. This structure and system establishes understanding of housing options before individuals turn age 18, giving them time to think and ask questions to a dedicated housing and accommodation expert. This system ensures that YP in care know what to do when leaving care and transitioning to become an independent adult. It also provides the YP with a permanent accommodation help-point for whenever they need guidance or emergency help with housing. Oxfordshire County Council also benefit as it helps them accurately and precisely track the accommodation status of their YP with care experience.

In this case, PAs can focus on day-to-day accommodation tasks, such as understanding the amount of money required from employment or benefits to pay the rent. Such aspects of accommodation are important and require detailed explanations and guidance. For example, when the YP turns age 22, housing benefit allowances change [17]. The Housing Allocations Officer also gives the YP with care experience some guidance on what to do when the rent inevitably increases due to a change in tenancy [17]. In addition, the housing support worker can give the YP with care experience advice on how to maintain a tenancy including avoiding missed rent or Council Tax payments, as well as important housing skills such as paying bills and managing visitors [17].

There are three broad components that Oxfordshire have proposed to achieve better housing: (i) the right buildings; (ii) appropriate support services; and (iii) clear pathways that enable YP and families to access such housing [17,18]. CCC is currently lacking in these three areas [12]. By having a set Housing Officer to offer housing advice, Oxfordshire County Council demonstrate their dedication to providing suitable housing and to valuing the opinions of YP in/leaving care about their accommodation.



By having a set Housing Officer to offer housing advice, Oxfordshire County Council demonstrate their dedication to providing suitable housing and to valuing the opinions of YP in/leaving care about their own accommodation.

Ofsted rated Children's Social Care in Oxfordshire as "good" [19,20]. In contrast, CCC was rated as "requires improvement" (Section 2 Part 2.4) [21,22]. The main factors that contributed to Oxfordshire's rating include, but are not limited to, the promptness of processing, the dedicated and specific services, and comprehensive documentation. The main point stated by Ofsted was [19]:

"Effective work takes place to ensure that YP with care experience have the help they need to make successful transitions to independence. Most YP with care experience live in suitable accommodation, including those who Stay Put with their foster carers. Accommodation options are carefully considered, and creative planning and tenacity ensures that YP live in the most appropriate placement. Pathway plans reflect YP with care experience's histories and day-to-day experiences but would be strengthened if actions needed and timescales for delivery were clearer."

Oxfordshire essentially has an Accommodation Officer to uphold rigorous standards for suitability and planning for accommodation of the YP with care experience. As such, PAs have time to carry out other work: "Care leavers benefit from developing meaningful relationships with PAs, who are conscientious and helpful advocates for children. There is a real sense of PAs being that 'one person who believes' in the YP. PAs work hard to keep in touch with the YP they support, with contact tailored to individual need" [19]. The synergy created by Oxfordshire ensures that the housing needs and standards for YP with care experience are met, allowing PAs to focus on their relationship with individuals.

2.2. Gloucestershire County Council

Gloucestershire County Council is another LA which CCC can learn from. The leaving care worker or social worker helps the YP with care experience to complete a personal housing plan [23,24]. This plan is then examined with a housing worker who will explain the different options available to the YP, from social housing and private rented accommodation to supported housing. The YP with care experience is fully involved in the entire decision-making process.

Gloucestershire County Council also reviews living arrangements within 28 days of the YP moving and then again at least 3 months after that [23,24]. The Housing Worker is able to support YP with care experience with finding accommodation out-of-county if they decide to move [23,24]. These personalised and consistent check-ups could also be implemented in CCC, as a feedback loop system, to help improve accommodation services. The existence of a Housing Worker leaves PAs free to focus on visiting and interacting with YP with care experience. PAs visit YP with care experience within a week of moving and then visit every two months after that. This personalised service is something Ofsted particularly valued when monitoring the services in Gloucestershire [23]. Ofsted stated that most YP benefited from the regular, responsive visiting and positive relationships with their PAs. This purposeful and timely intervention for accommodation was highly favoured. This planning and feedback system resulted in the vast majority of YP living in accommodation that reflected their level of independence.

2.3. Devon County Council

Devon County Council provides a local District Council Housing Options Team to help YP with care experience with their housing decisions. The Housing Officer will work an individual to agree on a personal housing plan. The plan informs the YP of their housing options and the steps needed to move into independent/semi-independent accommodation. YP with care experience are classed as having "priority need" for accommodation until their 21st birthday. If the YP is age 21 or above and is considered significantly more vulnerable, for example due to housing history, support needs, time in care, or medical conditions, the YP may also be classed as a priority for accommodation [25,26]. In contrast, CCC only provides a PA for these services [27].

Devon County Council keeps a clear record of the accommodation in which its YP with care experience are living. In 2019, Devon County Council had: 137 YP with care experience in independent living; 68 living with parents or relatives; 44 living with former foster carers; 37 in semi-independent or transitional living situations; 35 with no information about their living situation; 26 in a community home; 25 in supported lodgings; and 11 with no fixed abode or homeless [28]. Accommodation information is easy to obtain from Devon County Council [28], showing consistent tracking of the housing status of its YP with care experience. An Accommodation Officer/Team at CCC could contribute to better data organisation which inform policies and services for YP with care experience.



Accommodation information is easy to obtain from Devon County Council, showing consistent tracking of the housing status of its YP with care experience.

CCC's record-keeping is not as strong as at Devon County Council. CCC's accommodation data does not exist publicly and contains significant gaps. CCC's Corporate Parenting Annual Report (2018) showed that Cambridgeshire had 693 YP with care experience, yet between April and March 2018, the size of the cohort (i.e. YP aged 17 to 21) is recorded as 294 individuals [29]. Around 75% of these 294 individuals had suitable accommodation every month but the suitability of accommodation for 9.7% of individuals was not recorded [29]. Data does not appear to be regularly updated, contains gaps, and is difficult to obtain. Therefore, an Accommodation Officer/Team is key to providing data accountability.

CCC needs more information is needed about the types of available accommodation and the number of YP with care experience in various living arrangements. Devon County Council provides clear data on their main website and CCC should follow suit. Failing to monitor the housing situation of YP with care experience will lead to a lower quality of care and less suitable accommodation for YP in Cambridgeshire.

2.4. Cambridgeshire County Council

2.4.1. Ofsted Report

The overall effectiveness of the accommodation division at CCC requires substantial improvements [21,22]. As pointed out by Ofsted, the most significant challenge to the LA's ability to provide consistently good services to YP with care experience is the size of caseloads. The workload can be distributed with the introduction of an Accommodation Officer, especially since every YP will require thorough assessments and consideration of accommodation.

As Ofsted stated, the size of caseloads in CCC is too high and is unsustainable in some teams. The impact is that the immediate safety of YP becomes the only focus at the expense of follow-up work which ensures YP have a permanent home and a sustainable housing future. Ofsted noted that in CCC "work to ensure that children have permanent homes is not always pursued with sufficient pace or rigour" [21]. Additional investment in staffing and other related measures in CCC has reduced caseloads, allowing staff to tackle drift and delay in their work. The quality of services has also improved but it was noted that this progress must be sustained and built upon before most YP with care experience receive a consistently good service. Distribution of caseload tasks and delivery of consistently good service would be achievable with a permanent Accommodation Team.

Ofsted suggested key improvements that CCC should make to the accommodation process (Box 3) [21]. The improvement targets set by Ofsted can be achieved by introducing a permanent Accommodation Officer/Team. This new team would increase the capacity of other care teams to complete work to a consistently good standard and to ensure that YP with care experience receive the specific accommodation help they need. Accommodation affects all YP in/leaving care and therefore cannot be anything but a top priority.

Leaders have recognised that the former structure, made up of generic 'life-long' social work units and 14–25 teams, did not ensure a sufficiently sharp focus on children in care and previously looked after YP, and on the need to progress court work and ensure that they have permanent homes as soon as possible. A stronger strategic focus on children in care and previously looked after YP, an increase in staffing and, in the last few months, the establishment of dedicated teams for these children have started to address weaknesses in practice.

Although inspectors found examples of good practice, they also found that caseload pressures are making it very difficult for some social workers to do much more than focus on completing statutory visits, with insufficient capacity, for activities such as direct work and life-story work. Overdue visits and poor plans and case recording remain problems in a significant minority of children's cases. For some children, plans are not updated to reflect their current circumstances and needs, for example not clearly stating their wishes about contact with brothers, sisters, parents and others who are important to them.

Box 3. Suggested accommodation improvements in CCC by Ofsted.

2.4.2. Improvements Based on Ofsted Report

It is important to note that CCC has begun to address many of the issues highlighted by Ofsted. For example, CCC and all District Councils have agreed on a Joint Housing Protocol to improve the housing process for YP leaving care. This should ensure that no information is lost between the two tiers as well as improving communication ([Section 2 Part 2.3](#)). The format of the Corporate Parenting subcommittee has also been changed to amplify the voices of YP with care experience and make sure their accommodation concerns are heard. These changes demonstrate CCC's willingness to become a better Corporate Parent.

Local accommodation providers have been incorporated into CCC's accommodation process to provide specialised advice/information to YP about their Independence Passports. PAs have also received Cultural Identities training which will be useful when supporting UASC transitioning into life in the UK ([Section 2 Part 3.6](#)). The Pathway Plan has also been changed to include regular monitoring and updates, supplementing the recommendation to provide more frequent visits and individual assessment of foster placements ([Section 2 Part 3.4](#)).

CCC has also made a number of changes to staff. Staffing has been increased in Leaving Care Teams and a specialist PA has been employed to focus on homelessness prevention. These changes are an important step forward and demonstrate incorporation of vital new staff members. Therefore, CCC's existing structure would not require significant changes to implement an Accommodation Team. An Accommodation Team would enhance the improvements that have already made since the Ofsted report. In the long-term, such a team would help to maintain these new structures.

3. Recommendations

"The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do [...] the critical question that LAs should ask in adopting such an approach is: 'would this be good enough for my child?'"

The statement above from Statutory Guidance for LAs [2] demonstrates CCC's obligation to act as a parent to its YP. Safe and suitable housing is a basic human right and transient lifestyles and inappropriate housing are risk factors that contribute to the pathway to harm [2]. As such, CCC should place greater importance on improving the current accommodation process. CCC needs to view accommodation as a key priority for all aspects of health and quality of life.

The key recommendation is the implementation of a permanent funded Accommodation Officer/Team. The Accommodation Officer/Team should focus on:

- Extending the Staying Put scheme from age 21 to age 25;
- Removing the reduction of allowances for carers when YP join the Staying Put scheme;
- Ensuring more frequent visits and rigorous individual assessments for foster placements;
- Allowing for priority social housing applications any time before age 25;
- Granting access to all housing options and increasing housing allowance costs for YP waiting for asylum.

3.1. Have a Permanent Funded Accommodation Officer/Team

We recommend that a permanent funded Accommodation Officer/Team is integrated into the core team that supports YP with care experience. The aim of this recommendation is to achieve better planned and tailored outcomes for each individual. PAs currently fill this role but previous research and our survey responses demonstrate that this arrangement is not suitable. YP with care experience have emphasised that accommodation is one of their biggest concerns. To follow the Corporate Parenting principles [2], CCC must introduce a dedicated team to tackle the range of accommodation issues that may occur and to advocate for YP with care experience in this regard.

must address the lack of appropriate support services for YP with care experience by providing an Accommodation Officer/Team. A dedicated team would deal effectively with housing issues due to in-depth knowledge of the accommodation system and relevant processes. This team would also provide effective and timely support, especially for YP with complex needs. It would give YP the knowledge of where/how to obtain help with accommodation issues. Moreover, it would increase the pool of key contacts for YP with care experience. This is particularly pertinent given that 19% of these YP have nobody in their support network [30]. YP with care experience should have access to a variety of dependable and trustworthy adults. In the case of relationship breakdown between PAs and YP, members of the Accommodation Officer/Team could ensure that this miscommunication does not result in homelessness.

A dedicated team is the best option to support the accommodation needs of both CCC's YP and the District and City Councils. The team might advise on building new affordable housing and suggest solutions to key housing issues. They could gather accommodation information from YP with care experience to then clarify housing priorities with District Councils. They may also provide a set of needs to the property services and local planning departments. In this way, an Accommodation Officer/Team would advocate for local housing plans to reflect the housing needs of YP with care experience. These actions ensure a voice for YP with care experience on housing boards, especially when building/buying new homes or remodelling existing stock.

Creating an Accommodation Officer/Team is the optimal use of available funds. They would be best placed to provide ongoing and accurate information about housing. An Accommodation Officer also allows CCC to communicate the accommodation it offers without YP having to access the Local Offer. A dedicated team would improve communication between District Councils, provide specialist support and recognise housing issues at an earlier stage. CCC could then move towards prevention of these issues rather than the current reactive approach.

3.2. Extend the Staying Put Scheme from Age 21 to Age 25

All schemes, care, and support should be extended across the board until age 25. An Accommodation Officer/Team should focus on extending the Staying Put scheme from age 21 to age 25. As stated by the Homelessness Code of Guidance for LAs [30]:

“There is a duty on children’s services authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser to provide support to previously looked after YP until they reach their 25th birthday (except where the YP no longer wants a Personal Adviser) (Children and Social Work Act 2017). The support provided by Personal Advisers should be based on the needs of the YP as set out in their statutory Pathway Plan. This may include support from a housing authority.”

Although some YP are ready to leave care at age 21, flexible support illustrates a higher quality of care. The option to Stay Put would give YP with care experience the security and peace of mind that they can take the next step when they are ready [31]. Affordable and safe housing options should be provided for YP anyway and this is exactly what the Staying Put scheme offers. The Adolescent and Children’s Trust stated that “YP questioned about Staying Put frequently asked for it to be extended to age 25” [32]. Clearly, the Staying Put scheme is popular among YP with care experience.

Extending the Staying Put arrangements would help increase placement stability. Remaining in a familiar environment may help individuals to have a smoother transition into independence. YP who Stay Put are more than twice as likely to be in full-time education at 19 years old compared with other YP with care experience [31-33]. An extension of this scheme could therefore reduce the number of YP with care experience classed as NEET.

Providing long-term familiar housing options enhances the security and stability that the YP desperately need, giving them the ability to focus on other things such as their career or higher education.

If YP with care experience do not have to worry about basic needs, such as housing, they have more time to consider ambitions ([Section 6](#)). YP with care experience should be able to remain with their foster families. This would allow them to focus on higher education, finding a job, and eventually moving into their own place when they are ready. The popularity of this scheme has been demonstrated by CCC's YP. In January 2020, there were 27 YP in Cambridgeshire on the Staying Put scheme. A year later, there are 33 YP on the scheme with another 12 individuals expected to join in the next six months [33]. Therefore, there has been a 60% increase in demand for this Staying Put scheme in only one year and despite the COVID-19 pandemic. As a Corporate Parent, CCC should continue to listen to what its YP want and to provide options for individuals to make their own choices.

3.3. Remove the Reduction of Allowances for Carers when YP Leaving Care Join the Staying Put Scheme

Carer allowance is given to people caring for YP and contributes towards the costs of raising a child (e.g. food and rent). The Accommodation Officer/Team should ensure that there is no reduction in current carer allowance when YP with care experience join the Staying Put scheme. This action would demonstrate CCC's commitment to the scheme and would remove ambiguity about rental/support costs. Carer allowance could be maintained by introducing a simpler payment structure, with separate accommodation and support costs. Alternatively, it could follow the model of Lancashire County Council [34], in which a portion of the carer allowance given to Staying Put carers is paid by the LA.

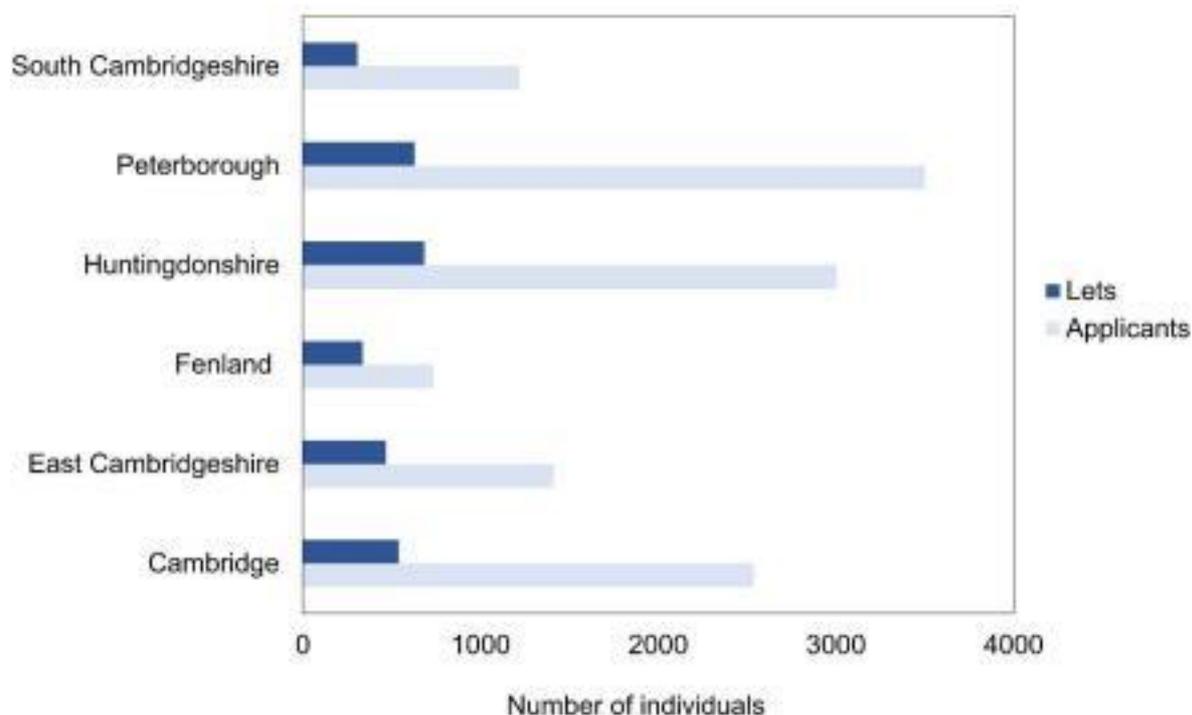
3.4. Ensure More Frequent Visits and Rigorous Individual Assessments of Foster Placements Post-21

The Accommodation Team should ensure more frequent visits and rigorous individual assessments of foster placements post-21 when implementing the extended Staying Put scheme. This recommendation would improve communication, support, and assessments of the implemented policies. Improved collaboration, following Think Communities, could be implemented such that the Accommodation Team have regular correspondence with independent foster agencies, so that a better feedback loop and continuously updated list of available accommodation can be provided. This measure is implemented by Oxfordshire County Council, Gloucestershire County Council, and Devon County Council ([Section 2 Part 2](#)).

3.5. Allow for Priority Social Housing Application Any Time Before Age 25

YP with care experience should be able to apply for priority social housing any time before age 25. There is extremely high demand for social housing and a large discrepancy between the number of applications and lets (Figure 8) [35]. Currently, there is no cap on age but there is also no priority for YP with care experience after age 21, resulting in YP falling through the cracks ([Section 2 Part 1.1](#)).

Figure 8. Comparison between the number of applicants for social housing and the number of social housing lets.



Priority for social housing should be given automatically to YP with care experience. The current priority system does not benefit YP with care experience as waiting times can extend into the decades [35]. Corporate Parents have a statutory duty to ensure that YP have access to housing options. The lack of housing options available to CCC's YP adds to the disadvantages facing this group. A major part of this issue is that YP do not have a guarantor that can help them rent privately (Section 3). Private rentals do not tend to accept YP with care experience who are on benefits and these YP have to compete with other vulnerable groups for accommodation, such as families with young children [35]. As such, private accommodation is not an option for most YP with care experience. The minimum that CCC should do is to put YP with care experience on a priority social house application list before they turn 25 years old.

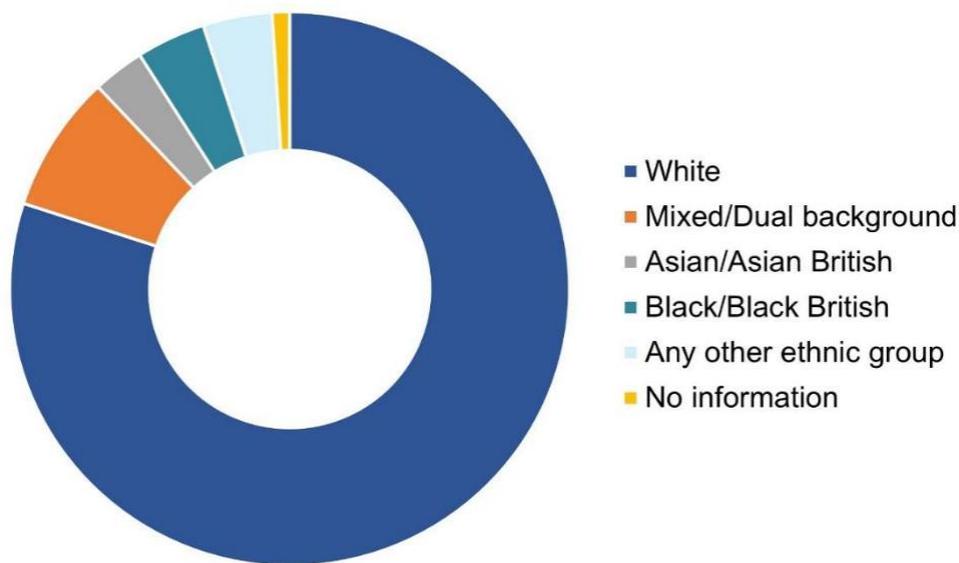
The semi-independent "accommodation trap" is a key barrier to successful transition from care into independence. Semi-independent accommodation is the cheapest housing available to YP classed as NEET since housing benefits and Universal Credit are enough to cover the cost of accommodation and living [35]. If an individual starts working full time (35 hours a week on an Apprenticeship), they then have to contribute towards the cost of housing, on top of the cost of living, travel, items required for work etc. YP often earn much less money than they receive from Universal Credit if they are unemployed [35]. As one 2020 survey respondent said: "it costs me more to work than it does to not work." YP become trapped in semi-independent accommodation because they cannot get onto a social housing priority list due to long wait times or private accommodation is too expensive [12]. A social housing priority list would help YP escape the semi-independent accommodation trap.

Allowing YP with care experience to move into social housing may help to increase their take-home pay. Take-home pay may increase further when priority is obtained in conjunction with a reduced housing benefit, as well as the incentive for the YP to transition into work and stay in work [12]. In the short- and long-term, giving priority to YP with care experience for social housing will reduce costs for CCC and District Councils. For example, councils would have to pay fewer subsidies to semi-independent accommodation providers. Social housing priority may also boost the local economy by giving individuals incentive to stay and work in Cambridgeshire [36].

3.6. Grant Access to All Housing Options and Increase Housing Allowance Costs for YP Waiting for Asylum

UASCs in Cambridgeshire may struggle to integrate due to low ethnic diversity in the county. Although Cambridgeshire has one of the fastest growing populations in the UK and has seen considerable increases in its migrant population, ethnic diversity in Cambridgeshire remains lower than the national average [29]. Around 7.4% of Cambridgeshire’s population belong to a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic group compared with 14.5% nationally [29]. Around 19% of 698 YP with care experience surveyed in Cambridgeshire belong to one of these groups (Figure 9) [29]. This lack of diversity may contribute to the social and cultural isolation of UASC.

Figure 9. Ethnicity of YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire.



The number of UASC in Cambridgeshire has remained fairly stable since 2016, despite significant increases in UASC across England (Table 3) [10]. Compared with CCC, other LAs have seen similar or greater increases in their UASC population. The UASC population in Cambridgeshire only represents about 10% of its care-experienced population [29]. It is important to note that YP from migrant populations can experience social and cultural isolation as a result of a language barrier and being away from their home authority [29]. There is a need to address these issues in the services provided by adapting them so that the voices of UASC are not forgotten. One way of adapting services is through the recommendation that all housing options are available to YP waiting for asylum.

Table 3. Number of UASC in Cambridgeshire from 2011 to 2020.

Year	UASC in Cambridgeshire – no. (% of care-experienced population)
2011	15 (3.2)
2012	5 (1.1)
2013	10 (2.1)
2014	7 (1.4)
2015	19 (3.6)
2016	61 (10.0)
2017	67 (9.8)
2018	62 (8.9)
2019	79 (10.2)
2020	75 (10.5)

The maximum number of UASC that CCC can be responsible for is 92 individuals [2]. When this number is reached, UASC are transferred to other LAs. CCC receives a set fee per UASC from central Government to cover costs such as accommodation and support. When UASC turn 18 years old and if they have gained “leave to remain” status, they become eligible for housing benefits [2]. Alternatively, the LA continues to have a duty to pay for their accommodation until their status is determined [2].

UASC in Cambridgeshire are usually placed in supported accommodation provision (Table 4) [37]. This has put pressure on supported accommodation services available to YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire. Accommodation is the only factor that places UASC in competition with Cambridgeshire’s YP with care experience. LAs have a duty to provide sufficient accommodation for both groups [29].

Table 4. Types of accommodation in which UASC were placed in 2017.

Accommodation Type	UASC in Accommodation – no. (%)
Children’s Home	3 (4.5)
Fostering	18 (26.9)
Supported Accommodation	46 (68.6)

The accommodation options and resources available to YP with care experience and UASC should be the same, although UASC may need additional support. This could be done by incorporating a specialist PA to visit UASC at a higher frequency. This can also be carried out through putting them in supported accommodation for a shorter period of time or until they ready to transition into independent accommodation. In addition, this will allow these individuals to have access to the same opportunities as other YP with care experience so that they themselves can transition into independence after graduating from their unaccompanied asylum seeker status. Asides from accommodation, UASC are supported in the same way as other YP with care experience, for example with access to health and

education services [37]. It is odd, therefore, that the accommodation options are also not the same.

UASC should be granted access to all accommodation options. The needs of UASC “are not being properly assessed prior to and after placement, are not being met in unregulated accommodation and that they often do not understand their options for care/accommodation and do not have their views taken into consideration” [29]. There is also lack of comprehensive research regarding UASC [29]. Moreover, “the Department for Education recognises that UASC form a significant part of the growing number of children being placed in independent and semi-independent settings, which are not registered or inspected by Ofsted” [29]. The lack of access to all housing options if the YP is waiting for asylum is clearly an issue.

