



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Mr Robin Walker MP, Chair

David Johnston

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing

Department for Education

24 May 2024

Dear David,

I am writing to you regarding the Committee's inquiry into children's social care in England.

The Education Committee would first like to thank all those who contributed evidence to this inquiry.

Whilst we are not able to finalise the inquiry and produce a report before the end of this parliament, we strongly urge the next Government in power to read the evidence that has been given to the Committee, and redouble efforts to afford this sector the attention it deserves. With 83,840 children in the care system, and more entering and leaving the system every year, the reforms of Stable Homes, Built on Love must be implemented effectively and fully, so that people in care and care leavers can have the best possible future.

We have also attached results from a survey we undertook this year, asking young people about their experiences with the care system and once leaving care, and would like to thank them for their contribution. The results of this survey show the importance of this issue.

We therefore encourage the next Education Select Committee to review the evidence we have collated so far, and renew an inquiry into this vital area. In the absence of a report, we raise the following points of importance:

- Early intervention has fallen by £3.7 billion since 2010-11. This trend must be reversed in order to prevent rising numbers of children entering the care system in the future.
- 85% of children's homes are owned by private companies, and we have heard evidence that the largest providers of placements are "making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices", than would be expected in a well-functioning market. Whilst the Committee understands the need for businesses to make profit, action must be taken to prevent excess profiteering made from the care of children.
- Local authorities are issuing section 114 notices at an alarming rate, with the cost of children's social care overtaking adult's social care in many areas. Measures must be taken to strengthen local authority position, and to encourage in-house growth of children's services.
- The Regional Care Commissioning model, as put forth in Stable Homes, Built on Love, must be implemented carefully. Whilst regional commissioning can be appropriate for aspects of the care system, local and national commissioning are also important for children and young people to get the care they need.


- On average, children in the care system were placed more than 18 miles away from their homes in 2022. Local and national Government must work alongside providers to reduce the number of children being placed outside of their local area, so that they can remain close to pre-existing relationships and support systems.
- Most children want to live with their birth families. However, we understand that up to 56% of local authorities do not have a dedicated reunification policy or strategy, with only 19% having a standalone reunification team as part of their children's services. It is paramount for reunification with birth families to be given prominence within the care system.
- Residential children's homes must be focused on in any children's social care plans. Care homes are in the best interests for many children, and should be seen as a positive aspect of the care system, rather than as a 'last resort.'
- The children's social care workforce is struggling. 83% of councils report difficulties in recruiting social workers, and in 2022 only 63% of fostering places were filled. A national recruitment campaign should be considered, for both social workers and foster carers.
- We understand that social workers, on average, leave seven years after qualifying. Efforts should be taken to reduce bureaucracy, and to review their pay.
- A national register for foster carers, as exists for social workers, must be considered in order to improve recruitment and retention, best-practice and oversight.
- It is encouraging that kinship care has received heightened attention, through 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and 'Championing Kinship Care.' However, many kinship carers live in poverty, and many begin looking after a child in a time of crisis. The case for additional financial support for kinship carers, as well as 'kinship leave' on par with Adoption Leave must be reviewed.
- Adoption registrations are in decline, and waiting times are rising. Improved diversity in prospective adopters must be encouraged, to meet particular groups of young people such as sibling groups, children with additional needs, older children and ethnic minorities.
- Outcomes for care leavers are consistently worse than for their non-care-experienced peers. Stable Homes, Built on Love included encouraging measures across employment, education and health, but more must be done to improve the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.
- The Law Commission's review of children's social care legislation for disabled children provides an important opportunity to review the place of disabled children within children's social care, and whether measures must be taken to give it a more distinct and separated role. Efforts must also be undertaken to increase the number of special educational needs workers, short-break respite centres and specialist placements. The direct payment and personal budget systems must also be reviewed to relieve bureaucratic and administrative burdens on already stressed families.
- Ofsted's inspection system for children's social care, built over a number of years and Governments, must be updated to reflect today's world. The power to scrutinise entire children's homes ownership groups, in order to hold providers of multiple services to account, needs to be considered.

- The use of handcuffs for children and young people being transported between care placements needs to be investigated.
- Multi-agency and multi-departmental work must be improved across the board, in matters of safeguarding, disabled care, and local authority finances, in order to reflect the vitally important and wide-ranging nature of children's social care.

Desire and ambition are needed to meet these issues, and will be crucial in transforming the lives of some of the most vulnerable and often forgotten people in England.

