

Written evidence submitted by Drive Forward Foundation

Recommendations for the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Executive Summary

At Drive Forward Foundation, we have seen firsthand both the immense potential of care-experienced young people and the systemic barriers that prevent them from thriving. Despite the government's role as a 'corporate parent,' care leavers face disproportionately poor outcomes: they are three times more likely to be NEET (not in education, employment, or training), twice as likely to suffer from mental health issues, and at significantly higher risk of homelessness.

To address these challenges, we propose the following amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill:

1. **Extend Corporate Parenting Responsibilities** to additional public bodies, ensuring a joined-up, cross-governmental approach to supporting care leavers.
2. **Introduce new statutory entitlements** for care leavers aged 18-25, providing targeted support in employment, education, housing, and mental health.

These recommendations have been co-produced with care-experienced young people and build on existing successful policies in Scotland and London. Implementing them would bring us closer to a society where all care leavers have the support they need to build independent and fulfilling lives.

About Drive Forward Foundation

Drive Forward Foundation is a charity dedicated to supporting care-experienced young people aged 16–26 in London into sustainable and fulfilling employment, education, and training. Since 2010, we have empowered over 4,000 young people to take charge of their futures by building meaningful careers.

Our services are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of this group, offering personalised 1-2-1 support, intensive employability training, professional mentoring, and a bespoke counselling service. Exclusively working with care-experienced young people, we enable them to gain the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to thrive in the workplace. Over the past decade, we've built a strong network of employer partners, offering exclusive training, work placements, and employment opportunities. Together, we are driving social mobility and creating more inclusive working environments that unlock the potential of care-experienced young people.

Care Leaver Outcomes in the UK

There are over 80,000 children in the care system and around 13,000 young people leave care each year¹. The state has a unique relationship with these young people as their 'corporate parent'. However, children with care experience have significantly worse outcomes compared to their peers:

- For 19- to 21-year-old care leavers, almost two fifths (39 per cent) are not in education, employment or training. This is three times the 13 per cent of all other 19- to 21-year-olds².
- By the age of 27, only 22 per cent of care leavers are in employment, compared to 57 per cent of non-care leavers.
- 1 in 3 care leavers become homeless in the first 2 years after they leave care³.
- 50% of children in care meet the criteria for a mental health disorder compared to 20% of all children and young people aged 8-25⁴.

Recommendations for the Bill Committee

The following recommendations have been co-produced with care-experienced young people between the ages of 18-30 who are members of Drive Forward Foundation's youth-led policy forum. They have been developed to mirror the vital networks and typically informal support most young people and young adults receive from their families.

Recommendation One: Extend Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

*The Bill should be amended to extend the corporate parenting principles contained in the **Children and Social Work Act 2017** to a greater range of public bodies including but not limited to: the Department for Work and Pensions, NHS, Police, Home Office and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.*

The current corporate parenting responsibilities that apply to local authorities in England are a set of high-level aspirations that reflect the type of support that local authorities are expected to provide to children in care and care leavers⁵. Children in care and care leavers encounter a broad range of public bodies and a young person's journey through care relies on them to provide support, services and guidance at various stages. As previously illustrated, care-experienced young people face disproportionately adverse outcomes. Despite policy initiatives in recent years, the proportion of care leavers not in education, employment, or training (NEET), for example, has remained

¹ Statistics from the Department for Education (Nov 2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

² Ibid <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024>

³ Barnardo's (2024) [Care Leavers Reception Event booklet - FINAL.pdf](#)

⁴ Civitas (2023) [How many care leavers go to university?](#)

⁵ Become (2024) [APPG-Corporate-Parenting-Inquiry-Final-Report.pdf](#)

persistently high. In 2017, 40% of care leavers aged 19-21 were NEET, compared to 13% of that age group in the general population⁶. Today, the percentage still stands at 39%⁷.

A cross-governmental approach to supporting children in care and care leavers is needed and is demonstrated by the already existing Cross-Ministerial Board for Care Leavers⁸. The extension of corporate parenting responsibilities would support and facilitate the Board's activity whilst also providing them with the legislative framework required to embed corporate parenting principles into a greater range of public bodies.

*The Independent Review of Children's Social Care*⁹ recommended extending corporate parenting responsibilities to a greater range of public bodies and the government committed to do this in the recently published policy paper on children's social care – *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*¹⁰. However, these provisions are currently not included in the Bill.

As Ester, a care-experienced young person and lived experience advocate puts it:

“Delaying the extension of corporate parenting responsibilities will adversely affect care-experienced young people everywhere. Every single day we are interacting with public bodies and there are no days off for us. Every single day, delay will make a difference to our lives. Extending corporate parenting responsibilities will ensure care leavers are protected as soon as possible. It would mean people working with young care leavers have considered our specific needs and public bodies will have the required policies and support in place to help us on our journey through adulthood.” Ester – DF policy forum member

Extending corporate parenting responsibilities would ensure that public services, from the NHS to the police, take a proactive and legally mandated role in supporting care-experienced young people, whilst also ensuring adequate data collection, evidence-based planning, and accurate reporting of outcomes.

⁶ Harrison et al. (2023): Care leavers' transition into the labour market in England.