The number of UASC has increased due to the National Transfer Scheme but LAs are looking after a proportionate number of UASC. Nationally, UASC represent 6% of YP with care experience. Despite the proportional distribution and low percentage of UASC, LAs are challenged by the lack of available suitable accommodation for YP with care experience. This results in many of CCC’s YP with care experience being placed in Peterborough and almost all of its UASC being placed in Peterborough [11]:

"In terms of resources and services, including Mosques and bilingual shopping facilities, Peterborough offers greater diversity and support for young people from overseas. Additionally, as a neighbouring Authority, and with a great many shared services Cambridgeshire Looked After Children are not disadvantaged by living in Peterborough, in the same way that a child might be considered to be if they live much further afield."

There is a need for CCC to expand their housing priorities so YP with care experience and UASC can stay in Cambridgeshire. This is preferable to relying on the resources of a neighbouring LA, especially if neighbouring LAs have reached maximum capacity. This would allow community support and development to increase over time in a similar fashion to Peterborough. Cambridgeshire could follow Peterborough’s approach instead of redistributing UASC [11]. We recommend implementing a better system with improved management, as Peterborough has already demonstrated successful integration of UASC.

With the majority of UASC entering care between age 16 and 17 [37], they leave the care system relatively quickly. CCC therefore has a duty to help these YP transition into independence [2], meaning that the accommodation system has to be smoother and more efficient. Unfortunately, with the increasing number of UASC in need of accommodation, more affordable housing options quickly fill to capacity. By increasing access to all housing options for UASC, there is also a decline in affordability due to the higher competition for affordable housing. CCC identified that the funding coming from central Government is not sufficient with the estimated costs per week at around £800 [37]. As such, housing allowance costs for the 92 UASC should be increased.

The increase in housing options and housing allowance is integral in a successful transition for UASC as CCC is responsible for housing, living, and support costs until the Home Office has made a decision on their immigration status [2]. This process can be lengthy with UASC waiting for decisions for one to three years and with a small number of UASC waiting longer than three years. It is important to note that Cambridgeshire has not reached their limit for distribution yet. Cambridgeshire is at 92% of their limit under the 0.07% threshold [2]. This

threshold is set by central Government for the maximum number of UASC that CCC can take in. There is therefore still space to take in more UASC and implement changes to improve the process for current and future UASC. The recommendations are made to help mitigate the financial burden due to the increase in the number of UASC, and to help improve the transition for these YP when they do gain “leave to remain” status.

4. Implementation of Recommendations

An Accommodation Team would have initial costs but would reduce CCC’s spending in the long-term. A successful transition into suitable and affordable accommodation means that YP with care experience can pay more towards their cost of living and contribute to the local economy. The team would reduce the cost of YP classed as NEET (Section 6) as well as emergency housing for individuals that become homeless (Section 4). The team would also save CCC the cost of extra financial support if YP do not have a successful transition. In addition, the number of closed cases and successful transitions may increase leading to further reductions in CCC spending [38]. Implementing an Accommodation Officer/Team is an example of a “spend to save” recommendation in the long-term.

5. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

Providing suitable housing is a key component of CCC’s role as a Corporate Parent. Ignoring the recommendations outlined in this section may prevent YP with care experience from flourishing as well as increasing the financial resources required to help these YP if they become NEET and/or homeless. In the long-term, this will lead to the loss of financial saving opportunities.

Failing to invest enough time and resources into the accommodation process will impact many aspects of the lives of YP with care experience. For example, if YP do not have a stable home, this may affect their mental health (Section 8), create barriers to setting up a bank account as well as to attending work/education (Section 6). Having a safe and secure home is a basic need and without it an individual cannot move forward.

6. Summary

Securing housing is a complicated process for YP with care experience. A permanent Accommodation Officer/Team would help YP in Cambridgeshire navigate the complexities of the accommodation process. This duty should not be left to PAs, District Councils, and certainly not to YP. Instead, collective and centralised effort is required for YP to feel properly supported and to understand their entitlements, benefits, and resources. This task is a full-time job in itself. An Accommodation Team that can collate this information and deal with housing issues would be beneficial.

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Section Three. Guarantor Provision

Overview

Additional measures to support YP engaged in low-income EET are needed, since semi-independent accommodation can remove the financial incentive to work in these types of placement. The common requirement for a guarantor makes private accommodation inaccessible to many YP, who often do not have anyone to take on this role. Acting as a guarantor is a way in which CCC can support its YP and expand its role as a Corporate Parent.

Key recommendation

- **Act as a guarantor for YP with care experience, with a particular focus on helping those engaged in low-income employment and apprenticeships.**
-

1. Introduction

[Section 2](#) highlighted the difficulties faced by YP with care experience with regard to availability and cost of accommodation. These issues are further exacerbated when individuals are on low incomes, for example those undertaking apprenticeships. Here, we outline the complex issue that arises when trying to balance low pay with accommodation costs while maintaining the incentive of YP to engage in employment, education or training (EET), and propose how these YP can be helped when transitioning into independent housing.

One of the primary issues when considering housing for YP with care experience on low incomes is the inaccessibility of key accommodation types. Firstly, private housing is often inaccessible as these YP have no adult to act as a guarantor. Secondly, social housing is difficult to obtain due to high demand. A high number of YP with care experience in the UK therefore live in semi-independent housing (27% of 18 year olds; 14% of 19 to 21 year olds) [1]. There is a financial barrier to this type of accommodation for individuals on low incomes, leading to a situation in which there is no financial incentive for these YP to engage in EET.



There is no financial incentive for YP on low income to engage in EET.

1.1. Financial Barrier of Semi-Independent Accommodation for YP on Low Income

One of the most easily accessible types of accommodation for YP with care experience to live in is semi-independent accommodation. In cases where individuals are NEET, they will receive Universal Credit and their accommodation fees will be covered by their housing benefit. Those that work are required to contribute to their accommodation costs from their take-home pay. For those aged 16 to 18 and undertaking an apprenticeship, or those aged 19 and in their first year of an apprenticeship, the minimum wage is £4.15 per hour [2]. When working a 35-hour week, for example, the take-home pay of these YP following payment of the accommodation charge is comparable to the amount of Universal Credit received by those who are NEET. Additional costs associated with undertaking an apprenticeship, such as clothing and transport, can bring this level of take-home pay significantly under the value of Universal Credit and eliminate the financial incentive of employment. Although those in apprenticeships are eligible for additional support in the form of the Care Leavers' Bursary [3], this represents a single payment of £1000, leaving YP still with a low level of take-home pay. For social housing, take-home pay for YP is usually higher, but this type of accommodation is difficult to obtain due to the lack of priority status in social housing allocation ([Section 2, Part 3.5](#)).

This barrier may drive YP towards jobs that pay a higher rate than apprenticeships instead of pursuing aspirational careers through apprenticeship opportunities in their areas of interest. Compared to other YP of a similar age who may be able to live with parents, YP with care experience are already at a financial disadvantage in having to pay for accommodation, which may discourage them from aspirational opportunities, a problem that is further exacerbated by this specific issue.

Private accommodation is often inaccessible to YP with care experience on low incomes due to the requirement for a guarantor. YP with care experience often do not have an adult to act as a guarantor, leading to situations in which they have to either live in semi-independent accommodation and reduce their take-home pay significantly or live in hostels, which provide a lack of stability and safety concerns, as was highlighted in feedback from some of the YP who responded to our 2020 survey.

2. Potential Solutions

2.1. Rent Cost

One way of changing the system to make accommodation more affordable for YP with care experience on low incomes would be adjust the amount of rent they are paying. There are several options for how this could be implemented, including establishment of an income-based rent scale, provision of a housing supplement for those undertaking apprenticeships or establishment of a rent cap. Alternatively, this problem could be approached from the income end, with CCC providing an income top-up for those undertaking apprenticeships.

2.2. Improving Accessibility to Housing Types

The second potential solution involves ways in which CCC can support YP with care experience in obtaining alternative types of housing in which it does pay to work. Firstly, individuals could be shifted to in priority need for social housing allocation. Alternatively, the timeframe for applications to social housing could be extended ([Section 2](#)) although this would require a collaborative effort with District Councils.

Accessing private accommodation is difficult for YP with care experience as they often have no one to act as a guarantor. As their Corporate Parent, CCC is well-placed to take on this role. There is no legislation that restricts the Council from acting as a guarantor. The Localism Act (2011) states that “a local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do” [4]. This power was highlighted during another LA’s investigation into the possibility of acting as a guarantor [5]. In addition to improving the living situations of those on low incomes, providing more types of housing would benefit CCC’s YP to whom it acts as a Corporate Parent.

Centrepont also highlighted that YP with care experience need their LA to act as a guarantor to improve their access to the private rental sector [7]. Centrepont’s report further indicates that this should be implemented with a clear contract that communicates the maximum guarantee that the LA is willing to provide.

The importance of establishing opportunities specific to YP with care experience will be discussed in [Section 6](#). In cases where opportunities consist of apprenticeships specific to these YP, such as the Kickstart scheme, the recommendations made here will be crucial.

3. Current Interventions

3.1. Cambridgeshire

While CCC provides useful information about the different types of accommodation available to its YP, CCC offers a limited amount of practical support ([Section 2](#)). Specific

accommodation support based on national schemes includes the Staying Put scheme for those in foster care, and the Setting Up Home Allowance [6]. The CCC website states that the Council is unable to act as a guarantor for its YP.

3.2. Cambridge's Geographical Neighbours

Within the East of England area, Essex County Council's Local Offer states that their Leaving and After Care Service is able to consider acting as a guarantor for their YP [8]. This is considered based on the outcome of a needs assessment, and is dependent on a number of conditions, including that the YP has no other accommodation options or individuals who could fulfil the role of guarantor. Additionally, YP must be motivated and able to maintain their own accommodation (Section 6, 8). We propose that a guarantor scheme within Cambridgeshire be extended beyond those with no other option, to allow YP working in low-income jobs and apprenticeships the option of private accommodation. In doing so, this would alleviate the financial and aspirational issues resulting from the financial barrier that occurs in semi-independent accommodation.

3.3. Cambridge's Statistical Neighbours

Several LAs within Cambridgeshire's statistical neighbours are able to act as guarantors for YP leaving care. Firstly, Wiltshire County Council act as a guarantor for individuals in the case where the income of these YP is sufficient to cover their rent and associated living expenses, and as of October 2018, the Council was supporting ten individuals in this way [9]. Each agreement is legally reviewed to minimise Council liability. Additionally, Wiltshire County Council considers its YP leaving care as a Band One priority group for social housing through their Homes4Wiltshire scheme [10]. We recognise that Wiltshire is a unitary authority and implementing this in Cambridgeshire would require collaboration with District Councils.

3.4. Other LAs

The LA held as an example of best practice for acting as a guarantor for its YP is Kent County Council. Kent County Council implemented a guarantor pilot scheme in July 2018 [5] which has since been extended and is still available to its YP [11,12]. The pilot was limited to 25 individuals and involved a guarantee of six months of unpaid rent, with a view to implementing a guarantor policy in the future.



Kent County Council implemented a guarantor pilot scheme in July 2018 which has since been extended.

The 12-month pilot accepted 26 YP aged 20 to 23, all in work or education, and none of the YP missed their rental payments [13], resulting in no monetary loss to the Council. Successful applicants were required to provide evidence that they could meet the costs independently. Six applicants for the pilot were unsuccessful, with three failing to provide this evidence and three being able to provide the necessary evidence but unable to find a suitable property to rent [13]. The review of this pilot highlighted in particular that each guarantor arrangement was closely monitored, meaning that any difficulties an individual had with paying rent were identified at an early stage.

Devon County Council, who implemented a guarantor pilot scheme prior to and informed the scheme in Kent, still maintain the role of being a guarantor in their Local Offer [14]. The Devon pilot was limited to YP who represented a lower risk in terms of financial liability for the Council such as those in University or employment. The assessment process of the pilot undertaken in Kent led to a similar outcome to Devon's pilot which had narrower initial requirements.

Nottingham County Council also highlights in its Local Offer to its YP that the Council "may be able to act as your guarantor" [15]. Several city-level LAs and County Councils outside England also act as guarantors for their YP, including Leeds City Council to those in full-time education [16] and a number of LAs in Wales [17].

4. Recommendations

We recommend that CCC employs a strategy for facilitating the move of YP with care experience on low incomes into housing types other than semi-independent accommodation or hostels.

Any of the potential solutions outlined in [Section 3 Part 3](#) would be a step in the right direction, but we specifically propose that that CCC should act as a guarantor for its YP, as this has been successfully undertaken by other LAs and can be implemented within the Council.

Guarantor provision could be implemented as a pilot scheme. This pilot scheme could be limited by a maximum number of YP or certain criteria at CCC's discretion. For example the scheme may initially only be available to YP in employment or education. As undertaken by Wiltshire County Council, all agreements should undergo legal review to minimise CCC's liability.

5. Implementation to Recommendations

The key barrier to CCC undertaking the role of guarantor for YP entering private rental agreements is the financial liability that CCC would be subject to in the case of unpaid rent. While this is a valid concern, the success of the guarantor pilot scheme in Kent demonstrates that in reality, significant financial loss is unlikely. Although circumstances may vary between Counties, we propose that implementing this recommendation within a limited pilot scheme would provide a useful indication of the precautionary budget required to introduce this recommendation as formal policy.

There would be less demand for a guarantor from YP in Cambridgeshire than in Kent. Cambridgeshire has a lower number of YP engaged in EET [18]. Kent has 221 YP aged 17 to 18 and 747 YP aged 19 to 21. Cambridgeshire has 59 YP aged 17 to 18 and 124 YP aged 19 to 21. Limiting the number of places on the pilot scheme would solve any issues of unexpectedly high demand.

A pilot scheme would provide the opportunity to assess the benefits of having a guarantor to the YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire and determine whether the scheme is suitable here, while limiting the financial risk associated with direct implementation. Risk of financial loss can be mitigated further through close monitoring of agreements to identify signs of YP struggling to pay their rent at the earliest possible stage. YP should work with

their PAs (or an Accommodation Officer) to ensure they can afford the rent costs in the first place. Evidence of this should be provided by the YP when applying for the scheme.

CCC would need to establish criteria to determine whether its YP are sufficiently prepared for living independently as well as how rent affordability is calculated for the approval process. Many LAs have resources to prepare their YP for independent living ([Section 7](#)). Similar resources could be used to ensure that CCC's YP are sufficiently prepared. Communication with LAs that have already implemented guarantor policies could be useful while establishing such criteria.

Kent demonstrated that schemes of this nature have difficulty engaging landlords due to their lack of experience with corporate guarantors [13]. This would require active engagement from the relevant Council team to overcome, but as stated in the case of the Kent scheme: "these efforts have been rewarded by our young people accessing private rental properties that previously they have been unable to".

6. Costs of Ignoring Recommendations

The main cost relates to the social aspect of the transition into independence. The lack of financial incentive to engage in EET while living in semi-independent accommodation may drive YP away from aspirational "stepping stone" roles, particularly those which have associated costs such as transport. Taking measures to avoid this problem may promote higher aspirations, as required by the Corporate Parenting principles. Moving into independent housing also represents a large step towards independence. The lack of access to this type of housing jeopardises YP's successful transition. Additionally, private housing is a more stable form of accommodation than semi-independent accommodation. Eliminating stable accommodation as an option for YP leaving care may increase the number of YP forced to live in hostels with their associated stability and safety concerns. Without this recommendation, the level of take-home pay of these YP remains low, which also may be a contributing factor to their financial concerns.

7. Summary

Although there is limited precedent for LAs acting as a guarantor, some areas have been running successful schemes for several years. By acting as one of the pioneering LAs, CCC could make a real contribution to helping its YP enter the private rental sector, and in doing so promote the pursuit of aspirational careers via uptake of apprenticeships. Other LAs have established ways in which this support can be provided while limiting the financial liability taken on by the Council. The extension of pilot schemes taking place in other areas is testament to the success of this type of support.

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Section Four. Homelessness

Overview

YP with care experience are disproportionately affected by homelessness in England. Homelessness can occur due to a variety of reasons and can lead to negative consequences on individuals across the lifespan. CCC's YP should not face homelessness or be forced into inappropriate accommodation. LAs should act to minimise the risk of YP with care experience becoming homeless, but it is important to be prepared for the worst. While CCC has introduced some preventative measures, stringent safety nets are required. CCC currently lacks emergency protocols to ensure that its YP avoid homelessness, a primary duty for any Corporate Parent.

Key recommendations

- **Work with District and City Councils to remove homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience.**
 - **Secure emergency accommodation specifically for YP who are faced with homelessness or tenancy breakdown.**
-

1. Introduction

1.1. Defining Homelessness

Homelessness disproportionately affects individuals who experience other inequalities, such as YP with care experience. Homelessness takes on a variety of forms, all of which can have a detrimental impact on the individual facing homelessness. In this paper, homelessness is defined as [1]:

“Rooflessness (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough); houselessness (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter); living in insecure housing (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence); living in inadequate housing (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding).”

While the definition may not fully encompass all of the experiences that come under “homelessness”, this definition provides a framework for our understanding of homelessness.

Prevention is CCC’s focus when it comes to homelessness but CCC does not yet have robust emergency protocols built into its homelessness prevention strategy. As such, YP with care experience can be classed as intentionally homeless and denied access to Main Housing Duty, a duty which provides temporary accommodation until a given time. As a Corporate Parent, CCC should do all it can to prevent any of its YP becoming homeless. YP with care experience do experience homelessness at greater rates than their peers. It is therefore vital that measures are in place to provide a safety net for YP where preventative measures have failed and/or homelessness is imminent, regardless of their circumstances.

1.2. Correlation between Care Experience and Homelessness

YP with care experience are a vulnerable group who are disproportionately affected by homelessness. In England, the estimated percentage of YP with care experience who also experience homelessness ranges from 22% to 35%. Crisis (2011) found that 25% of survey respondents who had experienced homelessness had also experienced care [2]. Another study reported that 35% of 106 YP experienced homelessness in the first 12 to 15 months after leaving care [3]. During this transition period, 37% of YP with care experience also experienced housing instability [3]. An additional study noted that 33% of YP experienced homelessness six to 24 months after leaving the care system [4]. Homeless Link’s Young and Homeless (2018) survey found that 22% of YP (aged 16 to 25) experiencing homelessness also had experience of care [5]. Leaving care was cited as a primary cause of homelessness in 17% of cases in this report [5]. In Scotland, the CELCIS reported around “17% of those eligible for aftercare” making a homelessness application [6]. Precautions must be put in place to provide support for YP facing homelessness.

The relationship between care experience and homelessness is also recognised in policy papers. The Care Leavers Strategy (2013) acknowledged that YP with care experience have particular needs in relation to homelessness [7]. The National Audit Office’s (2015) report also acknowledged the correlation between care experience and homelessness [4]. Finally, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2017) report focused on

homelessness prevention for YP with care experience [8]. The relationship between care and homelessness is an established issue in both research and policy contexts.

1.3. Hidden Homelessness

Homelessness casts a wide net. Statistics about homelessness often hide those individuals that are dealing with their situation informally, i.e. without LA support. This can manifest itself in many forms such as sofa surfing. Hidden homelessness is an umbrella term which often masks various precarious living situations ranging from sofa surfing at the house of friends or relatives, involuntarily sharing with other households, sleeping rough in hidden locations, and squatting [9]. The term sofa surfing itself is ambiguous and at times euphemistic; while commonly used to indicate periods informally spent with friends or relatives, such an understanding does not capture the different contexts in which homeless people may come to rely on lodging as provided by others [9]. Those who experience hidden homelessness often lack access to homelessness support, despite being in a precarious situation [9].



Hidden homelessness is an umbrella term which often masks various precarious living situations.

Accommodation insecurity is a real and persistent issue that disproportionately impacts YP with care experience. Often individuals who find themselves in this type of situation are not in a position to secure more stable accommodation and their current situation is not sustainable in the long-term. These individuals are in a particularly vulnerable position and depending on their accommodation context, they may be dependent on someone for a place to sleep.

However, often accommodation is transient and over time this support may also fall away. Centrepoin't's (2017) report on post-care access to accommodation stated that 26% of surveyed individuals have sofa surfed and 14% had slept rough [10]. Moreover, 57% of those surveyed felt unsafe in the area where they lived immediately after leaving the care system [10]. This creates situations in which individuals turn to sofa surfing and other types of unstable housing situations [10]. A precarious living situation makes it difficult to move on and plan for the future. When an individual does not know what to expect from one day to the next it is difficult to engage in planning for education and work [10].

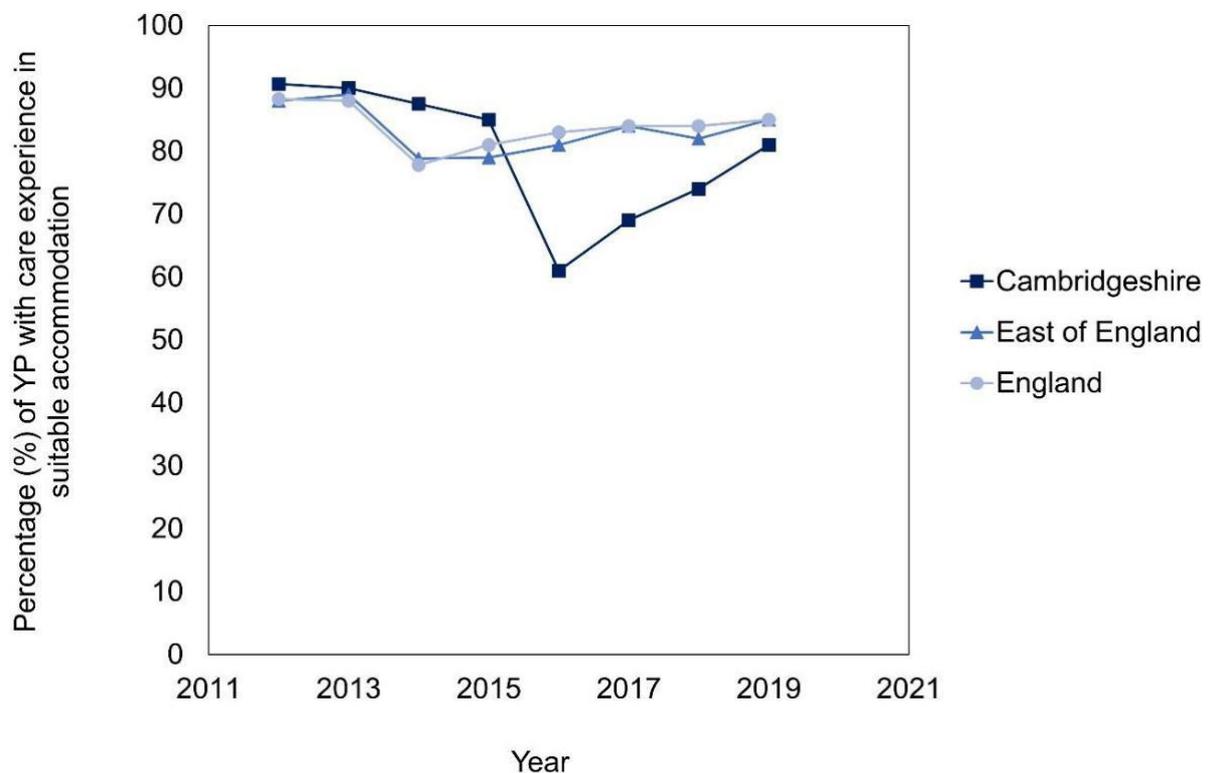


57% of those surveyed in Centrepoin't's (2017) report felt unsafe in the area where they lived immediately after leaving the care system.

LAs are required to keep statistics on the number of their YP who have been suitably accommodated between the age of 18 and 21. There is a consistent gap between the number of YP with care experience recorded and the number who have been suitably

accommodated (Figure 1) [11], indicating the precarious living situation faced by many individuals.

Figure 1. Percentage of YP with care experience aged 18 to 21 in suitable accommodation.



As with other areas, precise statistics are not available for those aged 21 and over. Given the difficulties associated with classifying hidden homelessness, it is difficult to determine how many YP with care experience are not in suitable accommodation. While the results of our 2020 survey cannot be taken as representative of the experiences of all of CCC's YP, precarious living situations were noted by some of the 10 respondents. Survey respondents were asked about the type of accommodation they were currently living in and some respondents reported living at no fixed address, including sofa surfing etc. (Section 2 Figure 3).