The Committee would once again like to thank all the organisations, individuals, academics and anyone who has contributed to our inquiry into children's social care.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Walker', written in a cursive style.

Mr Robin Walker MP
Chair of the Education Committee

Annex: Survey for care-experienced people

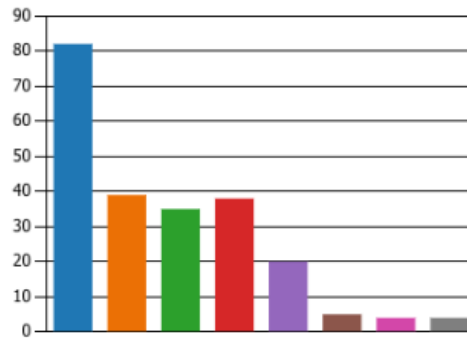
On April 11th 2024 the Education Committee sent out a survey for care-experienced people, the survey closing on 23rd May 2024. The survey asked for people's experiences within the children's social care system, and when leaving care. This was to aid our understanding and inform our inquiry through those with first-hand experience.

The survey received 226 responses, and we would like to thank all who helped disseminate it, and those who took the time to complete the survey. Attached below are the questions alongside the data that we gathered.

1. How old are you?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| 16-24 | 82 |
| 25-34 | 39 |
| 35-44 | 35 |
| 45-54 | 38 |
| 55-64 | 20 |
| 65-74 | 5 |
| 75+ | 4 |
| Prefer not to say | 4 |



2. What is your sex?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Male | 61 |
| Female | 164 |
| Prefer not to say | 4 |



3. Which of the following best describes your gender?

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[Insights](#)

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Man | 58 |
| Woman | 161 |
| Non-binary | 3 |
| Prefer not to say | 7 |
| Other | 0 |

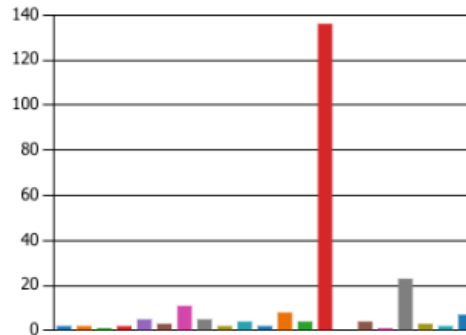


4. What is your ethnic background?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|--|-----|
| ● Arab | 2 |
| ● Asian, or Asian British: Banglade... | 2 |
| ● Asian, or Asian British: Chinese ... | 1 |
| ● Asian, or Asian British: Indian or ... | 2 |
| ● Asian, or Asian British: Pakistani ... | 5 |
| ● Asian, or Asian British: Any othe... | 3 |
| ● Black: African or African British | 11 |
| ● Black: Caribbean or Caribbean B... | 5 |
| ● Black: Any other Black backgrou... | 2 |
| ● Mixed or multiple ethnic groups... | 4 |
| ● Mixed or multiple ethnic groups... | 2 |
| ● Mixed or multiple ethnic groups... | 8 |
| ● Mixed or multiple ethnic groups... | 4 |
| ● White: English, Scottish, Welsh, ... | 136 |
| ● White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0 |
| ● White: Irish | 4 |
| ● White: Roma | 1 |
| ● White: Any other white backgro... | 23 |
| ● Any other ethnic background | 3 |
| ● Not known | 2 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 7 |



5. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a more than minor adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, that has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months. These include mental health conditions, neurodiverse conditions such as dyslexia and long-term health conditions.

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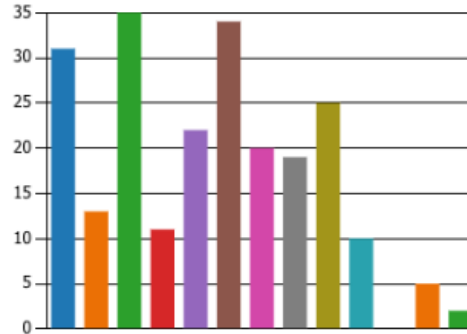
| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| ● Yes | 103 |
| ● No | 105 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 20 |



6. What part of England are you from?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| England – East Midlands | 31 |
| England – East of England | 13 |
| England – London | 35 |
| England – North East | 11 |
| England – North West | 22 |
| England – South East | 34 |
| England – South West | 20 |
| England – West Midlands | 19 |
| England – Yorkshire and the Hu... | 25 |
| Outside of England | 10 |
| No fixed abode | 0 |
| Prefer not to say | 5 |
| Other | 2 |