<https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CareLeaversLabourMarket.pdf>

⁷ DfE (2024): Children looked after in England including adoptions. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions>

⁸ House of Commons Library (2024) [CBP-8429.pdf](#)

⁹ MacAlister J (2022) [The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf](#)

¹⁰ Department for Education (2024) [Keeping children safe, helping families thrive](#)

Case Study – Scotland’s extension of Corporate Parenting Responsibilities to 24 Public Bodies

In 2014 the Scottish Government passed the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, included in the legislation was the extension of corporate parenting responsibilities to 24 public bodies¹¹. Under this legislation, Corporate Parents have specific duties and responsibilities towards Care Experienced children and young people up to the age of 26 (although many Corporate Parents go further and extend their support and policies to Care Experienced adults above the age of 26)¹². As part of their duties, corporate parents are required to prepare, keep under review and publish a Corporate Parenting Plan, setting out how they intend to fulfil their corporate parenting duties. They should also publish a Corporate Parenting Report at least once every three years, setting out how the organisation has fulfilled its corporate parenting duties¹³. The requirement to obtain accurate data, develop plans and report on outcomes is embedded into the legislation. This creates accountability and shared responsibility among the corporate parents with the ultimate and unifying goal of improving outcomes for care-experienced young people. For example, between 2016 and 2023 the proportion of school leavers who were looked after that achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 rose from 34% to 42%¹⁴.

Recommendation Two: New Statutory Entitlements for Care Leavers

*The Bill should be amended to introduce a new range of statutory entitlements for young people when they become Care Leavers, aimed at **improving access to employment, education, health, housing and other services** for them to receive a similar level of support parents and families generally provide for their own children as they transition from childhood into independent adulthood.*¹⁵

- These provisions should include the following specific new entitlements and services for young care leavers aged 18-25:
- **All public bodies to offer a specific Care Leaver Internship Scheme using the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship model** – Having co-designed the Civil Service Internship Scheme and worked with the DfE for almost a decade developing it, we know that with the right support and preparation, we have on average; a 50+% success rate in applications and a 70-80% conversion to permanent roles following internship completion.
- **Local authority or corporate partner to act as a guarantor and provide rental deposit** – Currently these schemes are not equally or readily available to all care leavers across with

¹¹ Scottish Parliament: Children and Families Directorate (2014) [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)

¹² Who Care Scotland? (accessed 30/01/2025) [Corporate Parents - Who Cares? Scotland](#)

¹³ Scottish Parliament: Children and Families Directorate (2025) [A decade of care: A corporate parenting update from Scottish Ministers 2021 - 2024 - gov.scot](#)

¹⁴ Scottish Parliament: Children and Families Directorate (2024) [Ministerial Foreword by the First Minister and the Minister For Children, Young People and The Promise - Keeping The Promise to our children, young people and families: progress update 2024 - gov.scot](#)

¹⁵ Barnardo's (2024) [Improving Cross-Government Support for Care Leavers.pdf](#)

43% of local authorities in England and Wales will offer to act as a guarantor with 76% willing to provide a rent deposit¹⁶.

- **Free NHS prescriptions** – Through the Pan London Care Leavers Compact this has already been implemented across all London Boroughs, making essential medication more affordable for care leavers in London¹⁷.
- **A dedicated mental health offer in every local authority** – Many young people in our forum have said that they were not able to or ready to access mental health services when they were a child and that the need for mental health services only increased when they turned 18 due to transitioning out of care and the majority of other services becoming unavailable¹⁸.
- **For those eligible for Universal Credit, the rate paid to those over 25** – It is estimated that giving all care leavers who are not in work the over-25 rate would cost an additional £24.8m a year.
- **Local authorities to create and embed Local Protocols for reducing the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers** – Since the London Protocol was introduced, data from MOPAC indicates care settings are calling the police less and those which do come through the police are dealing with over the phone with little police involvement.

Closing Statement

This Bill presents a unique opportunity to transform the future of care-experienced young people. By embedding corporate parenting responsibilities across public bodies and enshrining new statutory entitlements, we can ensure that no care leaver is left behind. We urge the Committee to amend the Bill accordingly and secure a brighter future for the thousands of young people leaving care every year.

In the words of Shimron, a passionate care-experienced advocate and campaigner:

“Many children in care are exposed to things in childhood which many adults may never see in their lifetime, from attempted suicides to drug use, gangs and the inside of a cell, homelessness, abuse and more. These experiences could happen alongside personal issues the child is experiencing, such as dealing with the lack of a family and being placed in an alien environment, being expelled from school and suffering from poor mental health. These experiences stay with you into adult life, they never go away, compounded by the realities of supporting yourself as an adult. These are the same children we label as criminals, sometimes for minor offences, when what they really need is support, stability and the chance to leave the care system and forge their own way forward.” Shimron – DF policy forum member

¹⁶ National Youth Advocacy Service (2024) [Housing FOI Briefing - Oct 24 - NYAS.pdf](#)

¹⁷ London Councils (accessed 30/01/2025) [Pan London Care Leavers Compact | London Councils – Home](#)

¹⁸ Drive Forward Foundation (2024) [Care Experience Manifesto](#)