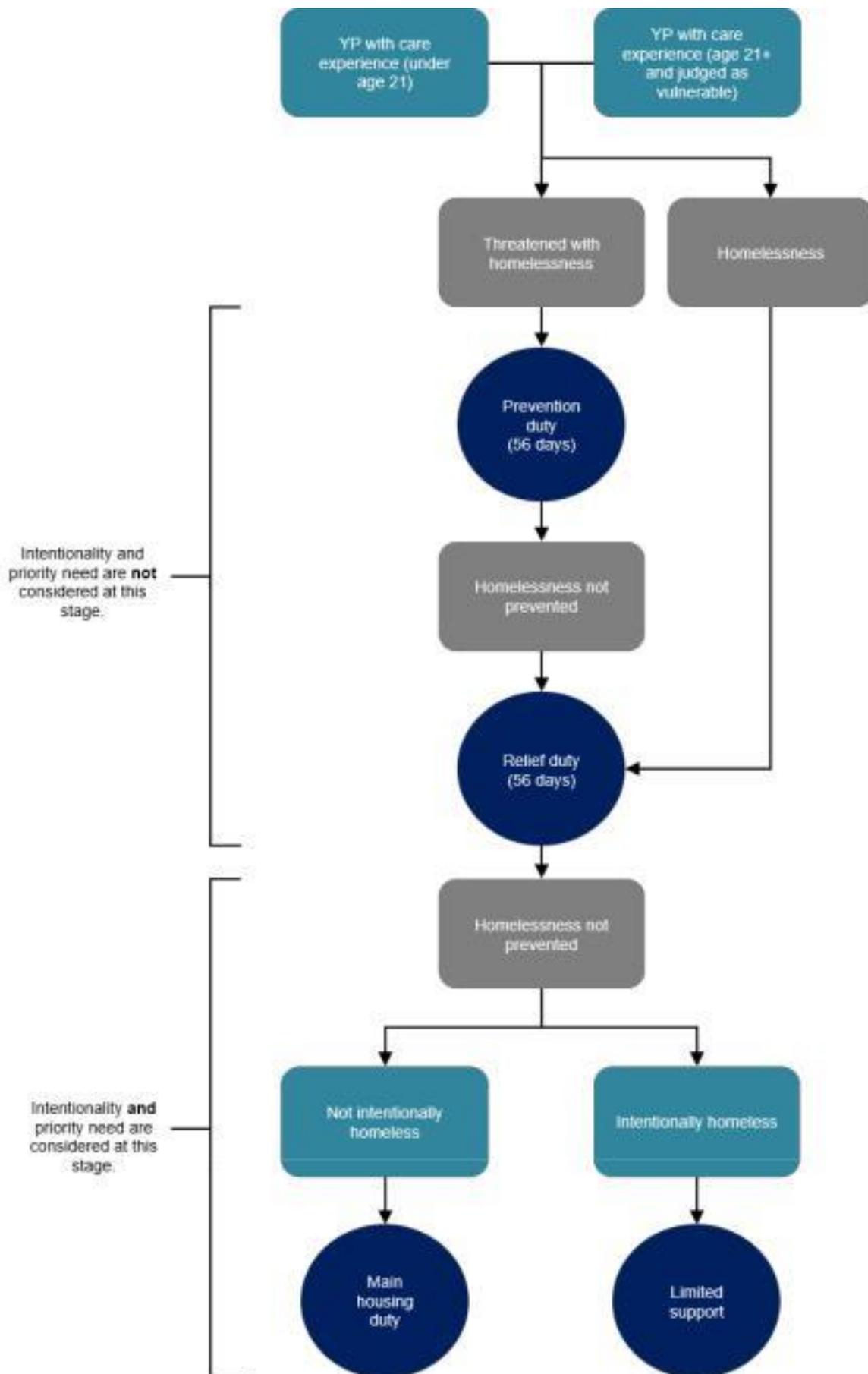
Respondents were also asked whether they felt their current accommodation was suitable and safe both now and in the future. Four out of 10 felt they did not have suitable accommodation to live in right now, five out of 10 felt they did not have suitable accommodation for the future. Two out of 10 felt they did not have safe accommodation to live in right now, and five out of 10 felt they would not have safe accommodation for the future. These responses show an alarming degree of variation. The fact that half of YP who completed the 2020 survey felt they lack access to suitable and safe accommodation for the future is particularly worrying.

1.4. Homelessness in Cambridgeshire

Homelessness duty refers to the duties owed by LAs to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. These duties include devising a personalised housing plan, to prevent or relieve homelessness, and to provide accommodation in some circumstances. An overview of this process is given in Figure 3. See [Section 4 Part 2](#) for further description of homelessness duty.

Data maintained by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding statutory homelessness gives the crude picture of households owed a homelessness duty [12]. The data does not represent the overall level of homelessness in England, it shows the number of households that were owed a homelessness duty in the 2019 to 2020 financial year. By taking the sum of households with and without a support need, the number of overall households that were owed a homelessness duty in Cambridgeshire can be calculated.

Figure 3. The process of owed homelessness duties.



Data for the number of houses owed a homelessness duty include specific numbers for different support needs, including (i) YP with care experience aged between 18 and 20, and (ii) YP with care experience aged 21 and over. Nationally, YP with care experience in either of these age groups make up 2.4% of households owed a homelessness duty in 2019 to 2020 (Table 1) [13]. In the East of England, these individuals also make up 2.4% of households owed a homelessness duty in the same year. The 3.1% share in Cambridgeshire therefore exceeds national and regional averages. During 2018 to 2019, 2.5% of households in Cambridgeshire that were owed a homelessness duty contained YP with care experience either aged 18 to 20 or aged 21 and over and classed as a priority need. In the East of England this figure was 1.9% and at a national level, this was 2.1% (Table 1) [13]. Cambridgeshire has clearly been underperforming in this area compared to the regional and national level for a number of years.

Table 1. YP with care experience (aged 18+) among households owed homelessness duty.

Region	No. of households with YP owed homelessness duty		Percentage (%) of YP with care experience among households owed a homeless duty	
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2018-2019	2019-2020
Cambridge	23	24	3.7	3.6
East Cambridgeshire	9	13	2.1	3.1
Fenland	36	27	5.7	4.8
Huntingdonshire	5	20	1.4	2.1
South Cambridgeshire	7	10	0.5	2.1
Cambridgeshire County	80	94	2.5	3.1
East of England	540	710	1.9	2.4
England	5720	6960	2.1	2.4

These are crude figures. They do not include the numbers for individuals who were denied an offer of settled accommodation because they were deemed to be intentionally homeless [8]. It also fails to account for hidden homelessness and accommodation insecurity (Section 4 Part 1). It is likely that the numbers for YP with care experience aged 21 and over only refer to those who are deemed to be in priority need and are thus not entirely representative. On the whole, the numbers outlined here are likely to be a conservative estimate of YP with care experience and experience of homelessness as defined by Section 4 Part 1.1.

Given that YP with care experience make up a small proportion of the population, the increase in YP owed a homelessness duty is concerning. A disproportionate number of YP with care experience have been in receipt of a homelessness duty. In 2018 to 2019, there were 262 YP aged 18 to 21 affiliated with CCC, including YP living out-of-county [11]. In the same year, 44 households in Cambridgeshire containing a YP with care experience aged 18 to 21, were owed a homelessness duty. This suggests a relatively large proportion of CCC's YP were owed a homelessness duty, reiterating the threat posed by homelessness to this community.

1.5. Causes of Homelessness

The onset of homelessness is often due to a series of structural and individual factors. The Homeless Link cited relationship breakdowns with family or caregivers etc. as the most common reason for homelessness [5]. However, a wide array of causes can be identified including unsuitable accommodation, financial issues (Section 7), benefits dislocation, substance abuse, physical and/or mental health problems (Section 8), abuse and neglect [5]. Homelessness can occur in a variety of contexts and it can occur all of a sudden.



Relationship breakdowns are the most common reason for homelessness.

The correlation between leaving care and homelessness suggests that certain aspects of the care and post-care experience increase the risk of homelessness. The journey of any YP into and out of the care system is an individual experience but it is often marked by trauma [14]. The nature of being in care means that many YP are unable to draw on traditional avenues of support that could help prevent homelessness [15]. The reasons for this are multifaceted. YP with care experience may have become estranged from familial networks of support or such networks may not be in a position to provide support. The moment when a YP leaves care, described by many as a cliff edge, sees the removal of many support networks. As an individual exits the care system, they are faced with many challenges coupled with a loss of support networks, creating an environment where YP with care experience may be more susceptible to homelessness.

1.6. Impact of Homelessness

Homeless can emerge from a variety of contexts, and the events which surround YP with care experience becoming homeless can be distressing for the individual. The impacts of homelessness can be severe for individuals affected, for wider communities, and for LA wallets. Becoming homeless can exacerbate an already bad situation leading to worse outcomes. It can also create a barrier for YP with care experience to transition into independence. Homelessness carries both short-term and long-term impacts that jeopardise a successful transition into independent adulthood.

As well as carrying social stigma [16], homelessness can lead to deterioration in an individual's physical wellbeing and mental health (Section 8) [1]. A fear of homelessness can itself cause ill health and exacerbate existing conditions [1]. The long-term effects of repeated or sustained homelessness are appalling. According to Crisis, the average age of death for an individual experiencing homelessness, is 47 years old for men and 43 years old for women, compared to 77 years old for the general population [1]. Homelessness can force YP into vulnerable situations, where they are at higher risk of abuse and violence. It is extremely difficult to plan ahead and take steps to move on with your life if you are threatened with or experience homelessness.



Homelessness can force young people into vulnerable situations, where they are at higher risk of abuse and violence.

Homelessness can negatively impact both the individuals who face it and their communities. Homelessness can stem from alcohol or drug misuse, however, the advent of homelessness can also exacerbate dependencies or even act as a route into addictions which threatens long-term safety and stability [1]. Homelessness is also a major disruptor to employment and education. YP who face homelessness are more likely to be excluded from school or to be NEET [1], since homelessness makes it more difficult to retain existing employment or secure new employment [1]. There are correlations between YP experiencing homelessness and increased risk of abuse and criminal and/or gang related activity [1].

This research seeks to suggest how CCC can aid the transition of YP from care into independent adulthood as well as their entry into employment. The impacts outlined here are an overview of how homelessness is a barrier to successful transition and employment. The impacts of homelessness are both disturbing and widespread for individuals put in a situation where they may face homelessness. Moreover, YP with care experience are often victims of circumstance. It is in the interest of YP with care experience, the local community, and the LA to ensure that these individuals avoid homelessness at all costs. Steps need to be taken to ensure that YP with care experience are not exposed to homelessness. As part of this commitment, LAs must have emergency protocols in place. Preventing homelessness is vital for YP with care experience who are faced with such a situation.

2. Current Interventions

Approaches to dealing with YP with care experience and experiences of homelessness should stem from the LA's duty as Corporate Parents to its YP. The Corporate Parenting Principles require LAs to act in the best interests of their YP. Corporate Parents should engender mental and physical wellbeing; promote safety and stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work lives; and prepare individuals for their transition into independent adulthood [17]. As Corporate Parents, LA members should show concern for YP with care experience as any good parent would towards their own child [17]. Allowing YP with care experience to become homeless conflicts with this duty. Enhanced emergency protocols aimed at protecting YP against homelessness would help CCC carry out its Corporate Parenting responsibilities in an empathetic and positive way.

Provisions aimed at providing safety nets for YP with care experience who become homeless is an ethical imperative. There are also practical reasons for such an approach. The impact of homelessness on an individual can be severe ([Section 4 Part 1.6](#)) and preventing YP with care experience from becoming homeless is more cost effective than attempting to improve the situation after the fact ([Section 4 Part 6](#)). Guidance published in 2020 by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government acknowledges the fact that there will always be a need for emergency responses and urges LAs to have strong contingency plans in place for YP with care experience who are at risk of homelessness [18]. Where preventative measures have failed, emergency approaches present a vital opportunity to stop YP with care experience from

falling into homelessness. It is vital that CCC implement stringent emergency measures to ensure that YP with care experience do not become homeless.

LAs apply standards which influence how much support an individual making a homelessness application will receive (Box 1). If a YP with care experience is under age 21 then they have priority need and are eligible for emergency homelessness relief. Priority need status has not been extended *a priori* to YP with care experience aged 21 and over. According to the Homelessness Code of Guidance for LAs, priority is only extended to individuals after aged 21 who are vulnerable as a result of having been in care [19]. It states that Housing Authorities must determine whether an individual has been “looked after” and “they will need to consider whether they are vulnerable as a result” [19]. If the individual is identified as facing homelessness within 56 days, steps must be taken to ensure that they do not become homeless. This is known as Prevention Duty (Figure 3). In cases where homelessness has not been prevented, eligible individuals come under Relief Duty, which seeks to relieve homelessness by securing suitable accommodation for a minimum of six months. When a LA has reason to believe that an individual may be (i) homeless; (ii) eligible for assistance; or (iii) in priority need, then the LA has a duty to provide interim accommodation. This duty can arise at any point after the individual has applied as homeless, including during Relief Duty [19].

Criterion 1:	Homelessness/threatened with homelessness
Criterion 2:	Eligible for assistance
Criterion 3:	In priority need
Criterion 4:	Homeless intentionality



Box 1. Homelessness Assistance criteria.

The Prevention and Relief Duties apply irrespective of homelessness intentionality and priority need. However, if homelessness has not been relieved at the end of the Relief Duty, then priority need and homelessness intentionality are taken into account (Figure 3). If an individual is found to be both in priority need and unintentionally homeless, then they can be owed the Main Housing Duty. However, if they are in priority need and deemed to be intentionally homeless, then they are offered a more limited package of support. According to the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, the LA must still ensure suitable accommodation is available for a “reasonable” period of time [19].

CCC applied for funding from central Government to support a specialist PA focusing on homelessness. This role was filled in October 2019 and it is due to end in early 2021. To our knowledge, there is nothing in place to replace this service. CCC should explore ways in which it can implement systemic change to prevent its YP from becoming homeless (Section 4 Part 4).

3. Key Barriers

Currently, CCC's focus is on preventing homelessness among YP with care experience. This is admirable, however, the contexts in which YP with care experience can be made homeless are varied and complex. Despite best efforts, individuals may still find themselves in a situation where they are effectively homeless. CCC acts as a Corporate Parent towards its YP and wants to be the best Corporate Parent it can be. As such, it is important that steps are in place to provide support for individuals who become homeless. We envisage this support coming in two forms: (i) removing "intentional homelessness" decisions from CCC's YP and (ii) providing specific emergency accommodation for those individuals who face homelessness.

3.1. Intentional Homelessness

The Housing Act (1996) sets the following standard for homelessness intentionality [20]:

"A person becomes homeless intentionally if [s]he deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which [s]he ceases to occupy accommodation which is available for [her/]his occupation and which it would have been reasonable for [her/]him to continue to occupy."

When faced with homelessness, an individual can apply for homeless assistance. If YP with care experience are in priority need, as is the case for YP under age 21 or above age 21 and classed as vulnerable due to being in care, they may be eligible for the Main Housing Duty (Figure 3). This means that the LA will work to secure long-term accommodation for the applicant. Issues arise when a YP is deemed intentionally homeless. In this case, where an individual is thought to have lost their accommodation due to deliberate actions, they may no longer be eligible for Main Housing Duty. LAs may still be obliged to provide short-term accommodation for the individual so they can find accommodation for themselves but they are owed limited support compared with individuals not deemed intentionally homeless.

Concerns have been raised about applying homeless intentionality to YP with care experience. The Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has recommended that housing authorities should do all in their power to avoid the impact of intentional homelessness decisions with regards to YP with care experience aged 18 to 25 [19]. Moreover, the 2017 All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness questioned the degree to which LAs were declaring their YP with care experience to be intentionally homeless and went on to recommend that the National Government should abolish homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience aged 18 to 25 (Box 2) [8]. Similar recommendations also feature amongst Centrepoin't's 2017 report which state that homelessness intentionality should be removed for all YP with care experience under the age of 21 [10].

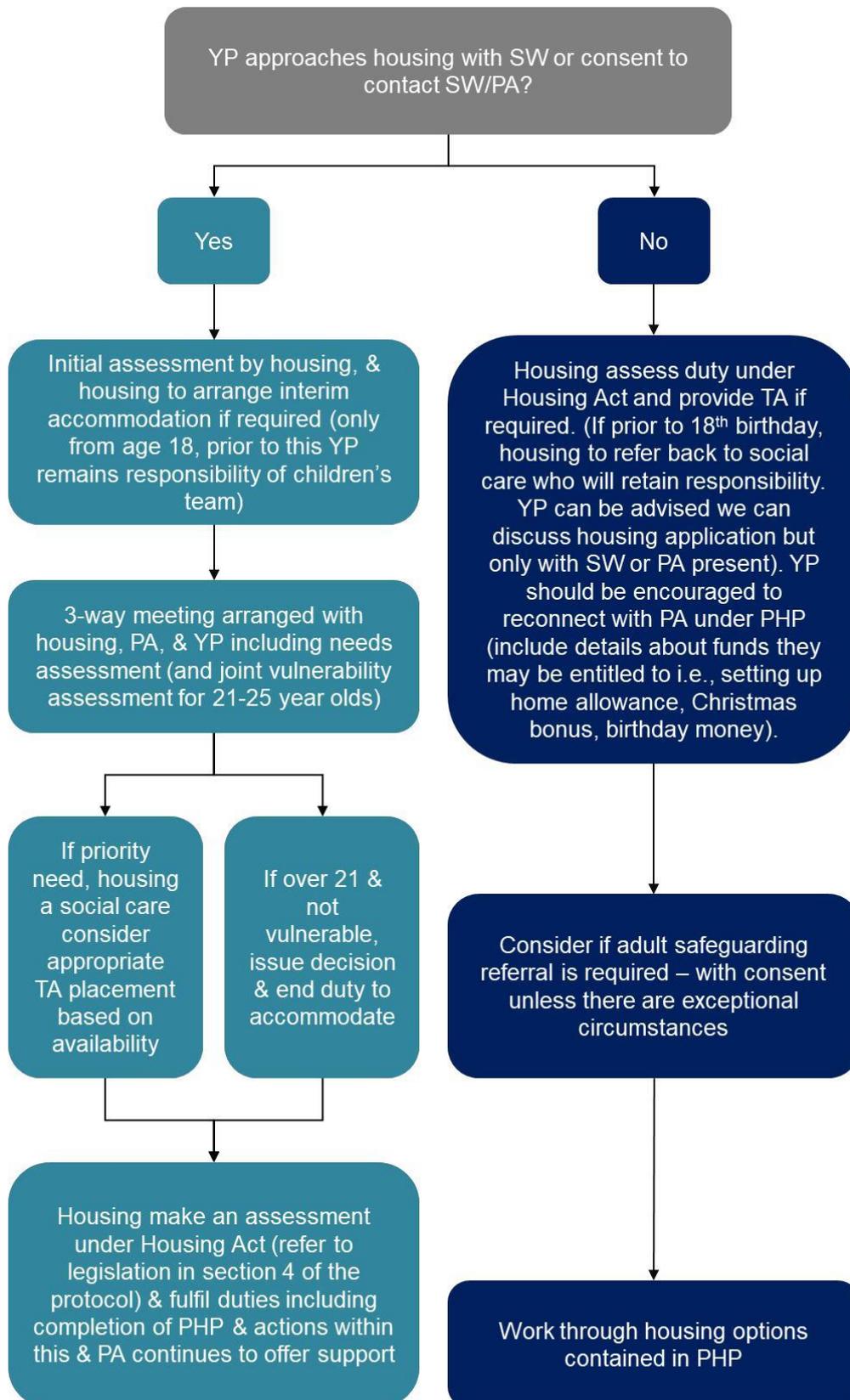
Allowing YP with care experience to be classed as intentionally homeless puts members of this group at high risk. This is particularly pertinent given the correlation between care experience and homelessness and the role of CCC as a Corporate Parent. This section shows that safety nets of support are something that is both vital and lacking within CCC. Given the threat posed by homelessness intentionality decisions, this seems like a natural place to start.

YP with care experience form a relatively small group yet the risk of them becoming homeless after being found intentionally homeless is high. YP with care experience have often lived very fragmented and sometimes chaotic lives before leaving care, therefore transitioning to adulthood can be challenging. We believe Housing Options teams are not properly investigating why a care leaver may have lost their accommodation or taking steps to resolve the issue, perhaps through mediation. Abolishing intentionality is one small measure which could drastically cut down on the amount of YP with care experience who are made homeless.

Box 2. Recommendation in 2017 All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness.

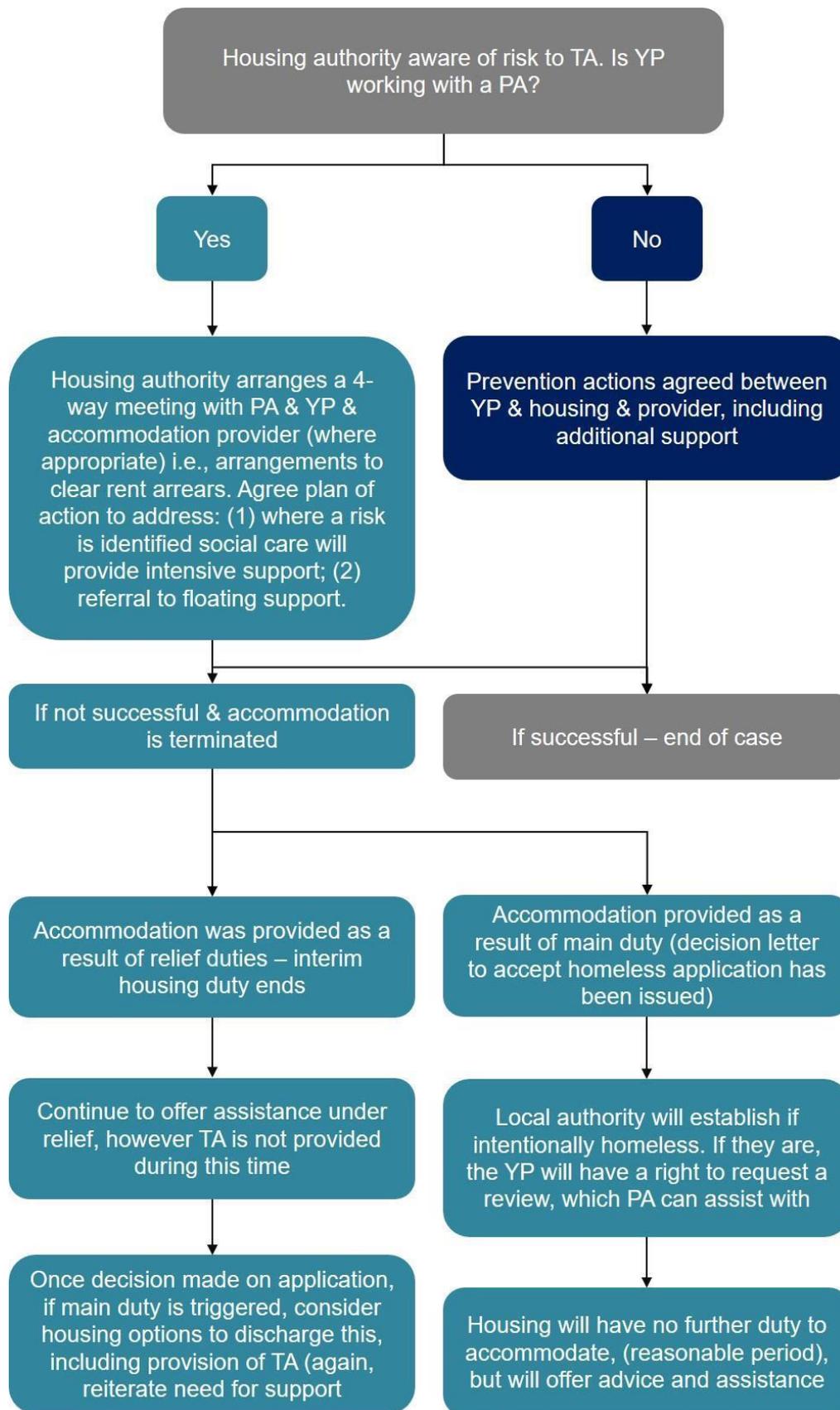
CCC has recently created a protocol which deals with housing and homelessness as recommended in the government funded report by Barnardo's and St Basils (Figure 4 & 5) [15,21]. The protocol represents a formal agreement between CCC and the District/City Councils, providing a strong basis for collaboration. The protocol acknowledges that "in most cases a care leavers up to the age of 25 will be vulnerable" and thus in priority need [21]. This is a welcome statement [21]. However, the protocol does not outline an agreement to remove homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience. CCC has improved safeguarding for its YP by implementing more stringent preventative measures. Yet, as this section has stressed, it is important that this preventative element is bolstered with safety net mechanisms. Removal of homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience will help to ensure that this group is protected from the potentially devastating impacts of homelessness. Given that YP with care experience are over-represented in homelessness statistics, which are likely to be conservative in their estimates, protection of this vulnerable group is needed more than ever.

Figure 4. Emergency Homelessness Situation protocol for YP with care experience. Adapted from CCC Protocol.



Key: TA=temporary accommodation, PHP=personal housing plan, PA=personal advisor, SW=social worker, YP=young person

Figure 5. Losing Accommodation provided by Housing Authority for YP with care experience (age 18+) Adapted from Cambridgeshire protocol.



Key: TA=temporary accommodation, PA=personal advisor, YP=young person

4. Recommendations

4.1. Work with District and City Councils to remove homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience

Ideally, the removal of homelessness intentionality would apply to all YP with care experience up to age 25. At the very least, it should apply to individuals judged as being in priority need. Given the CCC protocol accepted that most YP with care experience aged 25 and under should be judged as vulnerable, any decision to remove homeless intentionality has the potential to encompass all YP to whom CCC owes a duty of care.

This recommendation can be implemented within the framework of current homelessness legislation as has been achieved by Salford City Council. In May 2020, Salford agreed that it would not deem YP with care experience as intentionally homeless [22]. Salford's decision was based on their statutory duty as Corporate Parents and on the negative impacts of being declared intentionally homeless on their YP [22]. Their approach utilises discretionary allowances within homelessness legislation to extend the period during which individuals are owed Prevention and Relief Duties [22]. A panel consisting of relevant individuals (including YP) will be set up and accommodation offers made via direct let rather than through bidding. Salford's focus balances avoiding homelessness and managing successful rehousing. This is by no means an isolated instance. Intentionality for YP with care experience has been abolished across the ten LAs that make up Greater Manchester [23]. Early indications suggest that this recommendation is starting to gain traction with LAs across England. To be the best Corporate Parent that it can be, CCC must follow suit and be at the forefront of the movement to remove intentionality from its YP with care experience.

Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for YP with care experience, recommends the abolishment of intentionality for YP with care experience [23]. It is worth echoing the question he poses to all Corporate Parents: "Would this be good enough for my own child?" This is a question worth asking at every available opportunity. Intentionality decisions should be seen as directly contradicting Corporate Parent responsibilities in spirit as well as in reality. CCC must act to amend this discrepancy.



Mark Riddell challenges Corporate Parents to ask themselves: "Would this be good enough for my child?"

4.2. Emergency Accommodation

The primary focus of CCC is homelessness prevention but even the most robust pathway planning will not bypass the need for emergency accommodation in all cases. The reasons for homelessness are varied and complex, and while striving for the best possible outcome, it is important to acknowledge that sudden fluctuations can occur, which may demand an emergency response.

Provision of emergency accommodation should be a key part of a LA's approach to accommodation [15]. Homelessness can be sudden and it can force an individual into a uniquely vulnerable position. As part of this research, we met with various YP with care

experience in Cambridgeshire. One individual provided a distressing account of how their living situation was dramatically overturned by a strained relationship with their caregiver, resulting in the individual becoming homeless. In these traumatic situations, designated accommodation is invaluable. When securing such accommodation, it is important to ensure the housing is of an acceptable standard. The accommodation must be safe and secure and it must meet YP's specific needs. The individual we spoke with was able to overcome their situation but they noted the lack of available support. Many other individuals may not be able to bounce back from such a setback. Therefore, YP with care experience should have access to suitable emergency accommodation if it is needed.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for LAs states that bed and breakfast accommodation is not appropriate for YP with care experience under age 25 [19]. The Care Leaver Accommodation and Support Framework restates that importance of having appropriate emergency accommodation available to care experienced YP. All-age hostels as well as bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation are also deemed inappropriate: "this sort of accommodation is never suitable as an option. It is often not only inappropriate but is unsafe for YP and provides little or no support, so not helping them to deal with what has happened and to move on with their lives" [19].