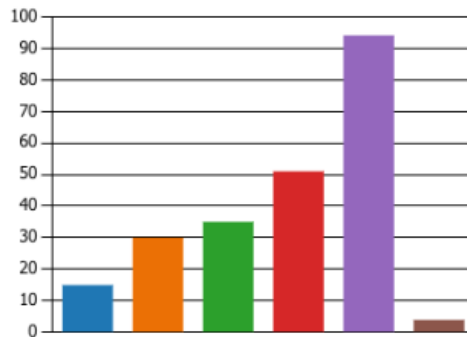


7. The care system was a positive experience for me.

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Insights

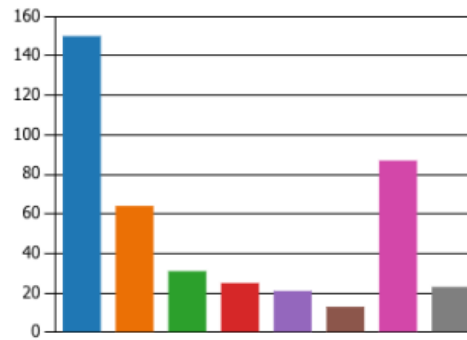
| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Strongly agree | 15 |
| Agree | 30 |
| Neutral | 35 |
| Disagree | 51 |
| Strongly disagree | 94 |
| I don't know | 4 |



8. What type of placement(s) did you experience when in care? Tick all that apply.

[More Details](#)

| | |
|---|-----|
| ● Foster | 150 |
| ● Semi-independent | 64 |
| ● Adoption | 31 |
| ● Kinship | 25 |
| ● Residential schools | 21 |
| ● Shared care | 13 |
| ● Children's homes | 87 |
| ● Other | 23 |



9. How many placements did you experience within the care system?

[More Details](#)

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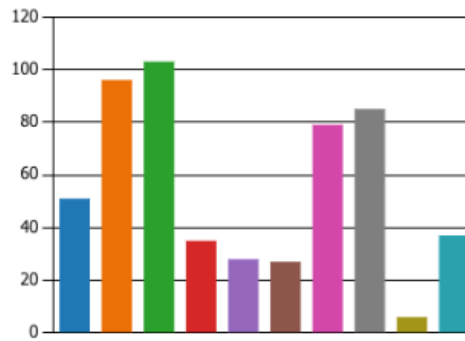
| | |
|--|----|
| ● 1 | 43 |
| ● 2 | 46 |
| ● 3-4 | 64 |
| ● 5 or more | 73 |



10. Within the care system, what would you like the Government to focus more on?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| ● Kinship care | 51 |
| ● Foster care | 96 |
| ● Semi-independent or supported... | 103 |
| ● Adoption | 35 |
| ● Residential schools | 28 |
| ● Shared care | 27 |
| ● Children's homes | 79 |
| ● Reunification with birth families | 85 |
| ● None of the above | 6 |
| ● Other | 37 |



11. Have you ever been moved far away from your local community and support networks during your care experience?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|---|----|
| ● Yes, and that was a good choice... | 42 |
| ● Yes, but it wasn't the right thing... | 90 |
| ● No | 77 |
| ● I don't know | 19 |



12. How far away were you moved?

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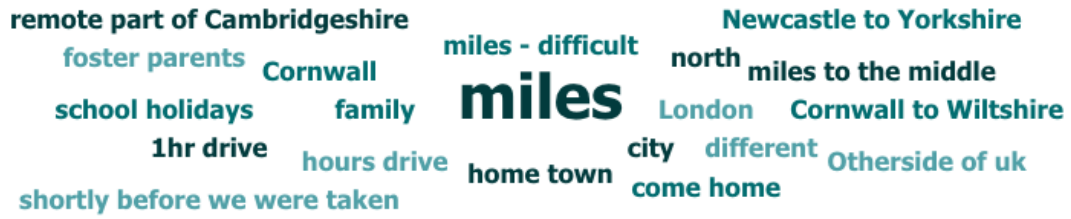
[Insights](#)

87

Responses

Latest Responses

48 respondents (55%) answered **miles** for this question.



13. Did you feel safe when in the care system?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|--|----|
| ● All the time | 16 |
| ● Most of the time | 44 |
| ● Some of the time | 86 |
| ● Never | 72 |
| ● I don't know | 9 |



16. Do you feel that the views of looked after children are sufficiently considered when the Government makes decisions on children's social care?