Interim temporary accommodation must be provided for those classed as: (i) homeless; (ii) eligible for assistance; or (iii) in priority need [19]. YP with care experience below age 21, and aged 21 or above and have been categorised as vulnerable, are in priority need and are owed interim temporary accommodation in the event that they face homelessness. St Basil's and Barnardo's Accommodation Framework notes that temporary accommodation should include on-site support or additional housing management, and that LAs must not place their YP in forms of shared accommodation with older adults who could present a risk to them [19].

In Cambridgeshire, YP with care experience who face homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless may be placed in one of the supported housing arrangements for YP facing homelessness such as those run by the CHS Group [24]. Alternatively, YP with care experience may be placed in a YMCA facility [25]. In some cases, YP may not be able to be placed in these kinds of facilities, due to capacity or "burned bridges" with such facilities in past experiences. This group often has specific vulnerabilities and are at particular risk of becoming homeless. A safety net is absolutely vital to ensure that no YP with care experience is faced with homelessness.

4.2.1. Secure emergency accommodation for YP who are faced with homelessness or tenancy breakdown

Proposals to secure specific emergency accommodation YP with care experience are being looked into by Joe Gilbert (Specialist PA at CCC) and colleagues, with the support of Esther Baffa-Isaacs and Dan Quantrill (Senior Transformation Advisors at CCC). Specifically, they are looking at securing Council-owned premises for the purposes of emergency accommodation. CCC is currently assessing the process through which its property assets can be reused for YP leaving care and UASC (awaiting status accommodation) ([Section 1 Part 2.1](#)). We support this approach. Council-owned housing will provide an important safety net for CCC's YP facing homelessness, while allowing a suitable degree of flexibility when dealing with individual situations. Crucially, it would also provide a safe and controlled environment to support them in the short-term while longer-term options are explored.

The provision of specific emergency accommodation may be used as a mechanism to support the abolition of homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience. The recommendations in this section complement one another. YP facing homelessness will have a safety net in place which will avoid declarations of intentional homelessness and specific emergency accommodation will be in place, providing a context in which they will be safe and secure while long-term options are considered and implemented.

5. Implementation of Recommendations

5.1. Expected Outcomes

Implementation of these recommendations will prevent YP from entering the cycle of homelessness. CCC will be able to ensure that fewer of their YP experience homelessness. The provision of a stringent safety net will ensure that CCC is prepared to support all their YP at a critical point. The safety net will provide emergency support for vulnerable individuals and prevent the potentially disastrous impacts of homelessness. Supporting these recommendations will help CCC become the best Corporate Parent it can be.

5.2. Financial Implications

The proposed recommendations would not impose significant budgetary constraints on CCC. While it is vital that these safety nets are in place, the preventative measures already introduced by the Council will ensure that they will only be necessary for a minority of cases. The implementation of a procedural change, such as that in the first recommendation, should be relatively straightforward once agreement is made between CCC and the District/City Councils. Current scoping for emergency accommodation has focused on property owned by CCC, and as such does not require the utilisation of new resources. Any preparatory work could be undertaken by the specialist PA for homelessness or alternatively by a dedicated Accommodation Team ([Section 2](#)).

Importantly, when safety nets are necessary, they are designed as the final barrier between YP and homelessness. This section has discussed the potentially devastating impacts of homelessness above. Preventing an individual's entry into homelessness is not only beneficial for the individual, but it may prove cost-effective in the long-term ([Section 4 Part 6](#)). The effects of homelessness incur a variety of costs on LAs depending on individual cases. Taking decisive steps to limit YP becoming homeless will save costs in the long-term.

6. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

6.1. Financial Costs

Homelessness is a costly public expense at the local and national level. Crisis (2015) reported that the bill for rough sleeping over 12 months can cost more than £20,000 per person [26]. A follow-up study reported that public spending for homelessness over one year amounted to more than £34,500 per person (Table 5) [27].

Table 5. Cost of homelessness over one year.

Service	Estimated cost (£) to service per person
Homeless Services	14808
Criminal Justice	11991
NHS	4298
Mental Health	2099
Drug/Alcohol Services	1320
Total Cost	34518

The financial costs of homelessness rise in line with sustained or recurrent experiences of being homeless. Once established, homelessness becomes increasingly difficult to resolve [26,27]. The most cost effective strategy is to prevent or resolve homelessness at an early stage [26,27]. Councils spent £1.1 billion in 2018 to 2019 on temporary accommodation for homeless households; an increase of 78% over five years [28]. 31.3% (£344 million) was spent on emergency Bed and Breakfast accommodation; an increase of 111% over five years [28]. If CCC were to provide temporary accommodation from properties owned by the Council, it could expect savings on maintenance of empty properties as well as in emergency payments.

YP with care experience are disproportionately at risk of homelessness. The number of YP owed a homelessness duty in Cambridgeshire is also above national and regional averages. The costs associated with the removal of homelessness intentionality is likely to be negligible. In comparison, the provision of emergency accommodation by CCC-owned property may provide a cost-effective alternative to other types of emergency accommodation. Failure to implement these recommendations will be costly in the long-term.

6.2. Human Costs

Homelessness has a human cost and prevents successful transition from care into independence. Homelessness is associated with financial difficulties ([Section 5, 7](#)) and being NEET ([Section 6](#)) as well as physical and mental health conditions ([Section 8](#)), including substance abuse. Implementing the recommendations in this section will demonstrate CCC's commitment to its Corporate Parenting duties.

7. Summary

Homelessness is traumatic and disproportionately affects YP with care experience compared to their peers. Homelessness can negatively impact the transition from care into independence. Robust policies must be in place to prevent individuals becoming homeless. CCC's approach to this issue is already preventative but does not go far enough. Safety nets are needed. Classifying YP as intentionally homeless is damaging and conflicts with CCC's Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Permanent acquisition of emergency accommodation will provide a safety net for YP with care experience at risk of homelessness.

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Section Five. Council Tax

Overview

YP with care experience face a more difficult transition into independent adulthood than their peers. LAs can ease this transition by providing YP with care experience with a Council Tax exemption or discount, and in recent years most LAs have used Council Tax exemptions as a way of supporting their YP with care experience. CCC is one of only 17 LAs which does not provide its YP with care experience with any Council Tax exemption or discount. The reasons for this, as listed in CCC's consultation on the issue do not stand up to scrutiny. If CCC fails to implement Council Tax exemptions for YP with care experience, it risks reputational damage. More significantly, the Council's approach poses a risk to the transition from care into independent adulthood, and may even make Cambridgeshire a comparatively inhospitable place for YP with care experience, given that Cambridgeshire is now in the minority of LAs that does not offer any Council Tax assistance aimed specifically at YP with care experience.

Key recommendations

- **Provide Council Tax relief to YP with care experience until age 25.**
-

1. Introduction

An important way LAs have helped YP leaving care in recent years is by using their discretionary powers to offer Council Tax relief. Council Tax relief specifically aimed at YP with care experience has received widespread support from relevant not-for-profit organisations as well as interested parties affiliated with central Government. The provision of Council Tax relief mirrors support which other YP may receive from their family or from the state if they are at University. Blanket exemptions have already been introduced in other parts of the United Kingdom.

1.1. Council Tax is a Barrier to Successful Transition

YP with care experience face independence at a relatively early age and often have problems managing their finances. This can lead to a situation where they fall into debt [1]. Respondents to our 2020 survey plainly stated that they found it difficult to manage money. In a national survey of 'care leaver' experiences undertaken by Ofsted in 2022 that had 255 responses across a range of ages, money management was a major issue, with some individuals experiencing debt and unstable tenancies as a result [44]. Ofsted's survey found that being worried about money was the most common reason for feeling unsafe upon leaving care [44]. Thus, the inability to manage money can have drastic effects and facilitates wider problems faced by these YP. A Children's Society report highlighted that YP with care experience moving into independent accommodation for the first time are particularly vulnerable to Council Tax debt [2]. 1 respondent to the 2020 survey, expressing their individual view noted 'I cannot manage money. I'm unable to budget or value money.'

Leaving the care system requires a faster transition to independence than leaving home [3]. YP leaving care are expected to be largely self-reliant at a much earlier age than their peers, in terms of finances and accommodation [4]. This is hardly surprising given that youth transitions have become elongated for most YP, including education, housing, employment, and dependence on parents [5]. The way independence is conceptualised at the point that YP leave care needs to be reconsidered. To an extent, this issue has been recognised in local and national policies. The Children and Families Act (2014) formalised Staying Put arrangements while the Children and Social Work Act (2017) extends PA support to all YP with care experience until age 25 [6,7]. LAs should look for other ways to ease YP's transition into independence.

Of the 11 YP who responded to CCC's 2019 survey, Council Tax was noted as one of the biggest financial pressures facing YP leaving care in Cambridgeshire. Several respondents noted that they had fallen behind with Council Tax payments. Council Tax support, and financial support more generally ([Section 7](#)), was requested as an addition to the Local Offer. Provision of Council Tax relief for these YP could help address this issue by easing the transition from care to independence for Cambridgeshire's YP.



In CCC's 2019 survey of 11 YP with care experience, Council Tax was noted as one of the biggest financial pressures facing YP with care experience.

1.2. Charity Support for Council Tax Relief

Council Tax relief policies for YP with care experience have been promoted by various charities. The Children's Society has led the movement for Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [1,2]. The Children's Society 2015 report demonstrated how Council Tax debt collection has an adverse effect on YP with care experience and recommended Council tax relief for these YP until age 21 [2]. In a later report, The Children's Society extended this recommendation until age 25 [1]. Other charities, including Centrepoin, Barnardo's and St Basil's, have also recommended Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [9,10]. Children's charities have also produced a recovery plan for YP with care experience following the COVID-19 pandemic and have called for Council Tax relief up to age 25 as part of ensuring provision of housing [11]. Council Tax relief for YP with care experience reduces their risk of debt and associated housing insecurity [10].

1.3. Government Support for Council Tax Relief

Central Government supports local-level Council Tax relief policies for YP with care experience. There is no statutory requirement that LAs offer Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. Instead, LAs have powers to provide Council Tax relief to protect vulnerable individuals and groups where national discounts do not apply. Many LAs have pursued Council Tax relief as an effective way to provide tangible support for their YP as they transition from care into independence.

Central Government's 2016 report cited Council Tax relief as a means for Corporate Parents to help their YP achieve financial stability when leaving care [12]. In the same year, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee recommended that YP with care experience be made exempt from Council Tax until at least age 21 [13]. In their response to the report, central Government reiterated that local Council Tax relief was a LA matter. Citing North Somerset Council, which offers Council Tax relief for YP with care experience, they urged other LAs to consider similar ways of helping their YP [14]. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness 2017 report also urged LAs to use existing powers to offer Council Tax relief for YP with care experience until age 25 [15].



Central Government cited Council Tax relief as a means for Corporate Parents to help their YP achieve financial stability when leaving care.

The National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers has also voiced support for Council Tax relief up to age 25 and including individuals living away from their LA [16,17]. The Children’s Commissioner for England has also called for Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [19]. Guidance for applying Corporate Parenting Principles to YP in/leaving care also highlighted Council Tax relief as a means of direct financial assistance [19]. YP with care experience in Scotland and Wales already benefit from Council Tax relief until age 26 and age 25 respectively [20,21]. Currently, whether YP receive Council Tax relief or not is something of a postcode lottery [15].

2. Current Interventions

Increasingly, it is becoming standard practice for LAs to offer Council Tax relief to their YP with care experience. This is partly because Council Tax relief is approved by central Government and not-for-profit organisations. It is likely that the number of LAs offering Council Tax relief to their YP will continue to increase. This year not only saw an increase in LAs offering Council Tax relief for their YP, but a number of LAs also expanded their existing offers. At the national and local level, CCC remains in the minority of LAs that have not yet offered Council Tax relief to its YP. As such, CCC’s YP are at a disadvantage compared with YP with care experience living in other LAs that provide Council Tax relief.



CCC remains in the minority of LAs that have not yet offered Council Tax relief to its YP.

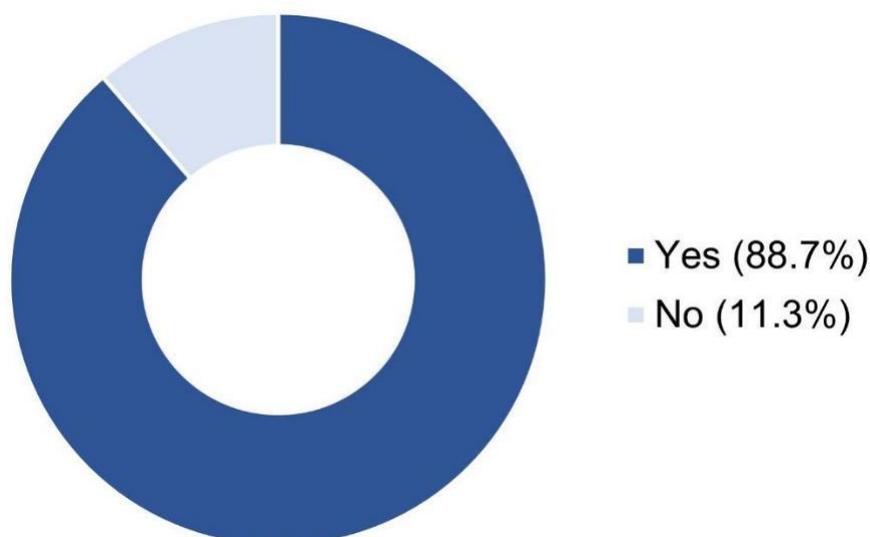
2.1. Cambridgeshire

The Cambridgeshire Children and Young People Committee met in 2018 to consider Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [22]. The committee decided that “adopting a scheme that exempts care leavers from paying Council Tax would not be appropriate in the absence of any national arrangements in this area.” Rather than implement a Council Tax reduction at the LA level, the Director of Children’s Services wrote to central Government to support a national scheme of Council Tax relief that supports all YP with care experience living independently [22]. CCC were subsequently contacted by The Children’s Society about their approach to which CCC restated its decision not to provide Council Tax relief to its YP.

2.2. England

The vast majority of LAs in England have offered their YP with care experience some sort of Council Tax relief. Of the 151 LAs in England, 134 offer some form of exemption or discount. This leaves only 17 (11.3%) of LAs that do not offer their YP any form of Council Tax relief (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of the 151 LAs in England offering Council Tax relief to YP with care experience.



These percentages do not take in account Council Tax relief offered only at the District or City Council level. Council Tax relief for YP with care experience is therefore likely to be more prevalent than the figures suggest. It is likely that more LAs will adopt Council Tax relief for YP with care experience in the coming years. Breakdown of the Council Tax relief offered by LAs in various regions is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of LAs offering Council Tax relief.

Type of Council Tax relief	LAs offering relief – no. (%)			
	England	East of England	Statistical neighbours	Two-tier councils
Full relief (until age 25)	97 (64.2)	4 (36.4)	3 (30.0)	10 (40.0)
Partial relief	37 (24.5)	3 (27.3)	4 (40.0)	10 (40.0)
Until age 21	24 (15.9)	3 (27.3)	2 (20.0)	8 (32.0)
Tapering relief	5 (3.3)	-	-	-
For 2 years or less	5 (3.3)	-	-	-
Until age 22	3 (2.0)	-	2 (20.0)	2 (16.0)
No relief	17 (11.3)	4 (36.4)	3 (30.0)	5 (20.0)

The LAs offering Council Tax relief to YP with care experience are not homogenous in their approach. Nevertheless, LAs generally either offer full relief until age 25 when Corporate Parenting responsibilities cease; or offer partial relief from six months to four years after leaving care. The most common method of partial relief is to offer exemption until age 21. Five LAs apply a tapering discount for Council Tax, in which YP with care experience receive a different rate of discount depending on their age (Table 2) [23-27].

Council Tax exemption should be offered to YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire until age 25. Tapering discounts can be confusing and cumbersome, both for the recipient and

the provider, and should be avoided. The recommendation for full Council Tax relief aligns with the extension of Corporate Parenting responsibilities until age 25 [16].

Table 2. Tapering Council Tax relief until age 25.

Council	Age (years)	Discount Rate (%)
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	18–23	100
	24–25	50
Sandwell	18–22	100
	23–25	50
North Somerset	18–21	100
	22–23	75
	24–25	50
Reading	18	100
	19	66
	20	33
Blackpool	18	85
	19	70
	20	55
	21	30

While the Council Tax relief methods mentioned above are generally adopted by LAs, specific circumstances can also influence the approach. For instance, a LA which offers a limited exemption may have provisions in place to extend the discount on discretionary grounds. Oxfordshire offers YP with care experience relief until age 21 but also has protocols in place to extend the exemption until age 25. Extension may be granted if an individual’s financial liability for Council Tax is judged as “difficult to manage” due to specific circumstances or vulnerabilities [28]. In such cases, a written endorsement by a PA or social worker from the Council must be provided. Any subsequent agreement to extend Council Tax relief only remains in place for one year or the remainder of a year.

2.3. East of England

CCC also lags behind other LAs in the East of England with regard to Council Tax relief. Of the 11 LAs that make up the East of England Local Government Association, four (Bedford, Luton, Norfolk, and Suffolk) offer full Council Tax relief for YP with care experience until age 25 (Table 1). Three more LAs (Thurrock, Essex, and Southend-on-Sea) offer relief for YP with care experience until age 21. Thurrock allows the extension of this exemption in exceptional cases. Finally, four LAs (Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Hertfordshire, and Central Bedfordshire) do not offer clearly defined Council Tax relief for YP with care experience.

The Executive Member for Social Care and Housing to the Corporate Parenting Panel (2018) report recommended that Council Tax relief be introduced for YP with care experience in Central Bedfordshire until age 25 [29]. A recommendation to approve the measure was included in the report, however, it has yet to be implemented. In its 2019 to 2022 Care Leaver Strategy, Hertfordshire County Council stated that a multi-agency strategic group was working towards extending Council Tax relief to its YP [30].

Peterborough also produced a consultation focused on Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. For similar reasons to Cambridgeshire, the proposal was rejected [31].

2.4. Cambridgeshire's Statistical Neighbours

Among its statistical neighbours, Cambridgeshire is in the minority of Councils that do not offer LA-wide Council Tax relief to YP with care experience (Table 1). Three statistical neighbours (Hampshire, Hertfordshire, and West Berkshire) offer no LA-wide discount but have expressed a desire to implement Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. Some District Councils in Hampshire already offer Council Tax relief for these YP. The Children's Services Inspection of Hampshire County Council by Ofsted noted with approval that the LA is working with District Councils to ensure that Council Tax relief is applied by them all [32]. Hertfordshire is also actively assessing the implementation of changes including Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [30]. West Berkshire states in its Local Offer that the LA is working towards introducing Council Tax relief for YP with care experience until age 21 [33].

Three of Cambridgeshire's statistical neighbours (Bath and Northeast Somerset, Wiltshire, and South Gloucestershire) offer a full Council Tax exemption for YP with care experience (until age 25) and a further four (Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, West Sussex, and Worcestershire) offer partial relief (Table 1). Both Gloucestershire and West Sussex offer relief until age 22 while Oxfordshire and Worcestershire offer relief until age 21. Oxfordshire's offer includes provisions to extend it beyond the age of 21.

2.5. Two-Tier Councils

CCC is a two-tier LA, meaning that it is not directly responsible for the collection of Council Tax. Instead, District Councils should impose Council Tax relief [34]. This may pose problems for implementing Council Tax relief for YP leaving care. An overview of 25 two-tier Councils in England suggests that this is a surmountable issue. Ten County Councils have implemented full relief measures while a further 10 offer various forms of partial relief. Only five County Councils offer no Council Tax relief for their YP with care experience.

3. Key Considerations

3.1. Changing Mindsets

A view persists at CCC that paying bills is a part of taking responsibility for oneself [22]. In effect, YP with care experience must learn the hard way.

“While seeking a fair and workable way of exempting care leavers from paying Council Tax may seem superficially attractive, the harsh reality is that paying bills is part of taking responsibility for oneself as an adult. Providing this relief for a period risks making the actual transition into having to eventually pay Council Tax a more difficult one as the young person concerned will have become used to managing on a budget that does not include having to meet this obligation” [22].

This sentiment does not acknowledge CCC's Corporate Parting duties in word or in spirit. It ignores the unique situation in which YP with care experience find themselves. YP with care experience generally face independence in a very different context and at an accelerated pace compared to their peers, but YP with care experience need to reach independence in their own time [35]. As such, imposing a point of total independence based on an arbitrary

And irrelevant timescale of youth transitions is not appropriate. YP with care experience face a host of unique difficulties and pressures that emerge from their experience of the care system (Section 2, 8). A tough love approach does nothing to address the context of these YP's lives and fails to acknowledge the particularly damaging pressures that Council Tax debt can have. Paying bills is indeed part of "the harsh reality" of life, but given the circumstances of leaving care, age 25 is a more reasonable age to expect Council Tax payments from YP with care experience. CCC must recognise that its YP are in a unique situation which demands a different approach to Council Tax than that which is currently offered.

Our 2020 survey asked about the transition from care into independent living. One respondent said: "[We] need to have more gradual easing into independent living." Following the 2019 Ofsted report, CCC highlighted that improving delivery during this transition is an area to focus on. Council Tax relief is designed to help YP transition into independence and could support this effort. CCC should also consider other ways of engendering financial literacy in its YP. For instance, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole offer tapering Council Tax relief whereby YP with care experience are offered 100% Council Tax relief until age 24 before dropping to 50% Council Tax relief for their final year of support [23]. The rationale behind this approach is to ease YP with care experience into paying Council Tax before their 25th birthday, when any specific exemption will come to an end.

While 100% Council Tax relief until age 25 is preferable, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole's example shows that steps can be taken to prepare YP to pay Council Tax in addition to offering support in the form of Council Tax relief. CCC's approach currently does not acknowledge the circumstances in which its YP find themselves. It also does not take into account the Corporate Parenting principles or effective ways of instilling financial literacy. YP with care experience do need to learn money management skills. CCC should therefore endorse schemes that improve the financial literacy of these YP (Section 7).

3.2. Practical Considerations

3.2.1. Council Tax Relief or Refund?

YP with care experience could be offered a refund for Council Tax paid instead of Council Tax relief. This approach has the benefit of allowing YP with care experience to claim a refund for Council Tax paid before they were made aware of the scheme, dependent on any time-based restrictions. Offering a refund instead of Council Tax relief comes with its own challenges. For instance, if an individual has difficulty paying the bill in the first place, the question of what action would be taken is asked. While Council Tax relief is designed to ease the financial burden placed upon YP with care experience, it has a wider role in promoting a successful transition from care into independence. Relief creates space for individuals to learn how to manage their finances and budget correctly. Refunds would also demand a sustained application process and significant administrative procedures, making it more challenging to enact automatic application of Council Tax relief. Council Tax relief is thus preferable to a refund.

3.2.2. Means Testing

Means testing is the process of measuring a person's income to decide whether or not they should be entitled to benefits. CCC may decide to implement means testing for YP with care experience seeking a Council Tax relief. Most participating LAs offer Council Tax relief to YP with care experience regardless of their financial status, although some LAs do use means testing. For example, Bedford Council will only offer Council Tax relief to YP with care experience earning under £50,000 [36]. The Scottish Care Leavers' Covenant advocates an "assumption of eligibility" approach, whereby LAs assume that YP with care experience are eligible for available services and support [37]. Any attempt to introduce means testing would threaten to complicate administration and the associated application process for Council Tax relief. Means testing is only likely to eliminate a very small proportion of YP with care experience from being eligible for Council Tax relief. CCC should therefore avoid means testing YP with care experience seeking Council Tax relief.

3.3. Eligibility and Equality

It is important to define which individuals should be eligible for Council Tax relief. The Equality Act (2010) makes discrimination unlawful on the grounds of: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation [28]. Section 149 of the Equality Act (2010) places Councils and public bodies under a duty to promote equality (Box 1).

- 1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 2) Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
 - a. Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - b. Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
 - c. Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

Box 1. Section 149 of the Equality Act (2010).

Council Tax relief for YP with care experience means treating these individuals more favourably than others. However, this will act to remove disadvantages and promote equality of opportunity. Indeed, the Local Government Finance Act (1992) Section 13A gives LAs discretionary powers to support individuals or groups that may face financial difficulty, such as YP with care experience [34].

YP with care experience often face a more difficult path towards stable independent adulthood than their peers. Their time in care may be the result of deeper problems within their family unit. While Council Tax relief for these YP results in favourable treatment, it does so with the aim of advancing equality of opportunity and removing financial barriers to a stable transition. In turn, this will promote stable tenancies as well as increased EET opportunities.

Implementation of Council Tax relief for YP with care experience should have no significant equality or diversity implications, as noted in the Council's consultation [22]. The provision of Council Tax relief for YP with care experience in CCC is, however, complicated by two issues: (i) external YP with care experience from other LAs living in Cambridgeshire; and (ii) YP with care experience living out-of-county to whom CCC acts as a Corporate Parent. CCC raised concerns that unless these groups were included in any Council Tax relief scheme that CCC could be open to legal challenge [22].

3.3.1. External YP in Cambridgeshire

Potential discrimination-based legal challenges against CCC by external YP living in Cambridgeshire were presented as a reason for not introducing Council Tax relief for YP with care experience [22]. Given that other benefits and support are only offered to CCC's YP, this concern is dubious. For example, external YP living in Cambridgeshire do not receive support from CCC PAs, but to our knowledge this has never been considered a legal risk to CCC. Council Tax relief should not be viewed as a legal risk to CCC either.

While CCC may not have Corporate Parenting responsibilities for external YP with care experience, they do reside in Cambridgeshire and thus make up part of the Cambridgeshire care-experienced community. They face the same issues that affect CCC's YP. Helping these YP on their path to independence and financial stability will produce positive outcomes, such as encouraging engagement with EET that will benefit the community. Given that they are not living in their associated LA, external YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire may be at an added disadvantage. These YP may not be able to benefit from support that would otherwise be available from their own LA. The potential vulnerability of this group further justifies the provision of Council Tax relief.

An important step is required before this option is taken. There is no available data which indicates the number of external YP with care experience living within CCC's jurisdiction. These YP may already receive funding from their associated LAs to alleviate Council Tax costs. CCC should take steps towards identifying this group and understanding their circumstances. CCC will then be able to judge whether extending Council Tax relief to this group is financially feasible. This work would ideally take place after Council Tax relief has been given to CCC's YP with care experience and could be carried out by an Accommodation Team ([Section 2](#)).

Other LAs already offer all YP with care experience in their jurisdiction Council Tax relief. This represents best practice and we recommend that CCC move towards adopting this approach, although this may not be immediately feasible.

3.3.2. YP Living Out-of-County

CCC has a duty of care towards out-of-county YP with care experience until age 25. In many cases their placement outside of CCC was beyond their control. It is possible that if any proposed Council Tax relief is not extended to these YP then a legal challenge could be mounted [22]. Once again, this was presented by CCC as a reason not to go forward with Council Tax relief [22].

The proposed Council Tax relief would be offered through Section 13A of the Local Government and Finance Act (1992) [34]. The exemption would be channelled through District Councils to those living within their jurisdiction. As such, CCC would not be able to offer Council Tax relief to out-of-county YP with care experience. CCC is not discriminating against out-of-county YP, as presumably the exemption would be offered to these individuals if they moved back to Cambridgeshire. There is therefore not an adequate basis upon which to reject Council Tax relief in principle.

That being said, CCC still acts in the capacity of Corporate Parent for YP with care experience who live beyond its jurisdiction. These individuals are still members of the Cambridgeshire care-experienced community, and CCC should ensure that they receive adequate support. By living away from Cambridgeshire, these YP may have difficulty accessing CCC services and may face additional risks. For example, if an individual gets into financial difficulty due to bills such as Council Tax, they will be in an especially precarious position if they are out-of-county. For CCC's out-of-county YP, an "out of sight, out of mind" approach is not acceptable. The Corporate Parenting Principles specify that every CCC member must act in the interests of its YP as if they were their own children. This includes out-of-county YP with care experience.

Other LAs offering Council Tax relief to YP with care experience follow three approaches towards their out-of-county YP: (i) they do not extend Council Tax relief to out-of-county YP. In these cases, the eligibility criteria for relief explicitly states that an individual must reside within the LA; (ii) they offer partial relief to out-of-county YP e.g. the London Borough of Ealing offers out-of-county YP Council Tax relief until age 21. YP living locally receive Council Tax relief until age 25 [39]; (iii) they extend the same relief to out-of-county YP and local YP with care experience.

Extending full Council Tax relief to out-of-county YP with care experience represents best practice and should be adopted by CCC. The liability for providing Council Tax relief to out-of-county YP with care experience would have to be met by CCC. Relief could be delivered in the form of a grant claim system, as has been proposed by Norfolk County Council [40]. In this case, a process should be included to ensure that any grants issued are used for their intended purpose by the intended recipient.

3.3.3. Other Vulnerable Groups

CCC pointed out YP with care experience already receive a broad range of support from the Council [22]. This is in contrast with other vulnerable YP who face difficult circumstances and

are struggling with the pressures of independent living: “it is therefore arguable that providing support to all YP living independently through measures such as Council Tax relief is an approach that would have far greater impact than one that only provides exemption to care leavers” [22]. To our knowledge, this Council Tax support has yet to be implemented.

While CCC should do all they can to help all vulnerable YP in their transition to independence, CCC has a specific duty of care towards YP with care experience. YP with care experience have a uniquely difficult experience in their transition to independence. Financial problems are at the forefront of their concerns during this transition. These YP are recognised as a vulnerable group by researchers, central Government, and by CCC itself. The existence of other vulnerable groups is thus not an adequate basis upon which to reject Council Tax relief for YP with care experience.

3.4. Financial Considerations

Cost is a significant barrier to Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. LAs are rightly concerned that their policies not only provide support to vulnerable groups, but that the potential outcomes justify the associated costs.

Collaboration between levels in a two-tier Council is key for implementing Council Tax relief. Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act (1992) gives LAs the ability to implement Council Tax relief on a case-by-case basis via request and on grounds of exceptional circumstances, and for certain groups of people where multiple taxpayers may fit into a group due to similar circumstances [34]. The cost of any relief must be borne by the LA itself and must be administered by the billing authority i.e. Cambridgeshire District/City Councils. As such, any relief should be implemented across all District Councils so that all eligible YP with care experience can benefit.

Council Tax relief would have financial implications for bodies that rely on such funding. These bodies include CCC, District Councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Fire Authority. CCC receives the greatest share from Council Tax payments. Presumably, CCC would forgo its share of the YP’s Council Tax bills (68% to 75% of the bill per person). CCC should work towards securing agreements with the relevant parties, particularly District Councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner, to proportionally share the costs of applying a Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. Other two-tier Councils have achieved this and CCC should follow suit.

The Children’s Society (2017) estimated the cost for LAs implementing Council Tax relief for YP with care experience until age 25 as £20,000 to £30,000 per year [41]. In 2018, CCC estimated the total cost of Council Tax relief for all its YP with care experience (aged 18 to 20 and living in Cambridgeshire) as £110,000 per year [22]. CCC suggested that at least £400,000 would be required to cover the costs of Council Tax relief for all local YP with care experience until age 25 [22]. This figure is likely to be an overestimate, as discussed below.

3.4.1. Liability

Assessing the financial implications of Council Tax relief is complicated by difficulty determining the number of eligible YP with care experience as well as liability and access to other discounts. Council Tax relief should be offered in all cases where YP with care experience are liable for Council Tax. In some cases, liability for Council Tax may be affected by an individual’s specific living situation. For example, a YP with care experience

may share liability for Council Tax with individuals who were not in care. These cases must be planned for. Current practice offers several options: (i) revoke the exemption for the house in question; (ii) apply a set discount; (iii) apply a proportional discount; or (iv) offer a full exemption to the household.

Offering a full exemption would ensure that YP with care experience do not experience any financial hardship due to Council Tax payments. This may not be cost efficient, however. CCC should instead support the introduction of a proportional discount when a YP with care experience is living with other individuals who have not been in care. For example, if a YP with care experience lives with a partner who has not been in care, a 50% Council Tax discount should be offered. This policy would offer YP with care experience relief in terms of Council Tax liability.

Any Council Tax relief offered to YP with care experience should only be applied after existing discounts have been applied. This would significantly minimise expected losses. Students and school leavers are eligible for Council Tax relief and apprentices and youth trainees can also receive support in certain cases. Disabled or mentally impaired individuals also receive Council Tax relief, as well as individuals who live alone. The general population receives a range of discounts depending on their employment status, income, benefits, and dependents. Council Tax liability for YP with care experience may therefore be 0% before the proposed relief is applied. Many YP who are liable for some of their Council Tax payments may not be expected to pay the full amount anyway. As such, the cost of introducing Council Tax relief for YP with care experience is likely to be much lower than the maximum estimated cost.

It is likely that CCC's 2018 cost estimates overestimate the actual cost of implementing Council Tax relief for YP with care experience. Indeed, the cost estimate only explicitly took into account exemptions due to student status. In many cases, CCC's YP may not be liable for Council Tax payments at all but where they are liable for partial or full Council Tax payments, the burden of that cost can have a substantial impact on their financial stability.

CCC must take steps to make YP with care experience aware of any changes to their Council Tax liabilities. YP with care experience may be unaware of their entitlements and this is especially true when new measures are introduced. The Corporate Parenting Principles state that LAs must "help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners" [19]. The Council should advertise changes made to Council Tax liability in its Local Offer. Any exemption should also be listed on District/City Council websites under the Council Tax relief sections. The nature of the relief, as well as all eligibility criteria should be stated clearly and in full detail. Where possible, CCC should attempt to directly inform eligible participants about any changes. CCC should pay special attention to alerting YP who are no longer in regular contact with their PA as well as CCC's out-of-county YP. This could be implemented through an Accommodation Team ([Section 2](#)).

3.4.2. Future Savings

Aside from the reputational risks facing CCC if it remains in the shrinking minority of LAs that do not offer targeted Council Tax relief, failing to offer relief could have negative financial implications for the future. Council Tax relief will help promote financial stability among liable YP. As such, CCC can expect a reduction in costs associated with emergency intervention

since these YP will have more stable tenancies and less need for emergency intervention. Increased financial security of YP with care experience reduces their reliance on CCC support in other areas.

Failing to provide Council Tax relief may result in more YP with care experience moving out of Cambridgeshire for financial reasons. As more LAs offer Council Tax relief to YP with care experience, it might not be financially rational for CCC's YP to remain in Cambridgeshire. An increase in out-of-county YP would create additional costs for CCC. LAs continue to have a duty of care to their YP until age 25, which includes access to a PA and other services. If more of CCC's YP move out-of-county for financial reasons, it will become more difficult for CCC to provide its statutory duties, the work of PAs will become more challenging, and it will become more expensive for CCC to provide its services at a distance. Making sure that Cambridgeshire is an attractive option, not least in terms of finances, is not only a cost-effective strategy, but it will go a long way to improving the lives of CCC's YP and fulfilling its Corporate Parenting duties.

It is important that CCC helps its YP pursue aspirational careers. The current system is designed in such a way that it costs YP to pursue their aspirations ([Section 7](#)). Council Tax payments are part of this burden on YP with care experience. Council Tax relief until age 25 gives individuals the breathing room they need to pursue their aspirations. Council Tax relief will also help create financial stability. Fostering this stability during the difficult transition from care into independence will help create a situation in which a greater number of YP can meet Council Tax obligations after age 25. Long-term, this will help offset the costs of introducing the policy.

3.5. Application Process

YP with care experience are not always aware of services available to them or may have difficulty accessing these services. CCC should make any Council Tax relief easily accessible for these YP. Different approaches may be required depending on whether CCC extends Council Tax relief to: (i) local YP with care experience; (ii) out-of-county YP with care experience; and (iii) external YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire.

3.5.1. YP in Cambridgeshire

For CCC's YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire, best practice would be an automatic application. In this case, the Leaving Care Team would pass the necessary information to the Council Tax Officers when the YP leaves care. Various LAs use this approach. This approach places less responsibility on individuals to seek out support and ensures that all those who are eligible for relief receive it. CCC should move towards introducing automatic Council Tax relief for its local YP.

An automatic process may take time to implement and there may be additional issues. For example, if CCC cannot contact a particular YP with care experience, due to missing accurate contact information, it would not be possible to apply automatic Council Tax relief for this individual. A mechanism for updating contact details may be necessary ([Section 2](#)). In the short-term, an application process may be required for CCC's local YP with care experience. An application process would also benefit the YP that CCC have lost contact with. CCC should consider accessible application formats. Doncaster County Council insist on an application process but offer several formats through which applications can be made,

including online and via telephone. If CCC uses an application, it should be made as accessible as possible and could be managed by an Accommodation Team ([Section 2](#)).

3.5.2. YP Living Out-Of-County and External YP in Cambridgeshire

It is likely that an application will be required for CCC's out-of-county YP with care experience to receive Council Tax relief. Aside from contact details, this application may need to include a confirmation of their status as a YP with care experience as well as an ongoing process to ensure that any grant is being used for its intended purpose by the intended recipient. An application will also be required for external YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire.

4. Recommendations

CCC should provide Council Tax relief to YP with care experience until age 25:

- a. Council Tax relief should extend to CCC's YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire and out-of-county.
- b. CCC should determine the possibility of extending this policy to external YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire, if they do not already receive this support from their associated LA.
- c. Council Tax relief should be offered as an exemption not a refund and it should not be subject to means testing.
- d. In the long-term, CCC should apply automatic relief for its local YP with care experience. If an application process is necessary in the short-term, it should be clear, accessible, and include multiple formats e.g. online and via telephone.
- e. The Council Tax relief rate should be 100% when a YP with care experience lives alone or with other care-experienced individuals. The rate should be applied proportionally if the YP with care experience is living with non-eligible individuals.

5. Implementing the Recommendations

Council Tax relief will have a number of positive outcomes. YP with care experience will be protected from Council Tax debt and the destabilising effects this can have on finances and tenancies. Given the unique difficulties associated with transitioning from care into independence, Council Tax relief will help provide a more secure environment in which to facilitate this transition. CCC will align with most other LAs in England. This means CCC's YP will no longer be deprived of the support that other YP with care experience receive simply due to their association with a different Corporate Parent. Furthermore, implementing this recommendation will bolster CCC's commitment to its Corporate Parenting responsibilities, helping to make Cambridgeshire more hospitable for YP with care experience. Finally, Council Tax relief will bring CCC a step closer to addressing the criticisms outlined in Ofsted's 2019 Children's Services Report.

6. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

6.1. Reputational Damage

CCC remains one of the few LAs in Great Britain that offers no specific Council Tax relief for YP leaving care. CCC lags behind other regional and statistical neighbours in failing to provide relief, despite sustained calls for Council Tax relief from various stakeholders. Council Tax relief for YP leaving care is becoming a standard way for LAs to support their YP. CCC already faces the unenviable prospect of being one of the last LAs to refuse to offer such support. CCC faces reputational damage in its role as a Corporate Parent if it does not enact Council Tax relief for YP leaving care.

6.2. Jeopardising the Transition into Independence

More importantly, failing to implement Council Tax relief could have drastic consequences for YP with care experience in Cambridgeshire. For those that are liable, Council Tax constitutes a major financial burden. The transition from care into independence represents a sharp reduction in financial support provided by CCC. YP with care experience have reported that they have found it difficult to manage following the withdrawal of this support. Those who are liable for Council Tax but have difficulties fulfilling this obligation face debt which can destabilise tenancies. Individuals who can afford to pay Council Tax are faced with a financial loss to what is often an already tight budget. CCC's out-of-county YP with care experience and external YP living in Cambridgeshire may be especially vulnerable, as distance may pose barriers to accessing support from their own LAs.

6.3. Inhospitable Environment for YP

As more LAs offer Council Tax relief to YP leaving care, Cambridgeshire may become viewed as an inhospitable place for its own YP. This could create a situation where these YP are faced with the prospect of leaving Cambridgeshire in favour of areas which offer financial support not offered by CCC. This would create added strain and costs for CCC, as it retains its Corporate Parenting responsibilities towards these YP. Relocation could have a negative impact on YP. These individuals would be away from established support networks and receiving assistance from their LA would become more difficult. Relocation of many YP with care experience would also impose strain upon CCC's Leaving Care team, who would face the added difficulty of attempting to aid more individuals outside Cambridgeshire.

7. Summary

Council Tax payments place unnecessary financial pressure on YP with care experience. In this respect, Council Tax relief has become standard practice for LAs to support their YP. CCC remains in the minority of LAs which have failed to introduce Council Tax relief. As such, CCC's YP are disadvantaged compared to other YP with care experience associated with other LAs. The reasons given for CCC's refusal to implement Council Tax relief do not stand up to scrutiny. CCC should give Council Tax relief to all of its YP.

8. Update

On 8 February 2022 CCC voted to introduce Council Tax relief for YP up until the age of 21 with the potential for further discretionary support up until the age of 25 if deemed necessary [42]. This policy will take effect from April 2022. This will be offered to CCC's

YP who live in Cambridgeshire and in other LAs. This is an extremely welcome development and we are delighted that CCC have opted to adopt the spirit of this recommendation. This development emerged long after the completion of the main research for this report. This update is intended to offer further recommendations on features of this new scheme.

The mechanisms through which Council Tax relief will be delivered and administered are still under development. However, current proposals indicate that YP will need to apply for the relief and that they will receive a refund [43]. As noted above, a refund is not the best way to support YP through Council Tax relief. CCC should aim to bypass situations where YP have to pay Council Tax in the first place; it could achieve this by paying the billing authority directly.

CCC's decision to implement Council Tax relief has the potential to impact all of its YP who have left care until the age of 25. It is important that CCC takes steps to make the potential beneficiaries of this decision aware of these changes. While a starting point is listing the policy on the Local Offer, it is important that this is buttressed with further targeted initiatives aimed at informing YP. Given that there is an application element, it could be worth considering an online / in person workshop related to completing the application.

The initial recommendation in this report recommended blanket Council Tax support for YP until the age of 25. CCC have opted for a scheme in which blanket support ends at age 21 (and discretionary support continues thereafter). The section above worked through various approaches to Council Tax support with an aim at presenting different models and approaches. It is still our belief that support until age 25 is the best approach; this recommendation aimed to support YP in financial difficulties but also create space for the transmission into independence at a more general level. While we recognise that this may not be possible at the moment, we would urge CCC to commit to considering the issue of eligibility criteria in the future, when the costs of operating the scheme as proposed are fully known, so as to consider the extension of relief for Council Tax payments for YP until age 25, if financially feasible. Many other LAs subsequently improved their Council Tax offers for YP; there is room for this policy to develop in ways that support more YP.

The new recommendations are listed below:

1. Avoid a refund model of relief (for example, by paying billing authorities directly).
2. Ensure that robust steps are taken to inform potential beneficiaries of the policy.
3. Commit to reviewing the eligibility criteria for the policy in the future.

References

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Section Six. Employment Opportunities

Overview

This section focuses on the need for additional support in the transition to employment. YP with care experience appear to be more vulnerable to becoming NEET than their peers. Many YP with care experience have aspirations of stability. Paid employment is crucial to achieving stability and independence as well as having mental health implications. CCC, as an employer and a Corporate Parent, has the capacity to provide opportunities for YP but currently none are available. This can be changed by creating specific opportunities for YP with care experience e.g. ring-fencing of apprenticeships or a guaranteed interview policy for YP meeting the minimum requirements for Council roles.

Key recommendations

- **Increase provision of internal work opportunities and work experience at CCC for YP with care experience by:**
 - a. **Guaranteeing interviews for those who meet the minimum criteria for a council vacancy;**
 - b. **Ring-fencing specific opportunities.**
-

1. Introduction

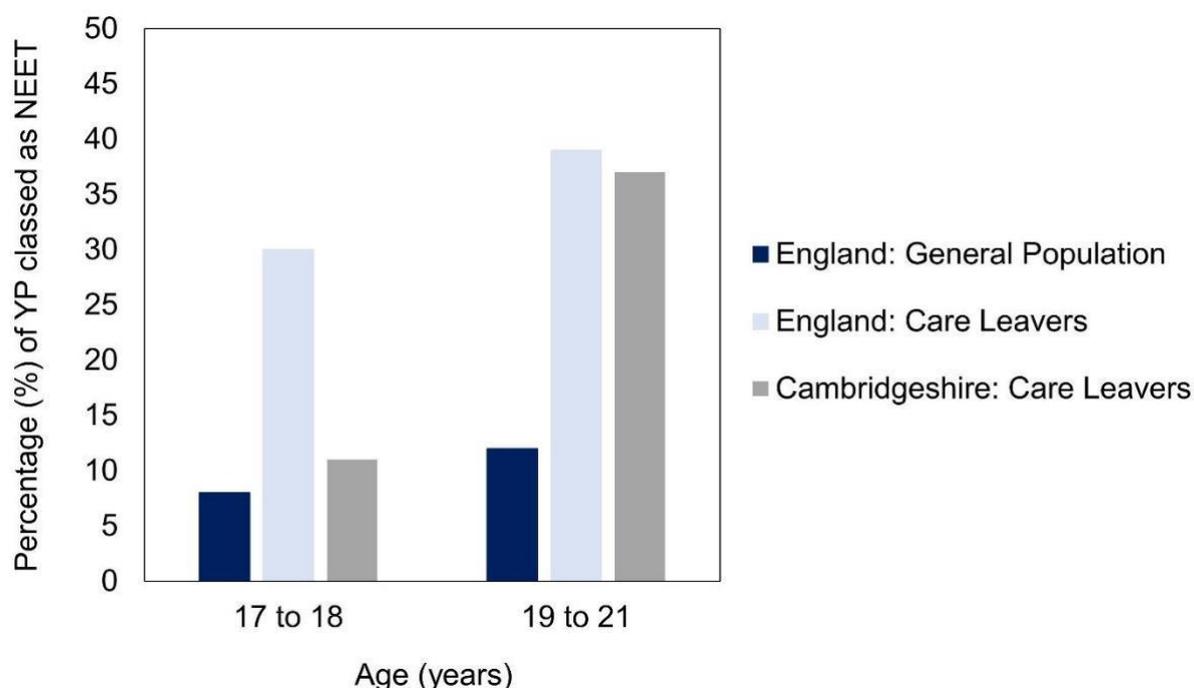
1.1. Barriers YP Face to Accessing Employment

Employment levels were most recently recorded in March 2019. In England, 39% of YP with care experience aged 19 to 21 were NEET [1]. Only 12% of 19 to 21 year olds in the general population were NEET (Figure 1) [1,23]. The national and local figures are similar. In Cambridgeshire, 37% of YP with care experience aged 19 to 21 were NEET in March 2019 [1]. YP with care experience are more vulnerable to becoming NEET.

YP with care experience face many barriers to employment. These barriers range from personal factors, such as lack of necessary skills and information, to structural barriers such as hiring behaviour [2]. Compared with their peers, YP with care experience also have lower attainment in school [3], which in turn is a predictor of unemployment [4]. Research has further highlighted a lack of skills/experience and low self-confidence in their ability to succeed as key issues (Section 8) [5].

The barriers to employment for YP leaving care are complex. Provision of specific and supported work opportunities could make a significant contribution to individuals gaining the skills, experience, and confidence needed to be competitive in the labour market. Moving into EET without adequate preparation can create a loss of confidence and discourage YP from further engagement with EET [2]. Any steps taken by CCC to equip its YP with relevant skills to help them enter the workforce or prepare them for future employment are encouraged.

Figure 1. Percentage (%) of YP classed as NEET in Cambridgeshire and England by age group.



1.2. Impacts of Barriers

While the results of the 2020 survey cannot be taken as representative of the views of all of CCC's YP, nine out of the 10 YP with care experience who responded to our 2020 survey expressed that they were either "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" about the issue of employment. Employment should therefore be a priority area for CCC.



9 out of the 10 respondents to the 2020 survey are concerned about employment.

1.2.1. Financial Impact

There is a lack of existing data on the financial impact of YP with care experience being NEET, both to these individuals and to public finances, but costs are predicted to be high (Section 7). For a YP who is NEET, the predicted public finance cost is £56,000 over the working lifetime of the individual [6]. Nine out of the 10 YP with care experience who took our 2020 survey selected 'somewhat concerned' or 'very concerned' about the issue of finances. The recommendations we make here would provide the young people with workplace experience to help them become more competitive in the job market, and so increase their likelihood of obtaining a stable income.



For a YP who is NEET, the predicted public finance cost is £56,000 over the working lifetime of the individual.

1.2.2. Mental Health Impact

Seven of the 10 respondents to our 2020 survey felt either "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" about the issue of mental health. Being NEET is associated with higher rates of mental health issues in YP [9], as are job insecurity, low pay, and temporary employment (Section 8) [7].

When asked about their aspirations and life goals in our 2020 survey, four out of the five respondents listed goals associated with stability i.e. building a career and housing. In response to a question asking about perceived barriers to meeting their aspirations, finances and self-confidence/mental health were specifically listed by respondents. Finding stable employment could be incredibly beneficial for YP, helping them to gain stability and work towards these aspirations. The ability to undertake work in a supported environment will further allow YP to build self-confidence in their ability to succeed.

1.3. Internal Employment Opportunities

Aiding the transition of YP leaving care into employment requires a dual-stranded approach. Firstly, they should receive support and guidance when applying for jobs, which is provided through PAs. Secondly, CCC should actively try to provide opportunities for YP with care experience in which they can gain experience of a workplace and build the skills necessary to engage with and sustain employment. The recommendations in this section focus on the provision of opportunities within the Council.

A key factor to consider when looking at employment-related support given to YP with care experience is the Corporate Parenting duties of CCC. The Corporate Parenting Principles require Councils to “promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people” and to “prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living” [8]. Provision of opportunities involving employment or work experience within CCC would represent a significant source of support for YP that aligns with these principles and has been likened to providing opportunities within the “family business”.

1.4. Ring-Fenced Apprenticeships

The Corporate Parenting model represents an underutilised means of providing opportunities for YP leaving care. It proposes ring-fencing of placements within the Council and interview guarantees for Council roles. A guarantee of an apprenticeship interview is one of the 10 Asks for Care Leavers recommended by the Children’s Commissioner for England in October 2020 [11].

Councils are able to ring-fence apprenticeships for YP with care experience when applying the Corporate Parenting Principles [12]. These placements can take place in any Council department. Providing these opportunities is a way for the wider Council to contribute to its YP with care experience. It is also noted that this is distinct from a differentiated service being provided for care leavers. Making YP aware of any apprenticeships offered by the LA, in particular any opportunities ring-fenced for them, is reiterated in the 2018 Department for Education’s Local Offer Guidance for Local Authorities [13]. Additionally, when discussing the ring-fencing of apprenticeships for YP with care experience, the former Minister for Children and Families said that “many Local Authorities do this already, but all of them should” [14].

Ring-fencing of opportunities in the Council is a key method of support encouraged by the Care Leaver Covenant [15]. The Covenant promotes internships for YP with care experience that are paid at least the minimum living wage for the area, and last for at least 12 weeks. The Care Leaver Covenant also recommends additional support during these placements such as a mentor, certification of the skills acquired during the placement, and the opportunity to continue into a job, for example through a guaranteed interview.



Care Leaver Covenant Outcome #3:

“Care Leavers have improved access to employment, education and training.”

Finally, ring-fenced opportunities are specifically recommended as a simple way through which Councils can improve the rate of engagement with EET for their YP in the National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers’ First Year Report (2018) [16].

1.5. Similar Schemes for Other Groups

Similar schemes exist to boost employment prospects for other groups in the UK. Many employers, including Citizens Advice and the Civil Service, commit to guaranteeing interviews for applicants with disabilities who meet the role’s minimum criteria as part of the

Disability Confident Scheme [17]. Additionally, the Great Place to Work for Veterans scheme, operated by the Civil Service, guarantees interviews to military veterans who meet the required criteria [18].

2. Current Interventions

2.1. Cambridge's Geographical Neighbours

Within East England, Worcestershire County Council offers internal work experience, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for YP with care experience. In Southend-on-Sea, work experience placements are provided at the Borough Council, which acts as the Corporate Parent for YP with care experience in the area. Additionally, their policy is to offer an interview to all YP with care experience within the Borough who apply for a Council apprenticeship and meet the entry requirement. Luton Council also guarantees interviews for its YP with care experience for L1A to L3 Council vacancies.