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[Insights](#)

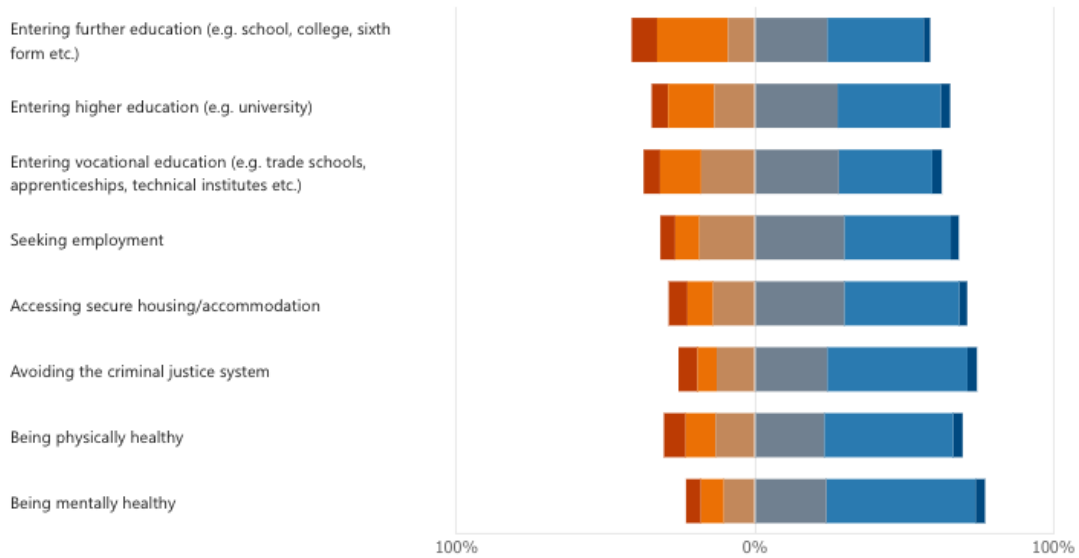
| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| ● Yes | 14 |
| ● No | 182 |
| ● Don't know | 27 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 3 |



17. Do you feel the Government does enough to support care leavers in the following ways?

[More Details](#)

■ Yes ■ Mostly yes ■ Neither yes or no ■ Mostly no ■ No ■ Rather not say

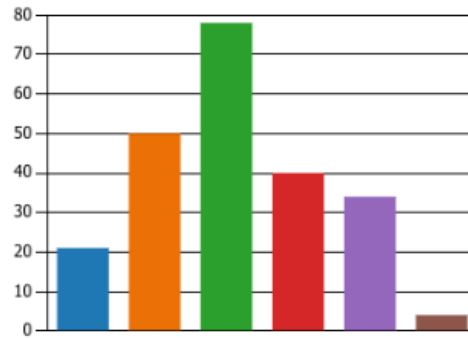


18. In April 2023, the Government raised the leaving care allowance from £2,000 to £3,000. What impact do you think this has had, and will have on care leavers?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

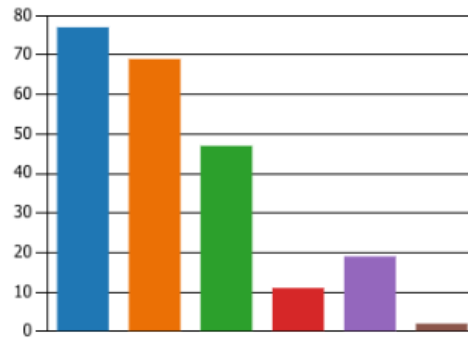
| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Large impact | 21 |
| Moderate impact | 50 |
| Small impact | 78 |
| No impact | 40 |
| Don't know | 34 |
| Prefer not to say | 4 |



19. The Government has announced that local authorities will prioritise allocating social housing to care leavers. What impact do you think this will have on care leavers?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Large impact | 77 |
| Moderate impact | 69 |
| Small impact | 47 |
| No impact | 11 |
| Don't know | 19 |
| Prefer not to say | 2 |

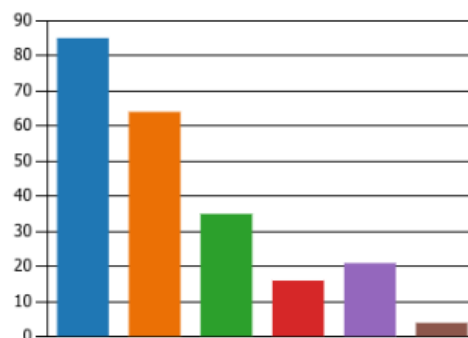


20. The Government has announced that when parliamentary time allows, they will raise the age limit for the 'Staying Put' scheme, which enables care leavers to remain with their foster carers past the age of 18, from 21 years old to 23 years old. What impact do you think this will have on care leavers?