2.2. Cambridge's Statistical Neighbours

Oxfordshire County Council provides YP with care experience who meet the minimum requirements for Council vacancies with a guaranteed interview. The Council's Human Resources Department provides one-to-one guidance about Council job applications to its YP and can organise short work experience placements. Wiltshire County Council grants favourable access to its YP for Council apprenticeships. West Berkshire provides internal opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment, including via Councillors. South Gloucestershire County Council also has a guaranteed interview policy for its YP applying to council apprenticeships.

2.3. Other LAs

2.3.1. Guaranteed Interviews

Several other Councils guarantee interviews for YP with care experience, including Wolverhampton City Council, Islington Borough Council and Somerset County Council. Both Bristol City Council and Cumbria County Council have a guaranteed interview scheme, and both provide YP with a financial supplement when undertaking a Council apprenticeship. In particular, Wolverhampton City Council's guaranteed interview scheme is highlighted as an example of good practice in the 2020 report from the Department for Education's National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' [19]. Monmouthshire County Council approved implementation of a guaranteed interview scheme earlier this year [20], in addition to developing work experience and apprenticeships schemes for its YP and requiring work experience opportunities from its contracted providers.

2.3.2. Ring-Fenced Apprenticeships

Several LAs have apprenticeship opportunities that are ring-fenced for YP with care experience. These include Leicestershire County Council, Wirral Council, Gateshead Council, and Warwickshire County Council.

Durham County Council has committed to implementing both a guaranteed interview scheme and ring-fencing of a council apprenticeship by March 2022 for its YP as part of its Apprenticeship Strategy 2019 to 2022. They have achieved this by guaranteeing interviews

for YP with care experience who meet the essential criteria and by ring-fencing an apprenticeship in the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Team [21].

2.3.3. Young Director Positions

Bexley Borough Council has introduced the position of Young Director within the Virtual School and Participation Team. The Young Director position is an apprenticeship undertaken by a YP with care experience to ensure that the voice of YP is central to the work of the Council. Similarly, Croydon Borough Council have established Young Director and Deputy Young Director positions with the same responsibilities.

Implementing strategies such as these would enable CCC to take a further step to support YP with care experience in gaining experience and acquiring skills. It would represent a strong reaffirmation of Corporate Parenting Principles and provide CCC with valuable insight when carrying out work related to the care of its YP. Through their work, YP with care experience may also engage more with the local community.

2.4. Cambridgeshire

CCC currently publicises several work opportunities to YP with care experience. These include guaranteed job interviews for internships at Reed Specialist Recruitment and Amazon, fast-tracking to the recruitment workshop at Evolve, and two weeks pre-employment training at Compass Group UK.

As part of the Cambridgeshire Care Leaver Community Champions scheme, Cambridge Re-Use guarantees interviews for YP with care experience. Volunteering opportunities are available for YP with care experience at Cambridge Re-Use, Barnardo's and Salvation Army [9]. While these opportunities are valuable for YP, the lack of opportunities within CCC represents an area for improvement. Provision of these opportunities is a simple method through which valuable support can be given.

As part of the Government's Kickstart scheme, CCC is also in the early stages of implementing a local programme of placements for YP [10]. Consideration is being taken to determine whether the scheme can have priority entry for CCC's YP or be expanded for these individuals. This scheme could provide an ideal framework for implementing the recommendations in this section.

3. Recommendations

The existing volunteering opportunities and work experience promoted to CCC's YP provide useful skills to YP with care experience prior to employment, but CCC should implement further policies with a focus on supporting YP with care experience to obtain paid employment.

One of the following steps should be taken to provide internal opportunities at CCC for YP with care experience:

- a. YP with care experience should be guaranteed interviews for job vacancies at CCC for which they meet the minimum requirements for the role;

- b. Specific opportunities for YP with care experience should be created and ring-fenced.

The Learning and Work Institute recommends an informal and semi-structured approach when interviewing YP with care experience. This guidance is also given by NHS Employers to recruiters. The Learning and Work Institute suggests that additional support is given to YP prior to an interview, including details of what the interview will include and dress expectations for the applicant [22]. Additional support of this kind should be considered when implementing one of the recommendations. Similar strategies for interviewing YP with care experience for the Kickstart scheme are being considered, including reducing the formality of the interview process and reduced application forms. Both of these methods provide useful ways to create a more accessible and semi-structured way of approaching the interviews. Additionally, the Kickstart scheme is considering allowing YP with care experience who are successful in obtaining places to sit on Council recruitment panels to gain insight into the hiring process. This is a simple way of familiarising YP with how recruitment works and help prepare them for similar experiences in the future.

One approach to ring-fencing opportunities could include the establishment of a scheme focused on a broader group of YP, with places reserved for YP with care experience [23]. In this case, it is important to ensure that the work required for the role is pitched appropriately for YP with care experience.

We suggest the following ways in which ring-fencing of opportunities for YP with care experience could be implemented:

- a. Commitment by CCC to provide a minimum number of apprenticeships per year to its YP, which may involve reserving spaces within a wider scheme;
- b. Commitment by CCC to provide all YP with care experience with a work experience placement of a standard length of time in a department of their choice.

4. Implementation of Recommendations

If specific opportunities need to be created, cost may pose a problem for the implementation of ring-fenced apprenticeships. While this is a valid concern, a guaranteed interview policy can be implemented within CCC's existing resources. Guaranteed interviews provide a simple and low-cost way to improve the employment prospects of CCC's YP, and follows an established path taken by other LAs.

Directing YP towards work experience in a particular Council team may alter their future employment options. Consideration for this issue should be taken but it can be alleviated by establishing the recommendations across different Council teams and allowing individuals to choose which department they are placed in. CCC should also consider the benefits of first-hand insight if opportunities are created within Council teams relevant to the provision of services for YP with care experience.

Finally, geographical barriers need to be taken into consideration. YP with care experience may have financial and practical difficulty with transportation to and from the place of work. Although work can be undertaken virtually, provision of support may be difficult, particularly at the beginning of their placement. This may cause a sense of isolation for the individual. A second option is that CCC pays for transportation costs, as is done by a number of other

councils, including statistical neighbours of Cambridgeshire (West Berkshire and Worcestershire). Alternatively, allowing YP to work in an office closer to their residence would allow them to experience the workplace and reduce transport pressure, but would require support from individuals who work in that office. Finally, a framework that improves access to opportunities through consideration of multiple factors could be implemented, ensuring that opportunities are allocated according to the aspirations and strengths of YP and their location.

5. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

Perpetuation of existing barriers for YP attempting to enter employment is the key cost of ignoring these recommendations. Many YP will continue to lack workplace experience and may move into non-aspirational jobs. Additionally, the difficulty of entering paid employment will mean they are unable to lessen their financial stress. These costs are avoidable since simple and low-cost options such as an interview guarantee policy are available.

6. Summary

Employment is a particular challenge for YP with care experience yet it represents a central part of the transition into independence. As an employer and a Corporate Parent, CCC has a unique chance to provide opportunities to their YP, much like a family business. Implementing one of the recommendations in this section would improve the chance of YP entering paid employment or gaining the necessary skills to do so. These recommendations also represent a low-cost strategy for CCC with a clear precedent from other LAs. Facilitating movement into employment would demonstrate CCC's commitment to its YP, along with their aspirations, financial stability and mental health.

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Section Seven. Financial Education

Overview

Financial education is a pivotal skill for a successful transition to adulthood. This is particularly true for YP leaving care who often have a more rapid transition into independence than their peers. Despite this, YP leaving care do not always have sufficient access to financial education. CCC must provide more opportunities and information for YP leaving care to learn how to properly manage money and avoid debt.

Key recommendations

- **Create a designated money and budgeting page in CCC's Local Offer which guides YP in/leaving care to financial services and courses as well as charity/private support.**
 - **PAs and care home staff should have more thorough training and guidance on how to provide financial education.**
 - **Pathway Plans for YP in care should have a specific section dedicated to the development of knowledge and skills required for independent living.**
-

1. Introduction

Early-life financial education is key to develop skills for adulthood and to have a successful transition from care to independence. In a UK-wide survey of over 1000 YP, only 55% of respondents had any financial education [1]. Among individuals who said they had financial education, the majority (87%) had not received training or had learned the relevant skills from a carer or parent [1]. An Action for Children survey identified that 59% of YP with care experience found banks intimidating and/or unhelpful, a factor which prevented them from going to the bank to open an account [2]. In the same survey, 87% refused to go to the Jobcentre for help or financial information as it was considered a “no-go area” [2]. Missing out on learning how to manage money at home or in school, not having the luxury to learn from financial mistakes, and the lack of support with finances means that financial education is necessary for YP leaving care.

1.1. Missing Out on Financial Socialisation

Financial education and subsequent growth of financial literacy is lacking for YP leaving care. This shortfall is due to the lack of financial socialisation provided in school and at home, as a result of disruptions or exclusions from learning [3,4,5]. For example, children in care are three times more likely to be excluded for a school term and twice as likely to be excluded permanently from school compared to their peers [4]. Kinship carers (i.e. carers who are friends or family of the child’s parents) have also been associated with financial difficulties and socioeconomic deprivation. Kinship carers may hide these problems from the YP in their care and may also struggle to deliver appropriate financial education to the YP [6]. YP leaving care therefore often have limited opportunities to be educated about managing and saving money [6]. The lack of such skills can have a detrimental impact on the transition out of care.



YP leaving care often have limited opportunities to be educated about managing and saving money.

1.2. Financial Mistakes Can Be Detrimental

YP in/leaving care often do not have the luxury to learn from their financial mistakes. A single financial error may cause significant issues such as homelessness ([Section 4](#)), being in debt to payday lenders, food insecurity, and/or bailiffs. A study by The Centre for Social Justice reported that more than 50% of YP with care experience in the UK struggle to manage their money [7]. Furthermore, 33% of YP with care experience in the UK are in debt [7], with 28% of those owing more than £5000 [3]. Financial education may help reduce these percentages.



More than 50% of YP with care experience in the UK struggle to manage their money.

YP leaving care do not always have reliable and consistent financial support to help them get back on their feet. Nor do these YP have consistent and dependable mentors focused on their finances. Moreover, many YP in care experience events in their childhood that negatively affect their mental and physical wellbeing, leading to devastating consequences for their education [8]. It therefore comes as no surprise that YP leaving care are more prone to financial difficulties and falling into debt than their peers [9].

1.3. Lack of Quality Financial Education by LAs

YP leaving care are less likely to have received adequate financial education than their peers. In contrast, YP leaving care are more likely to require financial advice, partly because they often become independent at a younger age than their peers. Leaving care signals the transition from minimal financial responsibility to complete financial freedom with limited support and financial aid.

Government guidance for how to prepare YP for leaving care states that LAs should place emphasis at an early stage on financial education and literacy [10]. The guidance states that pathway plans must address “the young person’s financial capabilities and money management capacity, along with strategies to develop the young person’s skills in this area” [10]. This Government guidance clearly highlights the importance of financial education.

Despite Government guidance, financial education is not always available or accessible to YP leaving care. In a study of 111 LAs across the UK, almost half (46.8%) did not provide any financial education to their YP beyond what is provided by PAs [9]. PAs therefore need the skills, knowledge and capacity to provide appropriate financial education to YP leaving care. In a study by the Children’s Society, YP with care experience said they would have appreciated more financial support and education before leaving care [9]. These YP stated that they had to work out their financial responsibilities independently since their LAs did not prepare them. In many cases, YP leaving care understood the concept of bills but did not know practically how to pay them [9]. LAs should ensure their YP have sufficient financial literacy before they leave care.

1.4. Lack of Support with Finances

Financial support for YP leaving care often comes in the form of crisis management. This is where the LA steps in to help YP when they may be already in financial hardship. Crisis management does not usually prevent future financial difficulties; it is a temporary solution. Crisis management may come in the form of a discretionary fund, food packages, paying for essential good, or emergency housing. Although such support is required in times of need, crisis management does not address the underlying issues which led to financial hardship in the first place. LAs should approach the financial needs of YP leaving care holistically and attempt to implement preventative measures. In this way, LAs could better understand why financial hardship is more common among YP leaving care than their peers and focus on dealing with the underlying issues.

YP leaving care are entitled to a variety of grants and benefits. It is a statutory requirement for LAs to provide a weekly allowance to their YP aged 16 to 17 and living in semi-independent or supported housing. This allowance must be equal to at least the benefit

rates. Weekly allowance is given regardless of additional incomes YP may receive (e.g. wages, education grant, training allowance) but these benefits are discontinued when YP turn age 18. Once YP leaving care turn 18 years old they are eligible for different benefits but they are expected to have financial responsibility for themselves. Such benefits can include Housing Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, Council Tax support (Section 5), Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance. YP leaving care are entitled to grants such as the Setting Up Home Allowance (also known as the Leaving Care Grant). This grant is a maximum sum of £2000 given by CCC to YP leaving care. Unfortunately, grants often arrive as a lump sum without accompanying guidance, a difficult management task for YP transitioning into independence. In addition, being dependent on Universal Credit may be problematic as it is paid monthly rather than weekly and may lead to budgeting issues. LAs therefore have to work closely with YP leaving care to ensure they will be able to manage their budget to make the money to last the month. Management of money in adulthood requires a combination of skills, experience, and knowledge. These attributes must be developed before YP leave care.

1.5. Financial Difficulties in Cambridgeshire

YP leaving care in Cambridgeshire face an array of financial and emotional obstacles during their transition to adulthood. Nine out of 10 respondents in our 2020 survey were concerned about their finances. These obstacles may make YP financially vulnerable (Section 1.2, 5, 8). While responses to the 2020 survey should not be taken as representative of the experiences of all of CCC's YP, responses highlighted various financial pressures faced by YP including job loss, housing, renting, and running a car. Four out of the eight respondents to this question struggled in general with money, with one YP struggling with everyday life and paying off debt. Another respondent was struggling with bills and Universal Credit. One YP admitted that the biggest financial pressure they face is that they cannot budget or value money.



9 out of 10 respondents to the 2020 survey are concerned about their finances.

Over half of the 11 participants in CCC's 2019 survey had fallen behind with payments in either Council Tax, water/utility bills, or accommodation costs. Although there were a limited number of participants in both the 2019 and 2020 surveys, they were nonetheless instrumental for gauging some of the financial struggles facing YP leaving care in Cambridgeshire.

CCC's 2019 Ofsted report stated that there was a lack of support/preparation for children and YP in care to become independent. Ofsted stated:

“Work to prepare children in care and care leavers for independence is not strong. Most pathway plans do not help with this. Many are lengthy but lack a sufficient depth of consideration of young people's needs or aspiration for their futures.”

YP leaving care in CCC require more help to prepare them for their transition into independence. The support given by CCC should be reflected in both the Local Offer and

the Pathway Plan. Good financial education to help minimise debt and improve budgeting is required.

1.6. Local Offer

Budgeting support in the CCC's Local Offer is limited [11]. Money management is only mentioned in the Pathway Plan section of the Local Offer. Advice about loans and financial support are briefly discussed in the Accommodation and Money Matters section respectively.

The Pathway Plan section states that "you can get various financial support, based on your situation and eligibility. You will also discuss budgeting; savings and any money worries you may have" [11]. Your Money is a subsection of the Pathway Plan which is dedicated to assessing how confident an individual is in budgeting, paying bills, dealing with banks, debt and saving as well as assessing the money spent and money received by the YP i.e. wages, housing benefits, other benefits, and student loans or maintenance. The end of the section states that issues with managing a budget should be taken up with your PA. However, in our 2020 survey, only three out of the 10 respondents agreed that their PAs provided them with practical advice to prepare them for independent adulthood. There is no designated course, no tips for improving money management skills and no suggested steps to budget or save money before age 18 to aid the transition into independence.

The Accommodation section of the Local Offer advises against entering a hire purchase agreement or getting a bank loan since repayments can be very high [11]. This advice is given in the context of the Setting Up Home Allowance (or Leaving Care Grant), an amount of up to £2000, which can be provided to YP leaving care for essential items when moving into semi-independent or independent housing. CCC's PAs are responsible for guiding YP leaving care on how to use the grant effectively. There is no section or subsection in the Local Offer designated to money management and budgeting. There are also no relevant courses offered or links to freely available resources that could strengthen an individual's financial education.

The Money Matters section of CCC's Local Offer provides brief details on the financial support available to YP with care experience aged 16 to 17 and 18 to 25 [11]. The process of claiming benefits, a link to the relevant section of the Government website, and a benefits calculator are given. There are brief sections on discounts, health costs, identification documents, birthday payments and Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority Payments (CICA).

CCC does not give details of the full extent to which financial support is available to its YP. For example, CCC has an initiative in which YP leaving care, whose Universal Credit payments are delayed, are given the equivalent amount of funding. This initiative is not mentioned in the Local Offer, despite CCC's statutory duty to present any services or support offered to its YP in the Local Offer.

1.7. Government Inquiry

An inquiry undertaken by the All-Party Parliamentary Group found that financial education is one of the key obstacles facing YP in the transition from care to independence. Following the inquiry, a report was published in 2019 about the importance of financial education [3,8]. This report was based on evidence provided by 25 organisations, two sessions with key

stakeholders, and oral evidence provided by a group of YP with care experience. It details practical and concrete policy recommendations to improve financial education for YP in/leaving care. The report's recommendations, discussed below, emphasise the roles that government, schools and organisations should play to improve access to financial education for YP in/leaving care.

1.7.1. Financial Education should be High Priority in the Development of Local Offers and Pathway Plans

LAs have a duty to provide a Local Offer for YP with care experience that clearly informs YP where they can access information and support about money management. The report stated that life skills, including financial education, should be a key part of the provisions given by Leaving Care teams to YP leaving care. There should be specific goals and action points outlined by PAs and on the pathway plan. Both children in care and YP leaving care should be given multiple opportunities to access financial information, education and support. This is important to allow YP to learn at their own pace and in a way which suits them.

1.7.2. Requirement of Support Workers to Receive Training in Financial Education

The report revealed that PAs and social workers often do not have the skills or confidence to teach money management skills to YP in/leaving care. This is despite current guidance which requires PAs to have knowledge of sources of financial support for YP leaving care. The requirement for PAs to be trained in providing money management skills was also highlighted in a Government report (2016) called *Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence* [12]. This report stated:

“It is crucial that personal advisers are able to give care leavers good quality information about managing their money, from budgeting to paying bills on time. Through our review of the personal advisor role, we will consider how we can best ensure that personal advisers are equipped to carry out this role”.

Central Government should require all social workers, PAs and children's home staff that work with YP in/leaving care to be trained in delivering financial education. The report recommended that in the interim LAs should encourage and support such staff to voluntarily obtain these skills.

2. Current Interventions

2.1. Cambridgeshire's Geographical Neighbours

Cambridgeshire's geographical neighbours include five County Councils: Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council, Essex County Council, Central Bedfordshire County Council, and Hertfordshire County Council. All of Cambridgeshire's geographical neighbours have a designated section in their Local Offer for budgeting and money management advice (Table 1).

Table 1. Local Offer budgeting support offered by CCC geographical neighbours for YP with care experience.

County Council	Local Offer Budgeting Support
Central Bedfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile App co-produced with YP with care experience with a Managing Money section. • Managing Money: explains the importance of money management, how to start budgeting, how to open a bank account, and detailed explanation about which bills you have to pay and what they are (i.e. rent, utility bills, Council Tax, telecom bills, TV license, insurance, service charges ground rent, and parking).
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Youth Adviser within the Leaving Care Team can help with a course that teaches independent living skills. • Designated money advice website page covering: Leaving Care Grant, claiming benefits, tips on managing debt, links to useful resources (e.g. Step Change, CAP UK, National Debt Line, Debt Advice Foundation, Money Advice Trust, Money Advice Service, and Citizen’s Advice). • Updated Finance Handbook (PDF format) which covers in detail all the financial benefits a YP leaving care can access from age 16 to 24.
Hertfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated money management website page covering: banking (e.g. how to open a bank account, pros/cons of credit cards, and links to designated pages on Citizen’s Advice), budgeting, tips for saving money, bills, and debt (e.g. link to Money Advice Service).
Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated money and budgeting advice page with a link to the Money Support Service available at Norfolk County Council and a link to a budget planner tool. • Money Support Service: budgeting training, help with money advice, support on how to reduce bills, and links to useful resources (e.g. Money Advice Service, Citizen’s Advice, National Debt Line, National Debt Advice, Step Change, and Debt Tester).
Suffolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated website including My Money which contains resources on how to look after your money and savings (e.g. Money for Life, Money Saving Expert, Young Enterprise).

- Website pages: Junior ISAs and how to use them, how to manage money and debt (e.g. Money Advice Service and National Debt Line), and how to deal with gambling and gaming.
- Designated activities within the Pathway Plan to develop independence such as managing and budgeting of personal finances, paying bills, meal planning, and shopping.
- Updated leaving care financial policy (PDF format) which outlines in detail the financial responsibilities of the County Council to YP leaving care.

2.2. Cambridgeshire’s Statistical Neighbours

CCC’s closest statistical neighbour is Oxfordshire County Council [13]. In collaboration with Metro Bank and the Care Leaver Covenant, Oxfordshire County Council has set up a pilot study to understand the needs of YP leaving care when it comes to money management and setting up a bank account. Metro Bank has committed to helping YP leaving care open cash accounts, current accounts, and saving accounts. Through the pilot, the only requirement to set up one of these accounts at Metro Bank is a letter from the LA and a telephone call for verification rather than ID, which YP leaving care do not always have. Metro Bank is also piloting money management sessions to help YP leaving care understand how to use a bank and how to budget. Metro Banks, such as those in Oxfordshire, have an assigned representative specifically for YP leaving care to help them with any issues.

2.3. Other County Councils

There are a number of other County Councils that have employed various methods to support the financial education of YP leaving care (Table 2). Kent County Council’s peer to peer model has also been suggested by University of Edinburgh researchers following consultation with YP with care experience, money advice services, and organisations working with YP in/leaving care. A potential barrier to the peer to peer scheme is recruiting enough YP with care experience to support the initiative [14].

Table 2. Local Offer budgeting support offered by other County Councils for YP with care experience.

County Council	Local Offer Budgeting Support
Cumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and Welfare website page covering: credit unions available in county, welfare, accessing state benefits, debt and borrowing money, types of credit cards, payday lenders, loan sharks (and how to report them), managing your debt, saving money, pension, fraud and scams, types of bills, paying bills (e.g. link to Mix Website), telephone line services charges and mobile phone contracts.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples and detailed explanation of what each part of a bank statement and payslip means. • Access to a freely available budgeting course offered by the Open University. Upon completion, the YP receives badges towards the Council Achievement Scheme. • PDF document outlining all the financial obligations the Council has towards YP leaving care.
Derbyshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living Skills and Tenancy Preparation Workbook: YP and PA work through together and includes a detailed sections on money management to help YP understand their spending habits, as well as key considerations when budgeting and saving money.
Kent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited course: learn how to budget and live independently. • Plans to set up a peer to peer financial mentoring model where YP with care experience can support current YP leaving care and share advice about potential issues, personal budgeting and finances.

2.4. Financial Education Courses

There are a number of financial education courses available to YP leaving care. In the UK, MyBnk and Young Enterprise are two of the key organisations empowering YP to harness their personal and financial skills.

MyBnk delivers a number of award winning workshops to YP aged between 11 and 25. Their workshops focus on topics such as tax, debt, saving, and budgeting. These programmes have been developed by their in-house team in collaboration with industry experts and YP. The survival money management course, Money Works, is particularly relevant to YP leaving care. Money Works is a digital and financial skills workshop tailored to YP transitioning into independent living. The course aims to help YP confront any worries they may have about money. It focuses on four key topics: (i) household costs and budgeting; (ii) sources of income (including information about National Insurance, benefits and Universal Credit); (iii) banking and understanding contracts and tenancy agreements; and (iv) scams, borrowing, and debt. Money Works has won the Children and Young People Now Leaving Care Award.

The Money Works course was examined in an independent year-long impact study [15]. More than 1000 YP leaving care and/or NEET (aged 16 to 25) were involved in the study. The report demonstrated that the average debt of YP who took part in the course dropped by 60%. In comparison, the average debt of YP in the control group grew by 50% (i.e. YP who did not take part in the course). The number of YP who were saving money increased by 23%. Over 50% of YP who took part in the course felt confident to seek specialist advice from organisations such as Citizen Advice or Step Change, compared with only 32% of the control group. Financial confidence increased by 24% with more YP going online to pay their taxes and make transactions. Importantly, overall life satisfaction increased from 37% to

65% (an increase of 28%) among YP who took part in the course. This is higher than the national average of 61%.

Although Money Works provides invaluable skills in financial management, the lack of participation by YP is a key issue. The impact study states that “one of the main challenges with coordinating the Money Works sessions tends to be the number of times than not enough young people turn up to the course” [15]. Lack of interest in participation in such courses is not uncommon among YP with care experience.

YP leaving care have a high sense of self-reliance. Evidence shows that some YP leaving care reject organised help as a way of separating themselves from the care system [16,17]. Other studies have demonstrated that YP leaving care felt ashamed or perceived themselves as lacking self-worth if they asked for help [16,18,19]. Researchers have therefore recommended that PAs should approach their YP with offers of help to tackle this problem. When it comes to financial education, PAs should also approach YP leaving care to offer assistance with any financial issues.

Young Money (part of Young Enterprise) is a national UK charity that believes the most sustainable avenue to financial education is to provide support to individuals involved in educating YP. Young Money have trained over 1,247 educators on how to deliver effective financial education classes. Although the majority of training provided by Young Money is delivered to teachers, training is also given to practitioners working with vulnerable YP. The aim of the training is to provide practitioners with the tools, skills, and confidence to convey what they have learned to the YP they support. Training for practitioners comes in the form of regional training events or through support given to organisations that work with vulnerable YP.

3. Recommendations

CCC requires a more systematic and uniform approach to financial education for its YP leaving care. Financial education should focus on common issues faced by this group across their lives, including: (i) which bills should be prioritised; (ii) and importance of good budgeting and regular savings. Courses such as Money Works demonstrate that by equipping YP leaving care with financial knowledge, these YP can successfully apply these skills in everyday life.

While the CCC provides some support for financial education in its Local Offer and Pathway Plan, minimal support with money management and budgeting is given to YP in/leaving care. CCC should implement policy recommendations focused on helping its YP gain adequate skills and confidence managing money to support their transition into independence.

- 1) Create a designated money and budgeting page in the CCC Local Offer which guides YP in/leaving care to available financial services and courses as well as charity or private based support.
 - a. CCC’s website should be updated and include available services and courses designated for money management and debt information.
 - b. A PDF or mobile application should be created which provides information on all the financial benefits available to YP leaving care.
- 2) PAs, social workers, and children’s care home staff should have more thorough training and guidance to provide financial education.

- a. Training should be focused on how to effectively provide advice on money management, budgeting, saving and spending to YP leaving care.
 - b. Clear guidance should be given to these workers to follow when providing financial education to YP leaving care.
- 3) Pathway Plans for YP in care should have a specific section dedicated to YP developing the knowledge and skills required for independent living.

4. Implementation of Recommendations

Although the recommendations are focused primarily on the financial education of YP leaving care, financial education and good budgeting habits should start from an early age. No single solution will resolve the lack of effective financial education for YP leaving care. As stated by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Financial Education for Young People [8]: “Intervention needs to take place at multiple levels to ensure that children in care are provided with opportunities to acquire the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes to manage their money. Concrete commitments from central Government, LAs, foster carers, charities and business are required.”

Financial skills can help mitigate or prevent financial hardship but no amount of budgeting can help individuals on low incomes with bills to pay. It is key, therefore, that YP leaving care have financial security in addition to financial education. As a Corporate Parent, CCC must take all the necessary steps to prevent YP leaving care from financial hardship.

5. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

By implementing these recommendations, CCC commits to improving financial education among YP leaving care. These individuals would benefit by having a clearer idea of what to expect when they transition into independence and understand how to budget and manage their money. Financial independence would help to build self-confidence and self-worth.

A failure to provide financial education to YP leaving care may cause individuals to make uninformed decisions about money and budgeting. Poor financial management can have detrimental effects to YP leaving care throughout their adult life. If YP leaving care do not know how to manage money they are more likely to fall into debt or financial hardship, possibly resulting in homelessness. MyBnk demonstrated that for every £1 spent on their Money Works course, £5.57 in social value was produced, with the financial/social return increasing over time [15]. Therefore, the benefit of providing financial education to YP leaving care far outweighs the cost.

Unexpected financial hardship among YP with care experience would be costly for CCC. CCC would have to provide financial aid to temporarily remove individuals from difficult situations. CCC’s YP would also remain more dependent on LA handouts and support. A lack of financial education leaves individuals vulnerable to repeated cycles of financial hardship and instability.

6. Summary

YP leaving care face many barriers during the transition from care into independence. It is no surprise that many YP leaving care feel unprepared for financial independence. Financial education is a key skill to have for all YP. It is particularly important for YP leaving care as they often do not have familial support networks to fall back on. An inability to manage money can result in financial hardship for the YP and higher support costs for CCC. CCC should thus invest in preventative measures, such as providing financial education for its YP before they leave care.

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Section Eight. Mental Health

Overview

The mental health of YP leaving care is of particular concern. Poor mental health can affect all aspects of a YP's life. The council needs to do more to improve the mental health of YP leaving care. Insufficient recognition of mental health needs, lack of mental health support and insufficient support networks are barriers to achieving good mental health for many YP leaving care.

As a Corporate Parent, LAs are responsible for the mental and physical health needs of the YP in their care. Improved mental health would be beneficial in the eyes of Ofsted who measure how well the council supports its YP in their transition, and monitor figures for EET.

Key recommendations

- **Embed a mental health professional within the Leaving Care Team.**
 - **Develop mental health training following Mental Health First Aid England guidelines.**
 - **Create a clear guide to accessing mental health services.**
-

1. Introduction

1.1. Mental Health in Cambridgeshire

Mental health is a national and local concern. In 2020, CCC has listed mental health as one of its potential priority areas [1]. The GP recorded prevalence of mental health conditions as a whole are generally lower in Cambridgeshire than the national average [1]. However, rates of emergency admission to hospital for self-harm are significantly higher across Cambridgeshire (243.5 per 100,000) compared to the national average (193.4 per 100,000), and rates have been at a relatively high level over time [1]. In addition, Cambridgeshire has higher recorded prevalence of serious mental illness (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other psychoses) than the national average and Fenland has higher recorded prevalence of depression (Table 1) [1]. Moreover, rates of claimants for Employment Support Allowance for mental and behavioural disorders are increasing across Cambridgeshire and England. Rates of claimants are significantly worse than national levels (27.3 per 1,000) in Peterborough (29.0 per 1,000) and Fenland (30.3 per 1,000) [1]. Work across Cambridgeshire and England is required to reduce the burden of mental health conditions.

Table 1. Prevalence of mental health conditions in 2018/2019.

District area	Number of people (%)	
	Serious mental illness	Depression
Cambridge	2,079 (1.1)	12,186 (7.3)
East Cambridgeshire	616 (0.7)	7,097 (10.3)
Fenland	784 (0.7)	11,417 (12.1)
Huntingdonshire	1,333 (0.7)	15,029 (10.4)
South Cambridgeshire	1,094 (0.8)	10,167 (9.4)
Peterborough	1,935 (0.9)	15,652 (9.1)
Cambridgeshire	5,906 (0.8)	55,896 (9.6)
England	570,675 (1.0)	5,077,090 (10.7)

1.2. Mental Health Problems Begin in Early Life

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, good mental and physical health must be achieved before psychological and self-fulfilment needs can be met. When applying this principle to YP with care experience, prevention and treatment of mental health disorders should be a priority. This is particularly pertinent given that YP in/leaving care are over-represented in mental health statistics [2].

The majority of mental health problems are established before YP leave care. Approximately 50% of mental health conditions are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24 [3]. Around 19,340 (13%) YP aged five to 19 in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have at least one mental health disorder and 17% of YP aged 17 to 19 have experienced a mental disorder [1].

YP leaving care in Cambridgeshire recognise the importance of mental health. Seven out of the 10 respondents to our 2020 survey were concerned about their mental health. Specific information about the mental health of YP with care experience is difficult to find.



7 of the 10 respondents to the 2020 survey were concerned about their mental health.

YP who enter care are a vulnerable group that may be at particularly high risk of developing mental health disorders. Prior to entering the care system, many YP in care are exposed to higher levels of childhood adversity than the rest of the population, with many experiencing the “toxic trio” of parental domestic violence, substance misuse, and mental illness [4]. In addition, the number of UASC in care, a group with complex mental health needs, has been increasing in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ([Section 2 Part 3.6](#)) [5]. Childhood adversity is one of the most robust risk factors for mental health disorders. In addition, family history of mental health disorders and prior experience of mental health problems are both associated with higher risk for subsequent mental health problems. Given their relatively higher risk for mental health disorders, the Corporate Parent should place the mental health of YP in/leaving care at the top of their priorities. Indeed, the earlier a mental health problem is identified and treated, the faster the recovery process is likely to be.



50% of YP in care have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

Once in care, nationally around 25% of YP are bullied for being in care, 50% have a diagnosable mental health disorder, 80% experience depression, and 90% experience low self-esteem [6-9]. In 2019, the emotional wellbeing of YP in care in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was a cause for concern in around 41% and 38% of cases respectively [10]. Poor mental health can contribute to an unstable care journey and subsequent difficulties across the lifespan. An unstable and unsupported care journey costs an additional £22,415 per person per year than a stable and well-supported care journey [11]. Supporting YP in/leaving care is therefore beneficial for both the individual and the care system.



An unstable and unsupported care journey costs an additional £22,415 per person per year than a stable and well-supported care journey.

1.3. Mental Health during the Transition from Care to Independent Living

The transition from care into independence is a time of upheaval and disruption for many individuals. In the UK, YP with care experience often have poorer mental health outcomes than their peers [12]. Over 25% of YP experience a mental health crisis after leaving care [13]. Even more alarming is that YP with care experience are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers [14]. Poor mental health affects multiple aspects of life for many YP with care experience and it can limit their ability to function independently. For example, serious mental health conditions condemn many YP with care experience to homelessness or increasingly limited housing options ([Section 2, 4](#)). Without proper support, the mental health of YP in care is unlikely to improve and may even get worse after leaving the care system.

Many YP in care have aspirations but mental health is a major barrier to achieving their goals. In our 2020 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to express their personal goals in free text sections, and respondents explained how they sought happiness, safe housing, employment, education and other personal passions. However, some respondents noted mental health and low self-confidence as a key barrier to achieving their goals. One of the main reasons YP with care experience struggle to engage with EET is due to mental health issues ([Section 6](#)) [2]. Mental health should be recognised as a key barrier to YP engaging with EET [2]. In addition to improving the quality of life of YP with care experience, better mental health support may also increase engagement with EET.

2. Current Interventions

2.1. Central Government Guidance

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) requires all LAs to publish a Local Offer for its YP leaving care ([Section 1 Part 1.4](#)). Central Government provides guidance for LAs on how to present their Local Offer. The guidance states that the Health and Wellbeing section of a Local Offer should include details of “services that teach about, support and enable good health and wellbeing. It should include links to, or information about, universal health services that might be particularly relevant to YP with care experience, as well as specific health and wellbeing services targeted at them” [15]. See Box 1 for the central Government template for the Health and Wellbeing section of the Local Offer.

Below are some of the ways our care leaving team and your personal adviser can support you to stay healthy and look after your physical and mental health. We can:

- Give you information on healthy living
- Give you information on getting help to pay for prescriptions
- Support you to register with a GP
- Support you to move from CAMHS to adult services
- Give you information about counselling services that are available locally
- Give you help with transport costs when attending health appointments
- If you are a young parent, we will support you to do the best for them. We will help you arrange childcare, if this is what you want.
- Offer free or subsidised access to the leisure centres we run
- Give you information about health drop-in centres
- Work with you to develop a 'health passport' containing key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current health needs.

Box 1. Central Government template for the Health and Wellbeing section of the Local Offer.

2.2. Local Offers

Limited mental health pledges in Local Offers appear to be a widespread issue across England, despite mental health being a major issue for YP with care experience. The government local offer template should not be the only mental health support offered to YP leaving care, yet 13 county councils (54% of all county councils) do not go beyond this template. These councils are: Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Warwickshire, West Sussex, and Worcestershire. Peterborough (Unitary Authority/City Council) also do not go beyond the template. Given that the Government recommendations require YP to demonstrate active help-seeking behaviour, which may not be realistic, these Councils should think holistically about how they can better support the mental health of their YP leaving care. While our survey of YP should not be taken as representative of the views of all of CCC's YP, seven out of the ten respondents felt that CCC did not focus on issues relevant to them.

A number of County Councils offer more mental health support to YP leaving care than CCC (Table 2). Staffordshire and North Yorkshire County Councils offered the most additional support to YP leaving care, followed by Cumbria, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. Most of these Councils continue to offer in-house mental health services to YP once they have left care.

Table 2. Mental health support in County Council Local Offers for YP with care experience.

County Council	Local Offer Health and Wellbeing Support
Cambridgeshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary access during COVID-19 pandemic to clinician to help with referral procedure
Cumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital badge for mental health to show to landlords or employers • Health and Wellbeing Coaches service run by the council
Devon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still able to contact Specialist Nurses for YP in Care above age 18
East Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing support beyond age 18 by Specialist Nurses within Through Care Service and involving Adult Social Care if necessary
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Coordinator in Leaving Care Team offers counselling and advice
Lancashire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from Looked After Children Nurse up to age 24
Lincolnshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At One Wellbeing Project provides mental health interventions between age 18 and 24 • Wellbeing Service for age 18+ to assist with personal wellbeing goals
North Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified Clinical Psychologists provide mental health support in collaboration with Leaving Care Case Worker • Family Group Conference Worker to help identify people who can give support • North Yorkshire Mental Health Helpline
Northamptonshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing Wednesday sessions every month • Crisis Cafes drop-in sessions for under/over 18s in crisis or in need of help with mental health
Staffordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mental health support with partner Sustain+ up to age 25 • In-house Adult Services for assessment of needs beyond age 18 • Drop-in service for YP with care experience
Suffolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Emotional Health and Wellbeing Hub containing Emotional Wellbeing Practitioners up to age 25
Surrey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Practitioner to support all aspects of health within Care Leaver Team

Another Local Offer of note is from Trafford Council [16]. The Trafford Council Local Offer includes access to Talkshop, part of Trafford Council's Youth Engagement Service. Talkshop is a specialist service where YP in/leaving care aged 13 to 25 can receive support from Youth Workers with issues such as family breakdowns and common mental health problems. The Trafford Transitions Team also contains one social worker and a Mental Health and Wellbeing Worker.

Most County Councils signpost to local or national charities that provide independent mental health services for YP with care experience. In Cambridgeshire, a number of local mental health services are signposted on the Keep Your Head website [17]. Most of these services operate via self-referral and are available up to age 25. For example, Kooth is a free online mental wellbeing community with a space designed specifically for children and YP [18]. Barnardo's offer ongoing support and counselling after YP leave care [19]. Become also offers a free life coaching programme designed to support YP with care experience with both practical and emotional challenges [20]. Catch22, a charity specialising in youth services, supports the direct delivery of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and aims to improve the transition into adult services for YP with care experience [21]. The Care Leavers' Association focuses on increasing the voice of YP with care experience by establishing regional forums in London, Birmingham, and Manchester, and establishing a virtual social network [22].

King's Fund previously provided a two-year grant of £70,000 to Lewisham to bring mental health services to YP with care experience [23]. The project was a partnership between Lewisham Council, NHS Trust, and other organisations and consisted of a community psychiatric nurse or social worker holding regular drop-in sessions for YP with care experience. YP with care experience were also trained to act as mentors or advocates for other YP leaving care. These services all offer important mental health support to YP leaving care, and while Councils, such as CCC, jointly commission initiatives with the voluntary sector, more can be done in this area.



As a Corporate Parent, the mental health of YP with care experience is the responsibility of CCC.

2.3. Local Transformation Plans

Local Transformation Plans (LTPs) set out how local services will invest resources to improve the mental health of YP in that area. LTPs involve a variety of professionals from across the NHS, public health, children's services in LAs, education and youth justice as well as YP and their families [24].

Out of the 25 County Council LTPs, 24% do not mention the mental health needs of YP in/leaving care. These councils are: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority [25], Cumbria, Kent, Lancashire, Norfolk and West Sussex. North Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire have made the greatest commitment to YP leaving care (Table 3). In addition, the Lincolnshire LTP was also highlighted in Barnardo's 'Neglected Minds' report for taking the mental health of YP with care experience seriously [13].

Table 3. Mental health support in County Council LTPs for YP with care experience.

County Council	LTP Commitments to YP With Care Experience
Derbyshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Kooth up to age 25 • Trauma-Informed Service for children in care identified as having deteriorating mental health from April 2020
Devon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen individuals in care for mental health needs
East Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFT provides mental health nursing direct in the YP with care experience' Team
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority access for looked after children to mental health assessments by specialist practitioners in Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service
Gloucestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempting to fully embed revised pathway of mental health support for children in care
Hampshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialised psychological assessment of individuals known to the Children in Care Mental Health Service
Hertfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Leaver Support Worker to improve interface of YP leaving care with Mental Health Services
Leicestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YP's Health Team for looked after children and other vulnerable groups • Mistle Project provides some post-placement psychological services to YP aged 16 to 20
Lincolnshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Kooth up to age 25 • Healthy Minds Lincolnshire Service up to age 25 focuses on early intervention and fast tracking assessment and treatment for YP in/leaving care
North Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Wrong Door support service including Clinical Psychologist • Partner in Practice support YP leaving care up to age 25 • Voice, Influence and Participation Team facilitates opportunities for children and YP in/leaving care to express views on services
Northamptonshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempting to make LAC Health Service that includes specialist mental health team accessible for YP leaving care
Nottinghamshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition Lead to support YP in care with mental health needs during transition to adulthood and transfer to adult services • Personal Budget for YP leaving care to support their emotional wellbeing and mental health • You Know Your Mind Project for YP leaving care age 18 to 25 who are experiencing poor or deteriorating mental health
Oxfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSCA Service provides mental health interventions to YP leaving care up to age 25
Somerset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somerset Children in Care and YP with care experience Health and Wellbeing Group
Staffordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Leaver Ambassador to support children in care
Suffolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment of CONNECT Service, a therapeutic service for

	children in care, to include YP leaving care up to age 25
Surrey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist Mental Health Practitioner within Care Leaver Team • YP who have left care represented in presentation about self-harm to YP with care experience Team
Warwickshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand CAMHS LAC Service to YP leaving care to age 25
Worcestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YP who have left care included in Young Commissioners group to evaluate Mental Health Services

YP in Cambridgeshire do have access to Kooth and had access to drop-in clinics at Centre 33 before the pandemic. Advertising these services is not permitted on Pathways4Us, leaving it down to PAs to remember which services are available locally as well as to YP to feel comfortable discussing mental health issues with their PAs. Given the nationally recognised higher incidence of serious mental ill-health among YP leaving care, it is clearly very important that PAs are confident in talking about mental health issues and have access to the necessary specialist support. Respondents to our 2020 survey, while not representative, said that they did not find that this was always the case.

3. Key Barriers

The mental health of YP in/leaving care was classified by Ofsted as an area that needs improvement [26]. Based on the available evidence, a number of problems contribute to the poor mental health and coping abilities of many YP leaving care, including (i) insufficient recognition of mental health needs, (ii) lack of mental health support, and (iii) insufficient support networks.

3.1. Insufficient Recognition of Mental Health Needs

Despite the high prevalence of mental health conditions among YP in/leaving care, any existing mental health support stops when CCC's YP transition to independent living [7]. A report issued by Care Leavers Association at the end of a three year project found that the health and wellbeing needs of YP with care experience are largely ignored [7]. Information about individual mental health needs is not always passed on to Leaving Care Teams and YP are not always aware of how to access relevant services [13]. If mental health needs are therefore not handled early enough they may become critical.

The divide between District and County Councils may perpetuate the insufficient recognition of mental health needs. Disconnect between the two-tiers makes it easy to shift accountability onto other teams or services. In addition to the remit of the NHS, the District Councils and County Council have a responsibility to vulnerable people. At the District level, this responsibility is in the form of Community Safety Partnerships, which feed into many areas where LAs are audited/assessed and both tiers have to spend more to fix the problems not being addressed by mental health support. The divide between District and

County Councils may perpetuate the insufficient recognition of mental health needs. Disconnect between the two-tiers makes it easy to shift accountability onto other teams or services. In addition to the remit of the NHS, the District Councils and County Council have a responsibility to vulnerable people. At the District level, this responsibility is in the form of Community Safety Partnerships, which feed into many areas where LAs are audited/assessed and both tiers have to spend more to fix the problems not being addressed by mental health support. With CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services overwhelmed, more responsibility by the LAs must be taken. The disjointed approach to the mental health needs of YP with care experience may therefore result in missed opportunities, delays, and inefficiencies in spending and service delivery. The District/County Council divide is therefore an important barrier to effective and timely mental health support.



Both the District Councils and County Council have a responsibility to vulnerable people.

3.2. Lack of Mental Health Support

Mental health support is often lacking, partly due to failures in mental health training for carers. Many LAs fail to equip foster and residential carers with the knowledge and skills needed to support children and YP in care with mental health conditions [28]. In addition, professionals working with YP leaving care may lack expertise in mental health [13]. In Cambridgeshire, the Clinical Team (comprising clinicians) leads training for foster carers and offers consultation to PAs and social workers. Social workers also receive some training in mental health. However, it is always possible to offer more and better training. While the Clinical Team will discuss issues with PAs or social workers, it can be difficult for the information to be properly understood and fed back to the YP, leading to disconnect between trained specialists and vulnerable YP.

Mental health services often fail to meet the specific mental health needs of YP leaving care. King's Fund research showed that YP who leave LA care are at an increased risk of mental health problems and that traditional services let them down [23]. There is currently a 16 week waiting list for NHS Mental Health Services, although in reality it is far longer. Many individuals transitioning out of care are too old to receive support from CAMHS, which tends to operate with a cut-off point of 18 years old, and lack a specific mental health diagnosis required to access adult mental health services [13]. CAMHS tier three and four does exist for the support and treatment of complex mental health needs but clearly these types of services are not appropriate for everyone. In addition, some YP in/leaving care may require a long period of time before they feel ready to engage in any form of therapeutic interventions.

Mental health services are diagnosis driven, which conflicts with the fact that many YP in/leaving care have mental health needs that do not present as a discrete difficulty. CAMHS also refuses to see YP without a stable placement or they delay access to their services until a placement becomes permanent [28]. YP who took part in our 2020 survey were concerned with the lack of mental health support, particularly after age 18. Issues with drug and alcohol use further complicate the process of receiving care [13]. The inflexibility of national mental health services means that many YP leaving care with mental health needs are not currently receiving any statutory service [13]. A dedicated Clinical Team within LAs can help address this issue.

There is a gap in national mental health services which presents significant challenges, but there are things that Corporate Parents can do to help bridge this gap. The DfE New Care Leaver Covenant Board is looking at how to support councils to employ adolescent mental health workers in every leaving care team in the country. The Cambridgeshire Local Offer states that YP in care will be given priority access to a temporary mental health clinician, although the clinician can only really offer support with referrals to other services [29]. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough reported that YP leaving care are often frustrated by the lack of mental health support but can be resistant to support when offered it; the YP may feel they want someone to support them but are also uncomfortable with talking about their experiences. While the views expressed in the 2020 survey do not represent all of Cambridgeshire's YP, in their comments, some YP living independently expressed concerns about mental health provision.

3.3. Insufficient Support Networks

Effective support networks may help mitigate some of the psychological effects of transitioning from care to independent living. The sudden loss of a support network and the associated isolation can lead to a lack of emotional and psychological readiness to leave care [27]. The Social Care Institute for Excellence report was written with substantial input from YP leaving care. The YP were clear that they wanted a holistic approach to their support network, support to develop self-care strategies, and a clear process for how to access mental health and emotional wellbeing support [4]. Currently, pathways to mental health support in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are precarious. For example, relying on YP being able to answer the phone to access support. There are no clearly defined pathways through which YP can reach the mental health support they need. Providing support to YP in out-of-county placements is particularly difficult due to a lack of communication between councils. Ensuring the YP are surrounded by strong support networks may increase trust and uptake of support services.

Prevention of mental health issues and early intervention are more effective strategies than risk-based management. Support networks can play an important role in early intervention. For example, the Neighbourhood Cares Pilot, based on the Buurtzorg model of care, was recently tested in Cambridgeshire [30]. Early intervention in the community is at the centre of the Buurtzorg model of care. The pilot was tested in Soham and St Ives on a combined population of 10,000 people. The pilot helped prevent the escalation of needs and

contributed to an improved quality of life for participants. Extending this model to mental health in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough could lead to beneficial outcomes such as improved mental health of YP leaving care, greater engagement in EET, and better support networks in the community.

Mental health support networks are vital for ensuring that YP leaving care are able to cope with and receive help for pre-existing mental health conditions as well as boosting aspirations and quality of life. Yet the present lack of mental health support means that the first decade of adult life for YP leaving care is often disrupted, unstable, and troubled. While effort has been made to increase signposting to mental health services as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, this is insufficient for many YP leaving care.

4. Recommendations

A refocusing of priorities is needed. Without mental health support, the implementation of other recommendations will fail. We suggest the following recommendations, covering systems, training, expertise and support, to improve the psychological aspects of the transition from care into independent living.

4.1. Priority Recommendations

- 1) Create a clear and well-advertised guide to accessing available mental health services including charity-based support.
 - a. Update the council website to improve access to relevant information.
 - b. Create a downloadable app or a PDF file that can be sent to all YP in/leaving care with all the relevant details from the Local Offer and clickable links to support services/other initiatives. At the very least a leaflet should be given to YP in/leaving care with signposting to local and national mental health services.
 - c. Create a defined pathway through which YP can access mental health support depending on their age/stage within care. This should include clarity around the transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services.
- 2) Develop a comprehensive training programme covering mental health first aid and up-to-date research on childhood adversity and mental health for the Leaving Care Team, PAs and foster/residential carers.
 - a. Develop a programme in collaboration with MHFA England and local NHS clinicians and/or university researchers.
 - b. Ensure members of the leaving care team complete mental health first aid training as a requirement of their role.
 - c. Offer refresher training sessions.
 - d. Intensify mental health training for foster and residential carers (current training is too basic).

- 3) Employ a senior, designated mental health professional with expertise in the diagnosis/treatment of mental health conditions and awareness of broader risk factors common in YP in/leaving care.
 - a. Embed mental health workers within Leaving Care Team to deliver a range of emotional wellbeing and self-development interventions.

4.2. Secondary Recommendations

- 1) Adult Social Care should assess YP in care before they leave to identify the support the YP will need once they are living independently. Adult Social Care can then make recommendations and put support in place or refer them for more advanced support before the YP leaves care.
- 2) Change the language that is used to describe these YP. “Care leavers” is somewhat dehumanising and should be replaced with more person-centred language such as “YP with care experience” or “YP leaving care”.
- 3) Encourage communication between councils regarding mental health support for YP in out-of-county placements.
 - a. Relevant councils along with YP should create a plan for how to provide mental health provisions to YP in an out-of-county placements.
 - b. Discussions or developments outlined by the Eastern Region Leaving Care Network should be included in the guide issued to YP in care so if they look to move out-of-county they know what to expect and how to access services
- 4) Where it is safe to do so, regulated visits with family members may be beneficial for the mental health of YP in/leaving care. For example, set up Family Group Conferencing with the local charity Break.
- 5) Establish feedback sessions with YP to give them space to express their concerns and for the council to learn how to improve from their experiences of the care system. For example, bring councillors from the Corporate Parenting Committee to YP Participation Forums.
- 6) Lobby at the national level to increase mental health of YP leaving care as a priority.
 - a. Development of YP leaving care-specific services aimed at those who slip through the gap of CAMHS and IAPT mental health services.
 - b. Ability to allow YP to remain in care past age 18 if this is this most appropriate solution for the individual in an effort to accommodate personal readiness to leave care.

5. Implementation of Priority Recommendations

A summary of the recommendations can be found in Table 4. Mental health training and employing mental health professionals have the large potential for high impact, and while they are higher cost and slower to implement than other recommendations, they are examples of spend-to-save interventions.