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[Insights](#)

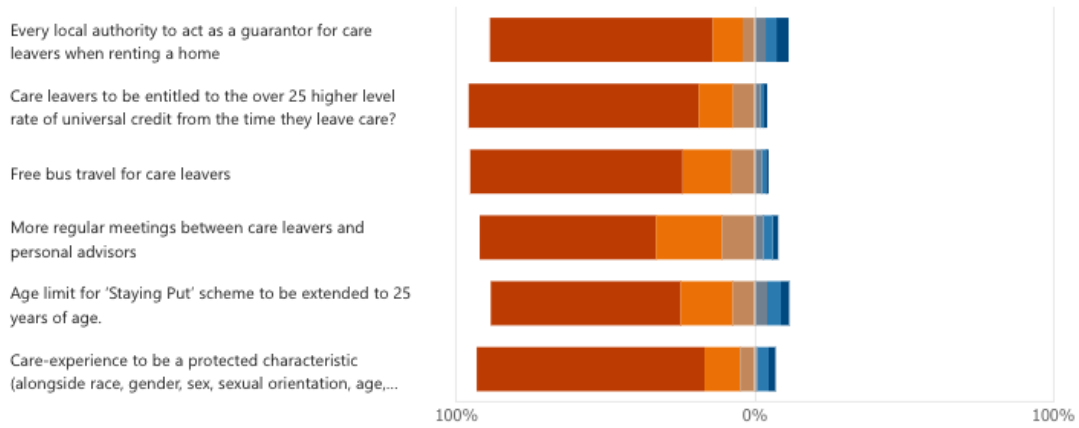
| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Large impact | 85 |
| Moderate impact | 64 |
| Small impact | 35 |
| No impact | 16 |
| Don't know | 21 |
| Prefer not to say | 4 |



21. We will produce a report making recommendations about children's social care to the Government. Should we consider recommending any of the following?

[More Details](#)

■ Strongly consider
 ■ Consider
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Don't consider
 ■ Strongly don't consider
 ■ I don't know



22. Are there any other recommendations we should make to the Government?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

150 Responses

Latest Responses

"Help in challenging LA decisions you feel are wrong for you. To promote that..."

39 respondents (26%) answered **care leavers** for this question.

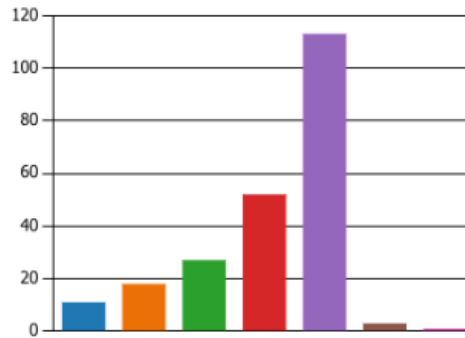
care leavers **family** **care system** **social care** **young people** **people in care**
support for care **health support** **cared for children** **care experience** **social workers** **mental health**
no care **children as care** **older care** **care services** **kinship care** **foster care** **support children**
care homes

23. How much of an impact did your experience in care have on your mental wellbeing?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| ● Very positive impact | 11 |
| ● Positive impact | 18 |
| ● Neither negative nor positive im... | 27 |
| ● Negative impact | 52 |
| ● Very negative impact | 113 |
| ● I don't know | 3 |
| ● Prefer not say | 1 |



24. Did you feel supported with your mental health needs when in care?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| ● Yes | 27 |
| ● No | 172 |
| ● Don't know | 23 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 3 |



25. Do you feel the care system has a good enough understanding of the unique mental health experiences of children in care?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| ● Yes | 16 |
| ● No | 200 |
| ● Don't know | 10 |
| ● Prefer not to say | 1 |



26. Did you feel supported with physical health needs when you were in care?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Yes | 67 |
| No | 137 |
| Don't know | 22 |
| Prefer not to say | 0 |



27. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how the care system should be improved?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

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Responses

Latest Responses

"If a child moves area, it should be easier to gain help from the local authority..."

"listen to the kids send undercover staff to vet the Staff stop gaslighting every..."

"Social and the people ^

66 respondents (52%) answered **care** for this question.