Table 4. Summary of recommendations. More ticks indicate cheaper/quicker/higher impact.

Recommendation	Low cost	Quick to implement	High impact
Guide to mental health services	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Mental health training	✓	✓	✓✓✓
Employ mental health professionals	✓	✓	✓✓✓
Assessment before leaving care	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Change language describing YP	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Communication between councils	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Regulated visits with family	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Feedback sessions	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Lobby at national level	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓

5.1. Creating a Clear Guide to Accessing Mental Health Services

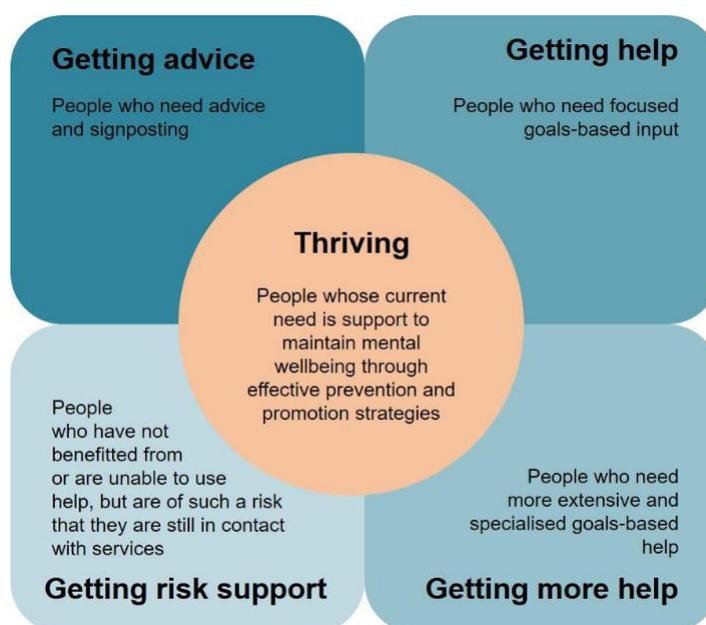
Creating a clear guide on how to access mental health services is a low-cost and important step towards better support for YP leaving care. A clear and easily accessible guide mitigates the issue of PAs being expected to pass on details of existing services to YP as well as relieving pressure on YP to discuss their mental health needs with their PA. The guide should be made available online and as a physical copy and should be kept up-to-date at all times.

After consultation with YP who have left care, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the 10 LAs (GM10) agreed on 12 guarantees that they hope to achieve in the next year [31]. The Greater Manchester Care Leaver Trust Board will oversee implementation of the guarantees. One of these guarantees was to consider the use of a Local Offer app such as Focus.Gov app [31]. The council should therefore consider creating an app version of the mental health guide, which can be easily accessed on mobile devices. Ideally, flow diagrams showing the procedure through which appropriate support can be accessed would be included for various levels of need.

THRIVE is a conceptual framework for child and adolescent mental health that complements the Think Communities initiative and could inform the design of the mental health services guide [32]. The London Borough of Haringey and NHS Haringey Clinical Commissioning Group are developing integrated mental health provisions in line with THRIVE Framework [32].

The THRIVE framework requires everyone involved in the delivery of care to work together, such as members of health, education, social care, and voluntary sectors. The framework stresses the importance of drawing on the evidence base, being transparent about the limitations of treatment, and explicitly engaging YP in shared decision-making about the type of help or support they need. It states that decisions on how best to support the mental health of a YP cannot be purely based on diagnoses or presenting symptoms. This is particularly pertinent given the complex needs of YP in/leaving care. Instead, the approach to delivering care should be based on five categories: (i) Thriving, (ii) Getting Advice, (iii) Getting Help, (iv) Getting More Help, and (v) Getting Risk Support (Figure 1) [32].

Figure 1. THRIVE framework for system change.



An individual may fall into any one of these categories. The mental health needs and support differs according to the category. For example, a person in the “Getting Advice” category would need signposting to relevant online resources or short-term support in their local community whereas someone in the “Getting More Help” category may need direct long-term support from a trained mental health professional. Table 5 shows key factors to consider when implementing this recommendation.

Table 5. Considerations for implementing a clear guide to accessing mental health services.

Considerations	
Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will be responsible for putting together and updating the guide within the Social Care Team? How will district and county councils collaborate to keep the guide up-to-date? What challenges are there to service coordination?
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the cost of making the guide come out of the Social Care budget? Who will pay to print physical copies of the guide?
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the guide be made available in other languages or accessible formats?
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will check that the most up-to-date guide is available on the council websites? Use BetterConnected+ to test the useability of the information once it is on the website?
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the environmental impact of printing and distributing physical copies of the guide each year?
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any services that cannot be advertised on the council website?

5.2. Developing a Comprehensive Training Programme

The Children’s Commissioner for England recommends that all PAs should be required to have mental health training and knowledge of mental health problems: “Although guidance is clear that personal advisors should know about mental health services in their area, there should be increased emphasis on, and training for, them to be able to identify emerging mental health difficulties. If a mental health concern is identified, YP with care experience must then be able to access professional help. Many of the calls to our Help at Hand advice service are from YP with care experience struggling to get this help” [33].

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England is the largest provider of mental health first aid training in UK and Europe. They offer a two day course which qualifies people as Youth Mental Health First Aiders [34]. This course is for people who support YP aged 8 to 18 years old. There are three levels of training available which qualify an attendee for different responsibilities: Youth MHFA, Youth MHFA Champion and Youth Mental Health Aware (Table 6). For PAs and social workers, the most appropriate course to take is the Youth MHFA training. The other training programmes may be more relevant to extended parts of the care system.

Table 6. MHFA England training levels.

Training level	Course length / Cost per person / Class size	Skills
Youth MHFA	Two days £300 16 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth understanding of YP mental health and factors affecting wellbeing • Practical skills to spot triggers and signs of mental health issues • Confidence to reassure and support YP in distress • Enhanced interpersonal skills e.g. non-judgemental listening • Knowledge to help YP recover health by guiding them to further support and engaging with parents, carers, and external agencies where appropriate • Ability to support YP with long-term mental health issue or disability to thrive • Tools to look after your own mental wellbeing
Youth MHFA Champion	One day £200 16 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of common mental health issues and how they can affect YP • Ability to spot signs of mental ill health in YP and guide them to a place of support • Knowledge and confidence to advocate for mental health awareness • Skills to support positive wellbeing
Youth Mental Health Aware	Half day £125 25 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers some common mental health issues affecting YP • Skills to work more effectively with YP living with mental health issues • Ways to support YP with mental health issues and relate to their experiences

The Youth MHFA training usually costs £300 per attendee but other councils, such as Cornwall Council have managed to secure funding from Public Health England to subsidise this price [35]. Although this course is not specific to YP in/leaving care it provides a general level of understanding of mental health. Given that the new national curriculum became statutory in September 2020 and now mental health education, it is important for corporate parents to develop an equivalent level of understanding of mental health. Considerations for implementing the mental health training programme are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Considerations for implementing a comprehensive mental health training programme.

Considerations	
Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what time in the year will training be carried out? • For whom will the training be compulsory? • Will other people in the council be able to attend training? • What level of training will PAs/social workers be expected to meet?
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will pay for the training/search for sustainable funding? • If travel is required, will travel costs be covered by funding?
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will the training initially be offered to? • How often will refresher training courses be done? • What will happen if someone cannot attend the course for a valid reason?
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the people receiving training have access to laptops/computers and a stable internet connection if online training is undertaken?
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will shared transport be considered if face-to-face training is undertaken?
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will attendees be able to feedback their learning to non-attendees?

5.3. Employing Mental Health Professionals

The Children’s Commissioner for England also recommends that all LA Leaving Care Teams should have a dedicated mental health professional within their team [33]. Employing designated mental health professionals within the Leaving Care Team is potentially the most expensive mental health recommendation, but it is a spend-to-save approach. Improved mental health may lead to more YP engaging in EET. A well-supported YP is less likely to need emergency payments, Universal Credit subsidies, access to their Setting-Up Home Allowance, or even require council services. If the YP is happy and engaging in EET past the age of 21, the service tends to be closed to the YP if both parties agree, resulting in substantial financial savings for the LA.

In Middleborough, there is already a dedicated mental health professional in their Leaving Care Team. This therapeutic practitioner supports YP up to age 25 and has a range of function and purposes, which are shown in Box 2 [31]. Feedback from YP who received this service indicates positive outcomes. For example, one YP said “I have stopped self-harming and reduced my anger.” Another YP felt the support would “make [them] more prepared for work.” The therapeutic practitioner is funded by Middleborough Council Children’s Services, costing £40,000 per annum, but remains an NHS Trust employee [31]. The internal Transformation Fund funds new initiatives to demonstrate a spend-to-save approach and could be used to fund a mental health professional. At the very least, the council should be aiming to use this fund to trial this proposal.

- Promoting effective links between Pathways Leaving Care Service, CAMHS and Adult Services
- Increasing support for looked after children and YP with care experience regarding their emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Providing a flexible and immediate response to YP in crisis
- Providing guidance to social workers and Personal Advisers to ensure they are appropriately supporting YP, taking into consideration their early life trauma and attachment issues
- Delivering Tier 2 therapeutic interventions to support YP to better understand their emotional wellbeing and develop coping strategies
- Working with YP aged from 16 to 25 open to the Pathways Leaving Care Service
- Delivering Attachment Training to Residential Staff, Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Providers
- Monitoring Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completion scores to ensure YP receive appropriate support in relation to their emotional well-being
- Delivering Kickstart group, which consists of four sessions covering any topics that the YP requested including obsessive-compulsive disorder and psychosis delivering Fresh Start, which offers taster sessions to YP with care experience with the aim of promoting emotional health and well-being.

Box 2. Responsibilities of the therapeutic practitioner in Middlesbrough.

In Slough, there are two clinicians embedded within the Looked After Children Team and Care Leaver Team [31]. The advantage of this is that clinicians will have had contact with YP in care and this early relationship helps facilitate engagement with YP who have left care. The role of the clinicians is similar to that of the therapeutic practitioner in Middlesbrough. The clinicians model and work with practitioners to assess mental health issues and to implement systemic approaches to mental health. For example, clinicians may assess where relationships can be re-established, ensure a range of social support and activities for the YP, and enable those working with YP leaving care to understand their relationships and to use these relationships to address problem patterns. Clinicians are therefore able to offer a responsive intervention, particularly where the YP leaving care is initially not willing to engage in formal services.

The GM10 guarantees, designed after consultation with YP who have left care, included (i) implementing priority pathways to mental health provision; and (ii) ensuring Clinical Commissioning Groups work with PAs to access health services [31]. Creating specialist pathways to access mental health support, such as those in Middleborough and Slough, may become increasingly necessary for YP leaving care as we exit out of lockdown [31]. Considerations for employing mental health professionals within relevant care teams are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Considerations for employing mental health professionals.

Considerations	
Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will there be staffing or capacity issues? • How will the gap be bridged between work hours and out-of-hours support (24/7 support cannot be provided)? • How will the volume of need be dealt with?
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will pay the salary of the mental health professionals? • Will the service be free? • Will there be financial support for YP to access this service (e.g. transport or service cost)?
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will contact be maintained with YP after they leave care? • Will the emotional challenge of accessing support be considered? • How will it be ensured that the mental health professionals have adequate experience to deal with the complex needs of YP in/leaving care?
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will these services be advertised to YP? • Will services be offered online for out-of-county individuals?
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the mental health professionals be expected to drive to meet YP?
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the registration procedure work? • Will personal data be stored and if so for how long? • Where will the mental health professionals meet YP and what are the potential safeguarding issues associated with the location/type of meeting?

6. Cost of Ignoring Recommendations

The cost of not improving the mental health of children in care is significant. According to the Youth Voice Census, YP felt that mental health was one of the largest barriers to accessing EET [36]. For those that are NEET, 52% said mental health or anxiety was the main barrier [36]. In 2009, it was estimated that a YP who is NEET would cost an average of £56,000 of public finance costs before reaching retirement age [37]. Taking into account inflation, this is equivalent to around £76,000 today. This is in addition to the estimated £104,000 (2020: £140,500) in lost opportunity costs to each individual [37]. Per individual, that is a total loss of £216,500. Moreover, up to age 28, the cost of each individual who had conduct disorder at age 10 is £100,000 more in services than those without conduct disorder [38]. While data on the direct cost of mental health is difficult to find, it is clear that even the indirect costs of mental health are considerable (Section 4). Mental health has long been overlooked and is fast becoming the next pandemic. It is time for CCC to take action to enhance its protection of some of the most vulnerable people in its care.

7. Summary

Mental health is the greatest overlooked problem for all YP at the national and local level. The issue, however, is getting more and more difficult to ignore. Mental health is intrinsically linked to all aspects of a person's life, including employment ([Section 6](#)), education ([Section 7](#)), physical health, and aspirations. A lack of mental health support for YP in/leaving care leads to higher costs for the council further down the line. Investing in the mental health of YP in/leaving care is a chance to improve the lives of these individuals as well as for Cambridgeshire to become a leader in mental health support.

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Section Nine. Outcomes

This report has outlined a series of recommendations that aim to improve the transition of CCC's YP from care to independence. Please see the [Appendix](#) for a summary of all the recommendations. In this section we focus on the possible outcomes that CCC can expect from adopting the recommendations as well as how they correspond with CCC's vision and responsibilities.

1. Outcomes for CCC's YP

We identified what the evidence showed about the type of support that would have the most impact on ensuring YP with care experience make a successful transition from care into independence, including the transition from education to work. We focused on accommodation, finance, and mental health needs during this transition.

Table 1. Recommendations and outcomes for CCC's YP.

Focus area	Recommendation	Outcomes
Accommodation	1. Accommodation Officer/Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete support system and processes for housing allocation • Centralised data collection • Clear point of contact for YP/District Councils etc. regarding housing issues • Cohesive entity when tackling more complex accommodation issues e.g. housing for UASC
	2. Guarantor provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to helping YP enter the private rental sector • Promote pursuit of aspirations / careers via apprenticeship uptake
	3. Remove homelessness intentionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce possibility that YP fall through net and end up homeless
	4. Emergency accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety net for YP at risk of homelessness • Create safe space for vulnerable YP who have nowhere else to go
	5. Council Tax relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove unnecessary financial pressure on YP with care experience • Remove disadvantage compared to other YP
Finance	1. Internal work opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve chance of YP entering paid employment • Equipping YP with necessary skills to enter employment
	2. Money and budgeting page in Local Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources to improve financial literacy

	3. Financial education training for PAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent future financial hardship resulting from lack of familial support networks
Mental health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental health professional 2. Mental health training for PAs 3. Guide to access mental health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide basic mental health support • Reduce future costs arising from lack of mental health support • Support YPs mental health needs • Improve all aspects of YP's life including education, employment, physical health, and self-esteem

2. Alignment with CCC's Strategic Priorities

CCC's Strategic Framework (2021–2025) outlines five strategic priorities that direct the activities and ambitions of the organisation. Adopting the recommendations in this report will produce outcomes that will help CCC reach its strategic priorities (Table 2).

Table 2. Alignment with CCC's Strategic Priorities.

Strategic Priorities	Impact of Recommendations
1. Communities at the heart of everything we do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and deliver services to meet the unique challenges faced by YP leaving care • Joint-working alongside District and City Councils and partner organisations to ensure YP are supported • Ensure YP leaving care are valued and respected • Facilitate YP to engage with the community
2. A good quality of life for everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve YP's quality of life • Build a ground on which they can live stable and independent lives • Ensure that YP's quality of life is not impeded by their care experience and address inequalities that exist for this group • 'Level up' this group to encourage social mobility
3. Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on initiatives taken before YP leave care • Provide support for those YP who have specific vulnerabilities or are facing difficulties in their transition into independence • Ensure CCC's Corporate Parenting Responsibilities are met
4. Cambridgeshire: A well-connected, safe, clean, green environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No negative impacts on CCC's environmental goals

- Ensure YP are safe and remove acute vulnerabilities surrounding finances, accommodation / homelessness, and mental health
 - YP leaving care will continue to receive support to prepare for independence
 - Ensure YP leaving care have the same opportunities as their peers
 - Ensure a basis of support so that YP can improve their own wellbeing
5. Protecting and caring for those who need us

3. Alignment with Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

Throughout this report we have emphasised how CCC can support its YP and fulfil its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Table 3 outlines how our recommendations will do contribute to this responsibility.

Table 3. Alignment with CCC’s Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.

Corporate Parenting Principles	Impact of Recommendations
1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and YP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report addressed three overarching areas where CCC can act to promote the health of its YP: 1) Accommodation; 2) Finances; 3) Mental Health. • Improving CCCs approach to these issues will improve physical and mental health outcomes for YP.
2. To encourage those children and YP to express their views, wishes and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project provided mechanisms through which YP could express their views about how CCC supports them.
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and YP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through surveys, focus groups, and secondary research, the team used the views of YP to inform the report.
4. To help those children and YP gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report outlines ways in which CCC can improve the support it offers to its YP and bring its own services into line with other successful LAs.
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and YP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report provides recommendations which are designed to improve YPs access to employment and opportunities and provide YP with support to realise their aspirations.

<p>6. For those children and YP to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report provides recommendations aimed at supporting YP and improving safety provisions for things like accommodation & homelessness, finances and financial management, mental health support. • Recommendations focusing on guarantor provision, financial literacy and improving access to employment opportunities promote stability and create opportunities for YP to succeed.
<p>7. To prepare those children and YP for adulthood and independent living.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistically, the report addresses issues which act as barriers for YP transitioning into independent adulthood.

4. Alignment with Think Communities

The recommendations in this report are framed in terms of Think Communities. The three pillars of the Think Communities initiative are (i) People; (ii) Places; and (iii) Systems (Section 1 Figure 5). The recommendations will require LA-led interventions to allow YP to engage with community-led activity. In this way, Think Communities aim to stimulate community-led action will be achieved in the long-term. The three overarching themes of this report (accommodation, finances, and mental health) are key issues affecting YP leaving care. By tackling these issues, not only is CCC helping create a more resilient community of YP, but it is setting them up to engage with community-led action. The following sections consider the recommendations in light of the three pillars of the Think Communities initiative.

4.1. People

The “People” pillar focuses on specific vulnerable groups and aims to recognise individual strengths. This aim is broadly achieved by all of the recommendations. By implementing YP-specific policies on issues such as homelessness (Recommendation 4 and 5) and Council Tax relief (Recommendation 6), CCC will address issues that disproportionately affect YP with care experience. The same can be said for improving delivery of accommodation (Recommendation 1 and 2) and mental health support (Recommendation 10-17). Moreover, by offering specific work opportunities to its YP (Recommendation 7) demonstrates that CCC recognises the strengths of its YP and gives them opportunities to succeed. Acting as a rent guarantor for private accommodation (Recommendation 3) and providing financial education (Recommendation 8-10) will empower CCC’s YP to live independently and to engage with the community. Finally, this project draws on the views of YP with care experience. Implementing the recommendations in this report shows that CCC is listening to the local community. CCC can continue to listen to the voices of its YP by establishing regular feedback sessions (Recommendation 18).

4.2. Places

The recommendations in this report raise awareness of a hidden community (i.e. CCC’s YP). The recommendations help to build community resilience with the aim of increasing engagement between CCC and the community. Therefore, supporting YP leaving care will provide a basis for new community networks. Securing emergency accommodation

(Recommendation 5) focuses on physical facilities in the community to help protect YP who may face homelessness.

4.3. Systems

This report took a broad view of the issues facing YP with care experience. We outlined three main themes: accommodation (Recommendation 1-5); finances and employment (Recommendation 6–9); and mental health (Recommendation 10-19). These issues are linked, and only an ambitious approach which acknowledges the interrelated nature of issues facing YP will lead to service improvement.

The recommendations require proactive collaboration with District and City Councils on issues such as accommodation (Recommendation 2), homelessness (Recommendation 4), Council Tax (Recommendation 6), and with other LAs for CCC's YP living out-of-county (Recommendation 6 and 16). CCC should be willing to learn from other LAs and create new roles to deal with accommodation (Recommendation 1) and mental health (Recommendation 13). By improving services based upon evidence and best practice, CCC will show commitment to building/sustaining trust with its YP as well as supporting the delivery of its YP's priorities.

Section Ten. Conclusions

This report aimed to identify ways that CCC can help its YP to successfully transition from care into independent adulthood. YP leaving care often face a more challenging transition into independence than their peers and the demands of sudden independence can be difficult to overcome. Accommodation, financial concerns, employment, and mental health are key barriers to a successful transition. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of these issues as well as other existing inequalities such as digital poverty and social isolation. All of these issues are interconnected and sustainable improvement requires systemic change.

In this report, we have outlined barriers and potential interventions to these issues. Our recommendations are summarised below. The recommendations focus on changes after YP have left care. Unfortunately, the entire care journey was beyond the scope of this report. Further research should be commissioned to consider how CCC can support individuals when they are still in care as well as beyond age 25. CCC is dedicated to its YP and to its role as a Corporate Parent. Implementing the recommendations in this report will confirm CCC's determination to change the lives of its YP for the better.

Appendix. List of Recommendations

- 1. Have a permanent funded Accommodation Officer/Team.**
- 2. The Accommodation Officer/Team should focus on improving the current accommodation process by:**
 - a. Extending the Staying Put scheme from age 21 to age 25;
 - b. Removing the reduction of allowances for carers when YP join the Staying Put scheme;
 - c. Ensuring more frequent visits and rigorous individual assessments for foster placements;
 - d. Allowing priority social housing applications any time before age 25;
 - e. Granting access to all housing options and increasing housing allowance costs for YP waiting for asylum.
- 3. Act as a rent guarantor for YP with care experience, with a particular focus on helping those engaged with low-income employment and apprenticeships.**
- 4. Work with District and City Councils to remove homelessness intentionality for YP with care experience.**
- 5. Secure emergency accommodation for YP who are faced with homelessness or tenancy breakdown.**
- 6. Provide Council Tax relief to YP with care experience until age 25:**
 - a. Council Tax relief should extend to CCC's YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire and out-of-county;
 - b. CCC should determine the possibility of extending this policy to external YP with care experience living in Cambridgeshire, if they do not already receive this support from their associated LA;
 - c. Council Tax relief should be offered as an exemption not a refund and it should not be subject to means testing;
 - d. In the long-term, CCC should apply automatic relief for its local YP with care experience. If an application process is necessary in the short-term, it should be clear, accessible, and include multiple formats e.g. online and via telephone;
 - e. The Council Tax relief rate should be 100% when YP with care experience lives alone or with other care-experienced individuals. The rate should be applied proportionally if the YP with care experience is living with non-eligible individuals.
- 6. The following recommendations / considerations should be taken into account in relation to the Council Tax support for YP passed by CCC in February 2022:**
 - a. Avoid a refund model of relief (for example, by paying billing authorities directly);
 - b. Ensure that steps are taken to inform potential beneficiaries of the policy;
 - c. Commit to reviewing the eligibility criteria for the policy in the future.

- 7. Increase provision of internal work opportunities and work experience at CCC for YP leaving care by:**
 - a. Guaranteeing interviews for those who meet the minimum criteria for a council vacancy;
 - b. Ring-fencing specific opportunities.

- 8. Create a designated money and budgeting page in CCC's Local Offer which guides YP in/leaving care to financial services and courses as well as charity/private support.**
 - a. CCC's website should be updated to include available services and courses designated for money management and debt information;
 - b. A PDF or mobile application should be created which provides information on all the financial benefits available to YP leaving care.

- 9. PAs and care home staff should have more thorough training and guidance on how to provide financial education.**
 - a. Training should be focused on how to effectively provide advice on money management, budgeting, saving and spending to YP leaving care;
 - b. Clear guidance should be given to these workers to follow when providing financial education to YP leaving care.

- 10. Pathway Plans for YP in care should have a specific section dedicated to the development of knowledge and skills required for independent living.**

- 11. Create a clear and well-advertised guide to accessing available mental health services including charity-based support.**
 - a. Update the Council website to improve access to relevant information;
 - b. Create a downloadable app or a PDF file that can be sent to all YP in/leaving care with all the relevant details from the Local Offer and clickable links to support services/other initiatives (as a minimum a leaflet should be provided with signposting for local and national mental health services);
 - c. Create a defined pathway through which YP can access mental health support depending on their age and stage within care. This should include clarity around the transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

- 12. Develop a comprehensive training programme covering mental health first aid and up-to-date research on childhood adversity and mental health for the Leaving Care Team, PAs, and foster/residential carers.**
 - a. Develop a programme in collaboration with MHFA England and local NHS clinicians and/or university researchers;
 - b. Ensure members of the leaving care team complete mental health first aid training as a requirement of their role;
 - c. Offer refresher training sessions;
 - d. Intensify mental health training for foster and residential carers (current training is too basic).

13. Employ a senior, designated mental health professional with expertise in the diagnosis/treatment of mental health conditions and awareness of broader risk factors common in YP in/leaving care.

- a. Embed mental health workers within the Leaving Care Team to deliver range of emotional wellbeing and self-development interventions.

Adult Social Care should assess YP in care before they leave to identify the support the YP will need once they are living independently. Adult Social Care can then make recommendations and put support in place or refer them for more advanced support before the YP leaves care.

15. Change the language that is used to describe these YP. “Care leaver” is somewhat dehumanising and should be replaced with more person-centred language such as “YP with care experience” or “YP leaving care”.

16. Encourage communication between Councils regarding mental health support for YP in out-of-county placements.

- a. Relevant councils along with YP should create a plan for how to provide mental health provisions to YP in an out-of-county placements;
- b. Discussions or developments outlined by the Eastern Region Leaving Care Network should be included in the guide issued to YP in care so if they look to move out-of-county they know what to expect and how to access services.

17. Where it is safe to do so, regulated visits with family members may be beneficial for the mental health of YP in/leaving care.

- a. For example, set up Family Group Conferencing with the local charity Break.

18. Establish feedback sessions with YP to give them space to express their concerns and for the council to learn how to improve from their experiences of the care system.

- a. For example, bring Councillors from the Corporate Parenting Committee to YP Participation Forums.

19. Lobby at the national level to increase mental health of YP leaving care as a priority.

- a. Development of YP leaving care-specific services aimed at those who slip through the gap of CAMHS and IAPT mental health services;
- b. Ability to allow YP to remain in care past age 18 if this is the most appropriate solution for the individual in an effort to accommodate personal readiness to leave care.

